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MALE/FEMALE ONTOLOGY

THE ONTOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

A mood combining elements of urgency and awe as we approach the questions of male and female roles stems from the painful consciousness that, in our own period, something of the gift of each sex has been lost to history. If we raise the ontological questions, asking what constitutes the uniqueness of the experience of the male and female through their struggle with life, we shall reopen the possibility of claiming for the future the gifts out of the depths of consciousness that each has to give in creating the emerging civilization. This ontological approach assumes that the life struggle one goes through produces an unrepeatable perspective on reality which, when released creatively, enriches the corporate consciousness. The critical issue for us, as we move towards recreating the social montage of images of femininity and masculinity, is to ensure that the depths of consciousness, both from the male and the female perspectives, inform those images, so that men and women in the future may be released to celebrate their specialness within the wide range of human style. The life struggle for both sexes is conditioned by physiological, cultural and experiential factors, at the same time it involves directly relating the self to the mystery, a relationship best pointed to in the images. The interaction of these conditioning factors in the midst of an unconditional stance of the self before God produces the qualities of consciousness, or the modes of perceiving reality, predominant in men and women.

CONDITIONING FACTORS IN THE WOMAN'S LIFE STRUGGLE

The woman's life struggle is powerfully conditioned by the child-carrying physiology. Culturally she is habituated to images of continuity, formed in ordering, forming and preserving values. Her fundamental experience of herself is as the Other, as participant in the human journey from the unarticulated metaphors of the interior deeps rather than through the mainstream of the literary idiom, which has always used the pronoun "he" to hold the human as well as the masculine experience. She relates herself directly to the mystery out of her deeps and stands as the priestess at the altar, calling upon God for his latest revelation, expecting its inevitable surprise which requires the shattering of past images. The Divine rapes her; and her religious mood is awe.

THE FEMININE MODE OF PERCEPTION

The feminine mode of perception which results from the woman's life struggle emphasizes the particular. Just as she carries one child at a time and relates to it emotionally as a unique personality long before she experiences its human form, her tendency in responding to events is first in terms of their momentousness, their separate significance, rather than in terms of their sequentialness or their implications for the future. e. Her vision

is predominantly aesthetic, seeing first the beauty or inherent worthiness of objects, and only secondarily their usefulness, relating them to other objects and a task. Her knowing is primarily intuitive, recognizing what is familiar first, that in acknowledging the depths, the meaningfulness of events, persons, objects, rather than their ordinariness or their location in relation to others. For the feminine perception the individual contains and represents the whole: to grasp the universal is to plumb the particular to the bottom.

CONDITIONING FACTORS IN THE MAN'S LIFE STRUGGLE

The man's life struggle is conditioned by his sperm implanting physiology. His cultural habit is that of discontinuity, forged out of the necessity to separate himself from every preceding generation. He experiences himself as the subject of activity in time, not participating in, but initiating history; he is the articulated, the form-giver in creating the consensus of an era's consciousness. He relates to the mystery as co-creator, standing alone, his fist in the fact of God, demanding that the future be new. He assaults the Divine; and his religious mood is audacity.

THE MASCULINE MODE OF PERCEPTION

The masculine mode of perception which springs from the man's struggle stresses the gestalt. Inasmuch as he ejaculates seed to engender children and conceptualizes sons and daughters before he experiences the personhood of a child, he tends to respond to patterns in events rather than to their separate meanings. His vision is rationaly abstract, interrelating events and observing their implications, or weighing the usefulness of objects before appreciating inherent meaning or value. His knowing happens through positing models and testing them over against the bombardment of other realities, so that he is always seeking the commonness among disparate entities, manipulating their relationships rather than probing them for revelation. For the masculine perception, the whole bestows existence and meaning upon the individual: to describe the universal is to understand the particular.