ROCK CAKES AT BLANDINGS: NATURE AS A BASIS FOR ETHICS

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The technical title of the orgy which broke out annually on the first Monday in August in the park of Blandings Castle was the Blandings Parva School Treat, and it seemed to Lord Emsworth, wanly watching the proceedings from under the shadow of his top hat, that if this was the sort of thing schools looked on as a pleasure he and they were mentally poles apart. A function like the Blandings Parva School Treat blurred his conception of Man as Nature's Final Word.[1]

Introduction

Although it is generally recognised that Clarence, Lord Emsworth, does not rank amongst the most brilliant of stars illuminating the Western intellectual firmament,[2] we are forced to recognise that in his encounter with the Blandings Parva School Treat he must wrestle with the basic ethical questions with which any holder of the naturalistic ethic prevalent in the Western world must come to terms: which concept of nature do we employ in our ethical considerations? and how do those who are integral parts of nature itself recognise what is right and what is wrong?

When we investigate the possibility of using nature as a basis for ethical consideration we are forced to ask 'which nature?' Do we use as our standard nature an idealised concept as in 'Man as Nature's Final Word' or fallen nature as we experience it in the Blandings Parva School Treat, an event likened to 'a reunion of *sans culottes* at the height of the French Revolution'?[3] In biblical terms we are forced to ask whether we consider nature as in the garden of Eden or at the foot of the tower of Babel. Is the nature with which we deal ideal nature as in the original creation and the new creation where the lion lies down with the lamb, or is it the fallen nature we experience where Samson bare-handed rips the lion asunder?

If we live at the foot of the tower and keep our eyes in the mud we face a restricted understanding of the world, which brings certain problems. The question whether any particular action should be considered right or wrong is only the penultimate ethical question. The ultimate ethical question is: what constitutes the good and is to be sought, and what is the bad and to be avoided? Our answer to this foundational question concerning the direction of life should, but does not always, enable us to have a basis upon which we can then answer the

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1 P.G. Wodehouse, 'Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend', in *Blandings Castle and Elsewhere* (London, 1980), p. 102.

2 'It has been well said that he had an IQ some thirty points lower than that of a not too agile-minded jelly-fish'; P.G. Wodehouse, 'Birth of a Salesman', in *Lord Emsworth Acts for the Best* (London, 1992), p. 160.

3 Wodehouse, 'Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend', *op. cit.*, p. 105.

always, enable us to have a basis upon which we can then answer the penultimate questions concerning what particular actions or activities are worthy of our approval, of having a place in our desires. The citizens of Blandings Parva looked upon the annual fete at Blandings Castle as immensely enjoyable and worth looking forward to. Lord Emsworth viewed the entire proceedings as something to be dreaded in prospect and endured with stoicism. Although operating upon the same naturalistic ethic the two sides had differing conceptions of what constituted the good and the bad in relation to the Castle park and therefore reacted to the concrete situation in differing ways. Simply put, one person's meat is another person's poison. As Lord Emsworth observed, when it comes to considerations of good and bad it is possible for human beings to be 'mentally poles apart'. Do we accept this or do we attempt to find a core definition of meat and of poison, and if we do make this attempt where do we look?

Consumer Utilitarianism

All have answers to these questions, whether as a consistently worked-out coherent philosophy of life, or as with most of us, as a rag-bag of rule-of-thumb judgements and reactions. Like most of their fellow citizens of late twentieth-century western Europe the inhabitants of Blandings Parva and Lord Emsworth both attempt to answer these questions in terms of the prevailing naturalistic ethical norms of our day. Although not the only naturalistic ethic of our day, the dominant ethical philosophy of Western society is one derived from that originally developed in the late eighteenth century by Jeremy Bentham. Utilitarianism, a developed understanding of human decision-making, has gradually filtered down into naive consumer utilitarianism.[4] This pervasive moral understanding is generally accepted by politicians, pundits, and the man and woman in the Clapham omnibus, not as a consistently developed moral philosophy but as a generally held naive world-view. Most of us live in closer proximity to the Blandings Parva School Treat than to the high table of an Oxbridge college.

