

THANATOS AND EROS
(Death-Urge and Life-Urge)

"I am bound for the promised land, I am bound for the promised land.
O who will come and go with me? I am bound for the promised land."

Who here ever thinks about his own death? I don't want your psychological problems, but rather your sense after that spirit gift of being concerned with your death.

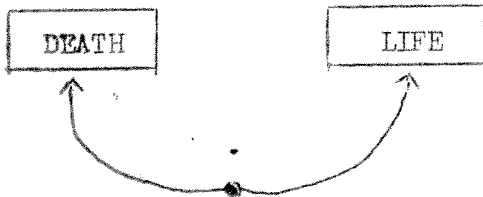
What one of our songs deals with the "death" issue? Is it "March into the futuro, march; dance over the deark abyss?"

The Being or Journey Song: "My life is as vast as the sea"

The Preparation and the Cry: "Free yourself from the mind" (is that the one where Griffoc was afraid the boat would wreck before we got there?)

"Men of the Spirit"

Do you notice the difference between "March into the Future" and "Free yourself from the mind"? One, to use the Greek classical categories, is the thrust of eros and the other is the thrust of thanatos. In the ancient Greek understanding of life, of being human, there was always the death urge. And there was also the erotic, or the life-urge. Freud, of course, used those, though I never thought he pushed it far enough; and I think he did not overcome the sense of negativism, at least not for me. This was not true of the Greeks. The Greeks know that the death-urge was just as much of life as the life-urge. When you read their great tragedies you and I tend, I suppose, to be ashamed of it; which, I imagine, points to a part of our sickness--or that we're on-logged in our humanness. I suspect the Greeks saw this. I use the Greeks here because I am so ignorant. My guess is, however, that ever civilization and every culture, every invention of humanness dealt with just precisely this. Probably in one way or another, if you did not have the death-urge, then you did not have the life-urge.



Now, in our time, the whole existential thrust expresses the fact that until you become aware of your death (not any symbolism! I mean the six-foot hole in the ground when you are no more, or beyond which you know nothing at all) you have never lived at all! Your problem, if you are a man of spirit, is to stick your fist through that death-urge. The first aspect of it is just acknowledging it as the fundamental pole out of which you're operating. But it's something more--to put your fist through it, force it into transparency. That's a bit of a problem. My guess is that in the hymn, "When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be; When we all see Jesus..." they were fooling with this death and life urge. You can put it in moresober language or sober music.

In our time, I think you and I are forced to deal in depth here. Mark you, this is not a moment when history is on the downbeat. Some of you didn't live when the downbeat was experienced in our time. The bottom was hit in the forties. From the 40's on the upbeat was the propensity.

40's

This is when a man like Sartre says that the value of somebody sticking a pin in you or a knife into your guts was that you know you were alive. The value of your wife telling you to go to hell is that you know you were alive. Do you begin to get a feel after that? We're on the upbeat. That little play, "No Exit" has changed the whole course of history. Sometimes I get angry with people who sit around and quibble intellectually about Jean-Paul Sartre or Gabriel Marcel or some other philosopher. They've been taught that it's great fun in college to sit around and quibble intellectually because you know you don't have to live if you do that. Anyway, while they're quibbling around about Sartre, he writes a little play that changes the course of history. Can you see the ridiculousness of the academic? Two little old pipsqueaks out there, seminary professors or college professors, sitting around nitty-gritty over some abstract concept they disagree with, while what they're talking about is literally changing the course of history--every bit of it except them, because they're abstracting from it. Anyway, that little play is dealing with hell, with life after death. A lot of inverted sentimentalists continue to beat their Sunday school teacher over the head, and with them such symbols as heaven and hell, while people who wouldn't be caught dead anywhere near a controversy about a Sunday school teacher are dealing with the problems those symbols in a past age were pointing to. I mean Sartre was dealing with the problem: life after death. What a play!

You will remember that hell, or life after death, is the solidification of your authenticity or your inauthenticity. It's interesting that in that play there is the coward. You know, of course, he wasn't a coward. The external circumstances were such that he had to do exactly what he did. But you know, hell doesn't give one good damn about your pretensions and your illusions. That's what Sartre was trying to get said. I mean, the man was a coward. He ran when he had to stand. It's very interesting that he picks out the male figure for that, isn't it? And then he picks out the female. What was she? The murderess. (very interesting too.) And the whore. (very interesting) Of course she wasn't a whore. But hell doesn't give one good damn about my rationalizations or your rationalizations. That's the important thing. When you die, you die dead. That's another way of saying what Sartre was saying. You are frozen. Up until the last one-thousandths of a second before that happens, which we poetically call death, (nobody's got the foggiest of what that is, objectively) there is always possibility; there is freedom. Not freedom of will. I just mean freedom! I am one big hunk of freedom. It's not news to you that there isn't such a thing as that moment. There's just

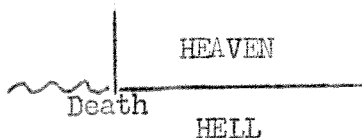
here  and there's just here.

