

On "to be" and "to be good"

réponse de C.D.K. à la présentation du Card. Villeneuve, 18 nov. 1945.

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Cette traduction me semble  
avoir été faite par C.D.K.

His Eminence will permit me to thank Him humbly for the honor he has done me by His sponsorship, as well as for the kind words he has had about me. My gratitude goes out also to my colleagues in the Royal Society for the honor they give me by receiving me into their midst.

We recognize in you, Your Eminence, a very enlightened protector of the speculative life and of its importance, not only in the Church, but also in the world. It is a source of ever-renewed admiration to see that in the midst of your pressing obligations, you could, with such facility and promptitude, listen to us, guide us and encourage us in the study and diffusion of ideas which are furthest from the realm of action and which are of no apparent interest. A passage from St Paul is here brought to mind, where he says to his disciple, Timothy, "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine. For there shall be a time when they will not endure sound doctrine but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables." Thanks to your teaching and example we cannot forget to hold ourselves always to guard in readiness/against these fables and to unmask them. That is why, on such a solemn occasion, it is fitting

that we remember the great sadness of a world which is devoted to the exclusive quest of itself.

Nihilism is beginning to to be accorded, in the assembly of nations, the rights which it believes it can lay claim to. It is, indeed, a peculiarity of present-day logic that those who deny the most <sup>would</sup> have also the most ~~taxpaying~~ rights. Carried to the limit, they would be the only ones having rights. For if we were to come to terms and cooperate with those who deny the greatest goods, the community as such could no longer recognize openly any good except that which they would permit. The public recognition of God, for example — because <sup>it might offend</sup> ~~this is offensive to~~ those who deny Him, everyone would have to operate publicly as if He did not exist. What precisely characterizes social nihilism is the fact that the community would have as goods to be sought only those on which all its members would be able to agree. What is the source of this nihilism? We find the answer to this question in the words of St Augustine: "There are two cities founded by two contrary loves: the love of self with contempt for God, which makes the city of the world; the love of God with contempt for self, which makes the city of God."

In what way does modern thought contribute to the founding of the City of the World? It has

constructed a speculative doctrine of the good which consists in denying the proper nature of the good. In truth, the good is, essentially, "perfectivum alterius per modum appetibilis": the good is not the perfection of being considered absolutely, but relatively to the appetite whose object it is. Now the moderns would like to identify the proper reason of being with that of the good, when even in God these two formalities remain distinct. This first error leads them to identify what absolutely is being with what absolutely is good. Therefore, let us recall what St Thomas says in this respect:

"According to three authors, one ought to say that creatures are not good by (their) essence, but by participation; namely, according to St Augustine, VIII de Trinitate, ch. 2, Boethius, de Hebdom., and the author of Liber de Causis (props. 20 and 22) who says that God alone is pure goodness. But they were urged to this one position by diverse reasons.

For the evidence of this question it must be known that, as is plain from what was said, just as being is multiplied by substantial and accidental, so is goodness multiplied; but still there is a difference between them. Because something is said to be being absolutely because of its own substantial existence, but it is not said to be absolutely because

of accidental existence: whence since generation is motion towards existence; when something takes on substantial existence, it is said to be generated simply; but when it takes on accidental existence, it is said to be generated secundum quid (relatively); and it is likewise with corruption, through which existence is lost. However, with the good the converse is true. For a thing is called good secundum quid (relatively) when it has substantial goodness, but it is called good simply when it has accidental goodness; thus we do not call the unjust man good simply, but relatively in so far as he is a man; but we call the just man good simply. This is the reason of this diversity: each thing is said to be being in so far as it is considered absolutely; but (it is said to be) good, as is plain from what was said in a. 1, ad 6um, <sup>with respect</sup> ~~in rapport~~ to others. In itself, however, something is perfected so that it subsists through the essential principles; but it is not perfected so that it be related in the proper way to all things which are outside itself except by means of accidents superadded to the essence; because the operations by which one thing is joined to another proceed from the essence by means of virtues superadded to the essence; whence a thing does not obtain goodness absolutely unless it is

completed both according to substantial and according to accidental principles. Moreover whatever perfection a creature has from the simultaneous conjunction of essential and accidental principles, God has this wholly through His own one simple existence; for His simple essence is His wisdom, justice, fortitude and the rest, which in us are superadded to the essence. Therefore, absolute goodness in God is the same as His essence; but (absolute goodness) in us is considered according to those things which are superadded to the essence. And while in us complete or absolute goodness is augmented, diminished or totally taken away, this is not true of God; although substantial goodness always remains in us. And it is according to this mode, it seems, that Augustine says (VIII de Trinitate, ch. 3) that God is good by His essence, but we (are good) by participation.