This world-view, which depends upon a pragmatic evaluation of our observation of what occurs around us, has led in our day to an interesting and important twist in ethical understanding, particularly in societies such as ours which are heavily influenced by capitalism. Instead of holding a particular field of human activity, the economic process in increasing prosperity, up against the bar of certain abiding ethical principles discerned from observation of what occurs in creation, today's consumer utilitarianism does the reverse. It manipulates ethics in such a way that a single aspect of our natural existence, the economic process of

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4 *Cf.* Alvin Ward Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (New York, 1970).

material increase, is accepted as ethically proper without prior justification, and economic progress itself is regarded as a basic standard observable within creation by which we can evaluate a wide spectrum of individual actions and social processes. In our society a particular aspect of nature is held to form a basic plank in the formation of our ethical understanding; the 'good life' tends to be understood in terms of material possessions and level of disposable income. This concept informs the activity of trades unions in their battle for higher wages, improved working conditions and increased leisure time, as much as it establishes the model for the activities of industrial corporations. It also shapes the policies of governments which can establish social services only on a basis of the utilities or consumption possibilities which they can provide for the electorate.

In the opening remarks of his Introduction to *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* Bentham makes a direct appeal to nature as supplier of ethical standards, not initially through a discernible system of natural law or natural rights but through our everyday human experience of pain or pleasure.

> Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do.... The *principle of utility* recognises this subjection.[5]

The message at the heart of utilitarianism is that motives do not exist and we must not evaluate actions in terms of revealed law or of good or bad motives. All that matters in the evaluation of the ethical quality of any action is its effect in terms of utility within our created existence. Utility itself can only be determined by observation of nature, by reflection upon our own experience of pain or pleasure in the midst of the present creation. 'Pleasure is ... the only good... and pain is... the only evil.'[6]

Bentham adopted a view which held that the 'greatest possible good for the greatest possible number' was the essential ethical purpose in life and was to act as the norm for the actions of governments. Such an understanding of utilitarianism led Bentham to adopt what were for his day some radical political and economic positions such as the nationalisation of life-insurance companies. In Bentham's wake Clarence, Lord Emsworth, can cast his eye upon the roistering multitude enjoying the dubious delights of the Blandings Parva School Treat and, despite his own deepest doubts, murmur that somehow the greatest number are enjoying the greatest good. But things move on.

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5 Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (New York, 1948), pp. 1, 2.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Utilitarianism as an approach to human activity is an ethical system in the service of economic expansion. It provided strong moral support for the start of the industrial revolution, and as such became particularly influential in the burgeoning science of economics. An important modification was introduced at this time, especially under the influence of John Stuart Mill. Although as a practising politician Mill argued for radical causes such as the public ownership of natural resources, suffrage for women and compulsory education, as spiritual heir of Adam Smith he held to the view that the possession of goods was the most important 'utility' and the performance of labour was an instance of 'disutility'. He provided an early Victorian philosophical example of the jibe that work is the curse of the drinking classes. It is from this root in the early nineteenth century that we today find philosophical justification for the naively-held assumption that the acquisition and possession of the greatest number of utilities which bring pleasure is a morally valid aim upon which to focus one's activity. It is generally held in society that within certain accepted parameters, of decreasing influence, the endeavour to acquire the greatest possible quantity of goods at the cost of the least possible output of exertion is *a priori* to act in an acceptable and responsible manner which will benefit others as well as oneself.[7]

Utilitarianism as applied to economics quickly assumed an individualistic cast. Mill held that when people sought their own freedom and welfare they were at the same time promoting the freedom and welfare of society as a whole. Underlying Mill's thought is a reading of nature which leads to the assumption of general human benevolence and deep faith in the continual progress of individuals toward a goal where the greatest number experience the greatest happiness.

> Yet no one whose opinion deserves a moment's consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end reduced within narrow limits. Poverty in any sense implying suffering may be completely extinguished by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals.[8]

In the last decade we have seen, with the emergence of the 'new right' in the UK and the USA, a return to economic and social libertarianism. In the West, political, social and economic liberalism has laid hold of

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[7] Unfortunately, the shadow of Babel lies over all creation and the consequences of the pursuit of individual utility do not always benefit society. The increasing structural unemployment experienced in the industrial West is to be expected from a world-view which teaches us to regard labour as a disutility to be avoided. This is an example of 'progress' in utilitarian terms, which enables us to produce ever-increasing quantities of goods with ever-decreasing 'disutility' of labour.

[8] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism: Liberty and Representative Government* (New York, 1951), p. 3.

this view of nature as determinative of human ends and aims to such an extent that Lord Emsworth should today be able to enjoy the solitary delights of the gardens at Blandings Castle and console himself with the thought that if the citizens of Blandings Parva were to exert themselves to the same extent as his ancestors, then very soon they too could have castles and parks of their own to enjoy rather than intrude on his.

The elements of this economic movement can be understood within two social principles. First, that public morality, the legal structures and the socio-economic order should allow unobstructed freedom to the forces of economic growth and technological development. Secondly, these forces will actualise themselves in accordance with a process of 'natural selection' or continual competition in the marketplace between independent production units striving against each other on the basis of maximised return on capital.

Bob Goudzwaard defines the spiritual characteristics of modern capitalism, based upon utilitarian ethics, under four heads:

1. The urge for economic and technical advancement is considered essential to our self-realisation, and this is obtained through interaction with nature.
2. This advancement is made possible by the concept that free competition belongs to the natural order in which the equilibrium of the marketplace leads to social harmony.
3. This advancement is justified by the legal norms of the revived natural law conception which regards pricess emerging from free competition as just, and which views the activity of government as limited primarily to the protection of already existing rights to property and contract.
4. This advancement is morally justified on the basis of the ethics of utilitarianism, which evaluates human activity only in terms of utility and which considers the increased acquisition of goods as the most important source of utility.[9]

We live within a society which is remarkably homogeneous, whatever the political views professed by individuals or groups. There are differences in underlying philosophy between right and left. The libertarian principle of justice appeals to the conception of relative natural law, which requires the state to protect the rights and liberties of the individual based upon private property. Relative natural law would be actualised in a situation where the individual was freed and enabled to maximise his or her inherent created potentials. Orthodox socialism holds to a conception of absolute natural law, which can be realised only on the basis of a return to communal property. Absolute natural law would be actualised in a community within which each renders to the other in accordance with his or her economic need and in which distinctions based upon class are removed.

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[9] Bob Goudzwaard, *Capitalism and Progress* (Grand Rapids, 1979), p. 34.

Whilst these differences between right and left are striking, they share common roots. Whether, as in libertarianism, primacy is given to the individual, or, as in socialism, it is given to the community, it is the autonomous human being interpreting nature who, either alone or in community, determines his own destiny. In either case some conception of natural law and the greater human good is basic. Both look upon human happiness as being the result of our interaction with nature, and regard the possession or otherwise of property as of fundamental significance for the greater human good. The order of nature is held to promote the maximum of earthly happiness by means of the free, general operation of the marketplace.

The discussion between right and left in our society has been narrowed down to the question of who is entitled to the fruits of economic progress. The question at issue within society is one of *distribution* – who gets what in terms of income, welfare and economic power. Fundamental questions as to what constitutes the nature of the good are not discussed. A narrowly naturalistic ethic is accepted on all sides. Lord Emsworth as proprietor wished to enjoy the gardens of Blandings Castle in peace and solitude, ruminating on the health of the Empress of Blandings, his prize black Berkshire sow, and enjoying the fruit of the labour of the tyrannical Angus McAllister, his gardener. The inhabitants of Blandings Parva think that they too should be able to enjoy the fruits of McAllister's labour and have the opportunity to enliven the proceedings by bunging an occasional rock cake at Lord Emsworth's top hat. Both, whether they realise it or not, act according to what they conceive of as nature and its laws. Both seek out what they think of as their greatest good. Both live in the shadow of the tower of Babel, peer dimly into the surrounding confusion, and long for differing versions of the new Jerusalem.

Can Christians Respond to Lord Emsworth's Problem?

Were he to enquire of us, what advice would we give to the Revd. Rupert Bingham? Vicar of the neighbouring village of Mutch Matchingham, Beefy Bingham is also husband of Lord Emsworth's niece Gertrude. Where would we have him stand as he tries to approach his little corner of Shropshire with a Christian view of the world? How do we as Christians respond to the problem faced by both Lord Emsworth and the citizenry of Blandings Parva as they endeavour to establish what is good and right and what is bad and wrong? Do we choose sides and assure one of them that they have the right in the matter and that nature, perhaps as created by God, demands that either the individual or the corporate body fulfil themselves in the maximum possible satisfaction of their abilities and desires?