But there is still another difference between the goodness of God and ours. For essential goodness is not to be viewed according to the <sup>absolute</sup> consideration of ~~absolute~~ nature but according to its existence; For humanity does not have the reason of good or goodness except in so far as it has existence. But the nature or divine essence itself is its existence; however, the nature or essence of any created thing

is not its own existence, but is an existence participating in another. And thus there is in God pure existence because God Himself is His own subsisting existence; but in creatures existence is received or participated. Whence I say that if absolute goodness were said of a created thing according to its own substantial existence, it would still have its goodness by participation, just as it also has participated existence. But God is goodness by existence in so far as His essence is his own existence. And this seems to be the intention of the Philosopher in the Liber de Causis (loc. cit) who says that the divine goodness alone is pure goodness.

But there is still another difference between the divine goodness and (that) of the creature; for goodness has the reason of final cause. Moreover, God has the reason of final cause since He is the ultimate end of all things, just as (He is) also the first principle; from which it is necessary that every other end does not have the appearance or reason of end except according to an order to the first cause; because a secondary cause does not flow into its own caused (thing) except by the presupposed influx of the first cause, as is plain in the Liber de Causis (prop. 1); whence also the good which has the reason of end cannot be said of

a creature except by the presupposed order of the creator to the creature.

Therefore, given that the creature were its own existence, as God also (is His existence); still the existence of the creature would not have the reason of good, except by the presupposed order to the creator; and still it would be called good by participation and not absolutely in that which it is. But the divine existence which has the reason of good not by presupposing something (else), has the reason of good through itself; and this seems to be the intention of Boethius in de Heb. (loc. cit.)." de Veritate, Q. XXI, a. 5, c.

It is only in God that what is absolutely corresponds with what is good absolutely. In every creature, on the contrary, that which is absolutely, that is, the substance, is good only "secundum quid". We do not say that Socrates is good absolutely because he is, because he is a substance; the perfection which makes him good absolutely is of the accidental order: (namely) virtue. It is not sufficient to be a man to be a good man. Our substance which is being absolutely is in some way <sup>formless</sup> ~~unformed~~ in comparison to that which is good absolutely. Now, it is precisely to that which, in us, is being absolutely that modern thought wished to give a value of absolute good.



Because I am I would be good absolutely; and the good which I lack would be a good only in a certain respect, a good to which, moreover, I would have a right because of the absolute goodness of my substantial being.

They would rise from such pretensions to maintain that the absolute good of man is inalienable on the same ground that his substance or his person is. Every man would be good absolutely by the sole fact that he exists. Every other good that he could acquire would be good only in a certain respect, that is, an accidental good subordinated to that of his absolute being. The subject determined by the good would be better than the good which determines <sup>it</sup> him. The appetite which pursues the good would be better than the good ~~that~~ it pursues. It would be the appetite and not the good, that would be the final cause. Spinoza said this expressly: "Causa autem, quae finalis dicitur, nihil est praeter ipsum humanum appetitum, quatenus is alicujus rei veluti principium seu causa primaria consideratur." He states precisely that we do not seek a thing because it is good, but, on the contrary, it is good because we seek it.

It is not possible to state more clearly that that which constitutes the final cause of man is

his substance taken as the subject of all further achievement and all that which proceeds necessarily from that substance. Man would be, therefore, for himself, the good diffusive of itself. The end of man would be the good that man is in so far as he is absolutely. It would be sufficient for us to become aware of that which we are, to reflect upon ourselves, to take possession of ourselves, in order to accomplish our end. In short, if our absolute being were an absolute good, we would be God. But, note well, we would be God in as much as we are subjects. It is the lack of form in us which would be divinity. Is this not very much like the doctrine of David of Dinant who taught that God is prime matter? It is the man as subject who would be the object of man. Karl Marx has stated this expressly: "Man is the supreme being for man." "The critique of religion sets man right so that he thinks, acts and fashions his reality as a man undeceived, a man who has reached the age of reason; so that he moves himself around himself, his own true sun. Religion is only an illusory sun around which man is moved as long as he is not moved around himself." Marx says again that "The appropriation of human reality and its rapport with the object is the accomplishment of human reality. That is why it has as great a

multiplicity of aspects as the multiplicity of  
of the essential attributes of man and the forms  
of his activity. Human activity and human passions  
considered humanly are the joys that man is given  
from himself." For "man ... is himself his own proper  
end."