As we look at the history of Christian activity, including that of Reformed Christians, we are forced to concede that in dealing with social

progress in a practical way Christian political and social organisations and pundits have failed to distinguish themselves from secular organisations and pundits and to display a style and an aim which are distinctly Christian. Synthesis with the development of society is the mark and reproach of modern Christendom. Like other groups we have been intensely involved in the debate about the distribution of the fruits of progress and less than concerned about the underlying direction of progress or what constitutes progress.

Our ethical discussion is empty unless it is anchored in the world in which we live. The scene of confusion below the incomplete tower of Babel and our longing for the harmony of the garden are our everyday experience. Like Lord Emsworth and the citizens of Blandings Parva we have our own idealised pictures of what the gardens should be like, of how they should be developed and enjoyed. Angus McAllister, the man given responsibility for nurturing the garden is in constant dispute with Lord Emsworth, proprietor of the grounds, whether the path beneath the yews should be grass or gravel. It is our intrusion within the creation which results in the conflict.

Progress

If we could live securely within that kingdom where there is no more darkness, we could look at our surrounding environment and know peace and fulfilment. If on the other hand we could accept that the nature surrounding us was the only given we could embrace the natural *status quo* with equanimity; if this were so it would be possible for us to recognise the reality surrounding us and try to live by the structures which we discern within creation. What we require, however, is a reference point which enables us to discern and evaluate that which lies within nature and the direction of our lives. We live in the midst of a becoming creation and have planted within us an impulse to seek the better and best. We are eschatalogically oriented.

As part of creation humanity forms a group which does not quietly acquiesce in existence as such. For us goodness does not correspond to a static ideal of perfection; humanity constantly reaches out. Those who have already grasped the promise in Christ are dissatisfied sojourners, aware of the antithesis between sin and grace and unable to accept this world as it is. Consequently Christians work within creation, pursuing the divinely-given cultural task of unveiling the creational potentials in covenant love to serve the present and coming Christ. The non-believer, although rejecting the promise in his heart, is also unavoidably a constituent part of the becoming creation. Beguiled and enraptured by the attraction of the static 'things' of the world and in rebellion against his own created purpose, he cannot help, despite his destructive inner motive, but erupt into constructive movement. Retaining the marred and deformed image of God we are not yet totally alienated from our created purpose.

The good performed by the unregenerate is evidence of that created purpose which they cannot deny.

Nature Preserved

Having brought the cosmos into existence God did not abandon it after the Fall but preserves and cares for created nature in such a way that it is held on course toward the goal of his intention in the fulfilment of the covenant relationship. The preservation of the creation, despite the entrance of sin, is an action of God by which he allows the continuation of the world in order that by later instances of the covenant he might bring about a full salvation in Jesus Christ.

The creational structures with their preserving function and their potentialities are not an end in themselves but a means to a greater purpose. By maintaining our existence and exhibiting clearly the care and love of God, the creational structures, even after the Fall, exist to lead us to God.[10] The preservation of creation points us towards salvation and the fulfilment of all that is at present seen only in shadow or hidden by rebellion. The creation itself and our cultural activity within it exist through and for the sake of God's grace in redemption.

Creational Structures

The structures of creation within which the children of God, obedient and disobedient, continue to live remain valid despite sin's advent. The fundamental conditioning laws which make possible the existence of things, events, social interaction *etc.*, remain in force. Every aspect of creation is subject to the laws of God. These laws, the multiplicity of created patterns, norms and legislation established by the Creator and discerned in special and general revelation, are the structuring framework outwith which it is inconceivable that anything could exist.

Not all laws discernible within nature are of the same character. A law of logic differs from a moral law, the law of gravity is of a different form from a law concerning the metabolism. The rebel against God can never totally deny God without also denying himself; if he lives in anger and rejection of God he distorts his own innermost relationship; he cannot flee from reason into unreason, from logos to chaos; he cannot absolve himself from the law of gravity; if he is cut he bleeds. Without law 'the subject drops away into chaos, or rather into *nothingness*'.[11] The structural laws forming creation remain for all; what has changed due to the entrance of sin is the way in which we humans encounter, utilise and

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[10] Calvin reminds us that the contemplation of God's goodness evident within creation is meant to lead us to 'bestir ourselves to trust, invoke, praise, and love him' (*Institutes* 1:14:22).

[11] H. Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (Jordan Station, 1983), vol. I, p. 12.

develop the structures for creation. It is this rebellious misappropriation which is the result of our alienation from God.

There is a vital difference between the laws of nature and the norms of nature. We cannot disobey a natural law for these are structural laws discerned within nature. If I step out of a sixteen-storey window without any support the law of gravity will operate according to certain fixed structural principles. Likewise Boyle's law cannot be broken, but only observed, understood and utilised. We can, however, transgress the creational norms, those ordinances of creation placed by God concerning the process of cultural, ethical and historical development. Natural laws are analytical descriptions which are obeyed involuntarily, creation ordinances are norms which can be deliberately violated.

> But although they can be violated these creational norms still hold true. Even the most ungodly ruler must continually bow and capitulate before God's decrees if he is to see enduring positive results from his labours.[12]

Outward and coincidental conformity by the unregenerate to the law ensuing from the norms of existence imposed by our created nature need not be equated with the obedience rendered by the regenerate conscience attempting with the help of the Holy Spirit to live by the Word of God. Nevertheless, such unregenerate conformity should not be dismissed as being of no value. Without outward conformity to the creational structures life itself would become an unbearable chaos of terror and evil.

The Fall has made special structures, such as the church in its institutional form and the state, necessary within creation. But even these special structures are based upon the created nature of the structures of all that surround us.

> Neither the structures of the various aspects of reality, nor the structures that determine the nature of concrete creatures, nor the principles which serve as norms for human action, were altered by the fall.[13]

If we deny this we are led to the conclusion that the Fall was utter and corrupted the very nature of creation, that total depravity is in fact utter depravity. This would mean that sin itself had become autonomous and existed independently over against God. Thus is God robbed of his sovereignty and Satan is allowed a realm of detached and autonomous authority. Sin, however, is not autonomous and does not manifest an independent principle of origin or authority. Sin could not exist independently of God for sin is sin because it effects a wrong relationship with God. The Fall into sin which effected the spiritual death of humanity exerts its dreadful influence upon temporal reality as a consequence of the radically redirected focus of human hearts, the direction of our lives. The structures of creation remain; if they did not there would be no 'thing'.

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[12] H. Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture* (Toronto, 1979), p. 37.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

The Image of God

Despite the tragedy of the Fall, natural humanity still retains remnants of the original gifts of God. By these we mean those remnants of the original physiological constitution accorded to humanity when God created us in his own image. This means that fallen humanity, as an organic part of creation, retains those facets of character which we need in order to live within creation and point us towards the true direction of our lives. The ability to choose, to love and to seek glory, planted in our hearts from the creation, still remains.

Since imaging relationship has been disordered by the Fall, the employment of our natural abilities is fearfully corrupt and distorted, and yet these abilities are not completely withdrawn. If our natural, created endowments were totally withdrawn we would cease to be human and would not know existence. The Fall, whilst rendering us prone to every sin and unable to please God because all our actions spring from a covenant-rejecting motive, has rendered us neither irrational nor hopelessly psychotic. Fallen human beings, as individuals and members of society, are able to perform deeds of relative good, because we still, as integral parts of God's creation, live and have our being within the creational structures. Our fallen nature remains human nature.

Created in God's image we bear within our psychological constitution the ineradicable realization that God is Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. These intuitions, rejected and suppressed by the unregenerate, are not acquired by observation or understanding, for they are innate. For us to eradicate completely our knowledge of God we would have to destroy ourselves. In maintaining that all unavoidably perceive the existence of God Calvin said, 'Man cannot move unless he experiences that God dwells in him.'[14]

Bipolar Revelation

Whilst in our decision-making we must acknowledge our natural constitution, what we cannot legitimately do is to treat creation itself as though it were somehow impregnated with final causes, as though nature could in some way substitute for God by providing from within itself either a bridge to the divine or an independent opening to self-understanding. As T.F. Torrance reminds us, without reference to God nature is

> meaningless, something that is complete and consistent in itself but without any ontological reference beyond itself. It becomes merely a game to be enjoyed like chess.[15]

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[14] John Calvin, *Sermons on Job* (Grand Rapids, 1952), p. 158.