You will have noticed that, according to this  
doctrine, we would not only be right in loving our-  
selves above everything else in wanting for ourselves  
every good; but more than that, our subject, (we our-  
selves) would be the supreme object of our love.  
We, ourselves, would have in our absolute being that  
incomparable excellence which <sup>causes</sup> ~~produces~~ the object of  
pride. "Objectum proprium superbi, ut sic, est  
ipsemet celsus, seu celsitudo sui."

In materialistic form as well as in idealistic  
form, the modern philosopher since the Renaissance  
has been distinguished by his apology for pride.  
He does not hide it. Ernst Cassirer, a renowned  
historian, treating the philosophy of the Renaissance,  
tells us: "All the predicates which the Deity besought  
for Himself are now attributed to the human soul in  
the same fashion."

This affirmation of the supremacy of the pure  
self is not simply an aversion of God. Very logically,  
this affirmation ends in a negation of that very

self which has been so exalted! In marxism, the emancipation of man is pushed to the total destruction of man. The immortality of the soul is incompatible with <sup>human</sup> ~~the~~ dignity and liberty and tomorrow will be, for each of us, as if we had never existed. Soon "humanity in its entirety will be pitilessly exterminated" (Engels). In fact, in the philosophy of pride, human dignity is inseparable from the supremacy of nothingness.

Never in history have men defended so much the the dignity of man; and never in history have they left more undetermined or denied more systematically everything that goes to make up that dignity! This strange paradox is not only ideological; unfortunately, it is today translated into deeds. Never have man been so dâspicable, so brutal, mass-assassins, with a cruelty which surpasses all imagination; and all this by those very people who clamor most loudly for human decency. And do our apôlogists of this nihilism (which they call "a new faith for humanity") find themselves embarassed when called upon to "explain" the innumerable liquidations and that absolute ~~xxxxx~~ contempt for the "right of all men to personal security"? However, it would not be difficult to furnish them with arguments. In fact, if, on the one hand, we proclaim that "the human

conscience is the highest divinity, a divinity which suffers no rival", is it not true at the same time that man is absolutely deprived of all true value in so far as he is entirely mortal? In this latter respect, what difference is there between the human person and the lowest animal? Death will be for him as if he had never existed. Why, then, make such a fuss over the life of a man -- or even a few million men? In short this doctrine offers, to its holders, the absolute power both of proclaiming that the human person is the highest divinity and of destroying that same person without a qualm and without mercy.

Is it not fatal that this desire to contain oneself and to delight in one's own absolute being as in an absolute good is engulfed, finally, in the void, in the hell of pure self? Is it not overwhelming, after such gigantic, desperate battles, murdering so many millions of men, that we can still define peace in terms of refrigerators with ever more gadgets or ~~by~~ in terms of television and radios with F.M.? Is it not poetic justice when this matter, which man wanted to possess, explodes in his hands?

Why then should anyone <sup>hypocritically</sup> be/astonished at our mistrust of those States whose philosophy, officially and openly, teaches that the goods of man are purely

material, that the end justifies the means, that we and our children are, in a word, beasts --- true, slightly more complicated but just as vile as cockroaches? Would it therefore be easy to come to some understanding on some/essentials of the for the most necessary human good with those who maintain that actually we do not exist? Would it be easy to admit that rights and liberty is only for those who deny them?

Those christians who capitulate to these doctrines and who, in a perverted generosity of publicly good-will, identify these powers with normal rights, would do well to meditate on the forceful words of 2 St Peter: (ch. 2:17-22) "These are fountains without water and clouds tossed with whirlwinds, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved. For, speaking proud words of vanity, they allure by the desires of fleshly riotousness those who for a little while escape, such as converse in error: promising them liberty, whereas they themselves are the slaves of corruption. For by whom a man is overcome, of the same also he is a slave. For if, flying from the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they be again entangled in them and overcome: their latter state is become unto them worse than the former. For it had been better

for them not to have known the way of justice than, after they have known it, to turn back from that holy commandment which was delivered to them. For, that of the true proverb has happened to them: 'The dog is returned to his vomit;' and: 'The sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire'."