[15] T.F. Torrance, *Ground and Grammar of Theology* (Belfast, 1980), p. 91.

This does not mean that we can dismiss nature as playing no part in our ethical decision-making or in our understanding of ourselves. Some argue that in the revelation contained in Scripture we have a full and clear representation of a good life. We have the great law of wholehearted love towards God and neighbour and the detailed legislation which instructs us how to live a life of love. We have the example of God himself in Christ, the true man, showing us what life truly is. We have the picture of the kingdom where there will be no more death or tears. With such a complete revelation of God's will for our lives what need do we have for the investigation of nature?

The Word is spoken into a becoming creation which is being led to its consummation. Christ the true man walked within created nature and posted signs today of the world to come tomorrow. As we try to establish our ethical standards we must recognise that ethics as a study does not establish ethical norms, but merely uncovers and investigates them. This investigation cannot be split into two neat categories – what we hear when God speaks in his Word and what we discern within creation – sometimes referred to as the split between special and general revelation. Knowledge of and from God and knowledge of and from the creation share the same ultimate foundation in God the Creator.[16]

God Speaks in Nature

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion taught by Paul in Romans 1 that even 'men who suppress the truth by their wickedness' (1:18) should be able to comprehend 'God's invisible qualities' which are to be 'understood from what has been made' (1:20). The verb *kathoratai* (have been clearly seen) denotes perception by the senses and indicates that through physical examination the observer is able to receive information and make judgements based upon the evidence in nature. The invisible qualities of God are 'understood' (*nooumena*, present passive participle of *noeo*, 'to perceive, apprehend, understand, gain insight into'). This leads us to conclude that even fallen man can gain some knowledge of the character of God by rational reflection upon what has been created. Paul seems to be saying that the visible data within the created order provide facts upon which correct theistic conclusions can be based.

Whilst it is possible to argue that the references in Job 38-9 and Psalms 8, 19, 93 and 104 to being able to interpret creation aright are all within the context of faith, there are important New Testament texts which specifically refer to the ability of humanity, including the unregenerate, to read creation aright to some extent. Christ appeals to the

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[16] *Cf.* C. Van Til, 'Scripture does not claim to speak to man, even as fallen, in any other way than in conjunction with nature'; 'Nature and Scripture', in *The Infallible Word*, ed. N.B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Phillipsburgh, 1978), p. 263.

creation ordinance, how it was 'at the beginning' (Matt. 19:4), in order to counter those trying to trap him with questions concerning marriage. In Acts 17: 22-31 Paul in his Areopagus speech refers the Athenians to the knowledge of God, however inadequate and distorted, which they had gained from observation of and reflection upon the world around. In Romans 1:18-21 the apostle speaks clearly of our ability and responsibility to read creation aright and draw from it valid conclusions about God and our relationship with him and consequently with each other. To relegate the creation which we see around us in nature to the background of our thinking is unbiblical. Sin has made a radical difference, but that radical change is seen in the religious heart of creation, in the life and direction of mankind. The human heart has turned from his Creator and looked at creation from an autonomous perspective. As Calvin, speaking of creation, reminds us:

> Most people, immersed in their own errors, are struck blind in such a dazzling theatre... to weigh these works of God wisely is a matter of rare and singular wisdom, in viewing which they who otherwise seem to be extremely acute profit nothing. And certainly however much the glory of God shines forth, scarcely one man in a hundred is a true spectator of it.[17]

The great failing of natural theology, as traditionally understood, is similar to that of fundamentalism, that it has tried to abstract the existence of God from his act. Knowledge of the world cannot be abstracted and made to stand on its own, for it is only truly intelligible when held in polarity with our actual knowledge of God revealed in his Word.[18] Likewise knowledge received from special revelation cannot be held as though it was spoken into a vacuum and exists without reference to creation. In his Word God approaches fallen mankind in a fallen world and his voice impinges upon our created existence and gives us no peace until we find true peace. God's voice is always immediate. It speaks to us where we are, and we cannot duck and dive and weave and take refuge in the hope that we can carve out an autonomous kingdom where nature, including ourselves, without any reference to God will supply us with guidance.

There are three sources of ability which enable us to discern from nature, however dimly, our place and ability to function within creation. These are: the continuing existence of creational structures and norms

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17 *Institutes* 1:5:8.

18 Calvin, *Institutes* 1:6:2: 'However fitting it may be for man seriously to turn his eyes to contemplate God's works, since he has been placed in this most glorious theatre to be a spectator of them, it is fitting that he prick up his ears to the Word, the better to profit. And it is therefore no wonder that those who were born in darkness become more and more hardened in their insensibility; for there are very few who, to contain themselves within bounds, apply themselves teachably to God's Word, but rather they exult in their own vanity.'

subsequent to the Fall; the continuance of humanity's essential character as image-bearers within creation; the ability to acquire rational knowledge through reflection upon the facts surrounding us. Not only do we know intuitively whom we are as created humanity in relation to God, we can also discern and understand to some extent, although not to any saving effect or true understanding of God, the revelation within created nature. If, as we maintain, the natural person is able by reason of innate constitution and by use of fallen reason to discern from within the created order the most fundamental and important fact of existence, then surely that same innate constitution and ability to reason will enable us to function within the creation of which we are an integral part. If 'God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen' (Rom. 1:20), then what is visible can also be clearly seen and understood and human beings, however rebellious, can live and move and have their being in God's creation. That many fail to discern from nature, even that viewed from the ruins of the tower of Babel, any true knowledge of God or his creation is not a matter of lack of reason or ability, but a matter of will, a refusal to allow God to impinge on their view of the world.

Conclusion

Those who have already grasped the promise in Christ are 'strangers in the world' (I Pet. 1:1), aware of the antithesis and unable to accept the world as it is. The regenerate read nature aright for what it truly is, creation. Consequently Christians work within creation, pursuing the divinely-given cultural task of developing its potentials in covenant love to serve the present and coming Christ, 'For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come' (Heb. 13:14).

We should advise Beefy Bingham to speak to Lord Emsworth and the citizens of Blandings Parva of the true direction and destiny of the garden, of nature, not as an immediate source of personal gratification or utility, but as a harbinger of that new creation yet to come and for which we, as constituent parts of nature, were created – the new heavens and new earth. The creation has an inner structure directed towards progressive development, and what is latent shall be disclosed.

> Historical development is nothing but the cultural aspect of the great process of becoming which must continue in all the aspects of temporal reality in order that the wealth of the creational structures be concretized in time. The process of becoming presupposes the creation; it is the working out of creation in time. Time itself is encompassed by the creation. The process of becoming, therefore, is not an independent autonomous process that stands over against God's creation.[19]

[19] Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, p. 79.

All creational history moves towards the goal of the new heaven and earth. The ultimate meaning of transcendent purpose is centred in an expected future in Christ. The goal of Christ's redemption is the renewal of the entire cosmos. Rather than seeing the gospel message of the incarnation and sacrificial death of Christ as an intrusion into an utterly blind nature we should follow the lead of Calvin and see that,

> In the cross of Christ, as in a splendid theatre, the incomparable goodness of God is set before the whole world. The glory of God shines, indeed, in all creatures on high and below, but never more brightly than in the cross, in which there was a wonderful change of things (*admirabilis rerum conversio*) – the condemnation of all men was manifested, sin blotted out, salvation restored to men; in short, the whole world was renewed and all things restored to order.[20]

An abstract conception of creation as an undifferentiated substratum yielding autonomous information upon which we can base ethical decisions fails to grasp the full importance of the incarnation and atonement, and thus fails to grasp the full importance of the creation itself. Beefy Bingham should tell his hearers that, yes, the gardens are there to be tended and enjoyed to the full. He should also tell them that we must study them and examine them carefully and if we do we shall learn much for our benefit and growth, for even the ants can teach us industry (Prov. 6:6). But he should also tell them that we can discern from nature true and clear principles for life only when we see them from the perspective of the Christ who has come and who will come again. Only when seen in this way shall we understand the origin, the present status, and the eventual destiny of the nature of which we are a constituent part.

Beefy could do much worse than teach Lord Emsworth and the citizens of Blandings Parva to sing the first and last verses of Cecil Frances Alexander's hymn,

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful–
The Lord God made them all.

He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty
Who has made all things well.

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[20] Calvin, *The Gospel according to St John*, transl. ed. D.W. and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh, 1961), on John 13:31.