As a matter of fact, death would be defined here as frozenness--of authenticity or lack of authenticity.

Everlasting, eternal--what do those metaphors mean, those great inventions of the human mind? For eternity you're a coward. For eternity you're a slut. For eternity you're a murderer. That's what Sartre was saying. Once you hear that, to use other poetry, you'd better run to your knees and start praying in one damn big hurry for fear somebody drops a bomb in that window right now and you get trapped in your crummy "isn-ness" for all eternity.

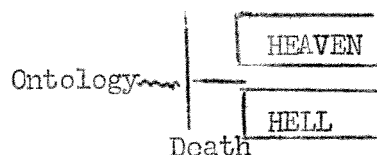
Another one of the interesting things about hell is that you were stuck fundamentally by two things: one was the gaze of another person. Old Charles here has got a mean gaze, and I feel that if I got behind the blackboard I could beat it. In hell, no beating it! They don't blink. (Oh, the man, Sartre, was smart.) No blinking. All the time there's Pastor Hahn just looking at you. The second thing there was a mirror, and you must look in it.

And all the while the door was open. Nobody was keeping you there. You were just frozen, that's all. Hell is the one place in which they never need guards.



There's an insight here that has perhaps been in many cultures--it's been very clearly in ours--that Being-in-itself makes no distinction between those who go to hell and those who go to heaven. The romantics in life, the ones who don't want to face this to begin with, say (and I'll use the old symbolism), "Oh, there couldn't be a hell in life because God would be unmerciful." You damn well bet! He's just utterly impartial. That's his love. That's the thing that frightens the daylights out of me. He loves me in my slobhood, just as much, but not any more, than he loves you in your sainthood. He's just as fond of you trapped down there in the blinkless gaze and the mirrors as the ones in whatever this is up here. That is the wisdom of life declared in the Old Testament, but not just in our culture. What it means to be human is that if you sow to the wind, you reap the whirlwind. It always has meant what it means to be human and it always will. You are exactly what you thrust. That's the insight held here.

What is heaven? "When we all get to heaven what a day of rejoicing that will be; when we all see Jesus, we'll sing (the Methodists didn't put the real words that should have gone in here) and dance the jubilee." What is heaven? Who is going to write this play? How in the devil would you write it? We are not dealing here with moralism--none whatsoever. This is ontology. You want to kick yourself for not seeing before that the saints only communicate in ontological language, never in moral language. Richard Niebuhr never tells me a thing except that which has to do with the ontological dimension of my being.



What does it mean to be frozen in authenticity? That old man, Samuel, there's a struggle (referring to Kazantzakis, story of Samuel, from Report to Greco, p. 269--?) One who can't tell God what you know He is, in this or that situation, has no authenticity. The old man says, NO! Why if I go and do that, my whole life up to this moment has been a joke, for I made Saul that king. (Reminds me a lot of clergymen who can't come to terms with the fact that they haven't been preaching the gospel for the 25 years they've been preaching. The greatest burden (and you and I can understand it)--it's not something you laugh at--is that they've got to say that the last 25 years of their life was wasted, when in their imagination they were "called.") Part of that authenticity was, for old Samuel, "KILL ME!" He saw the situation and was coming to terms with it.

This brings us back to that death urge. Whenever that death urge is not there, authenticity is not there. Only when you stick your fist through that death-urge do you understand the life-urge. But, when this life-urge is the prevalent superficial aspect of your existence--now mark you, in the depths they're both there.....This is why these young glowing brides always make me nervous--(or is it their mothers?)--who want this to be such a happy moment in their lives. They want that to be the moment in which they forget what life is really like, and what damn well is going to be on the other side of that glowing moment. I want that bride, as a symbol of myself, to be all aglow. But, as a man of faith, I want her to get her fist through that death-urge. This is what Kierkegaard meant when he said, "last night I was the scintillating heartbeat of the party, and after that I wanted to go out and blow out my brains." Anyone who participates in the very bottom of happiness, finds this death-urge.

I don't know what "going to heaven" is; I would like to suggest it's one who is living in the struggle. Mark you, the moment you abstract with authenticity and begin to define it, you're out of the ontological, and into the moral. However else you are going to deal with authenticity, it's going to be in the midst of the struggle of "KILL ME!" You'll remember that the old man, Samuel, went. But there was an anger at the bottom of his being against Being itself. Only that man knows what it means to love being. Or to put it in theological poetry, only the one who isn't afraid to punch God in the guts--not out of any virtue but out of his struggle with life--knows what it means to love God. I'd like to tell the story of Abraham, and how he became the friend of God. I'd like to tell the story of Moses, and how he became the friend of God. I'd like to tell the story of Jacob, and how he became the friend of God. "When we all get to heaven..." When we're frozen in the ripping, gouging struggle to be human!

How will you write a play on that? When you're fooling with hell, don't you yank in that Christ word here too soon. Luther and Calvin both, and me with them, say that if we end up in hell shovelling coal, we're going to shovel it to the glory of God; the Apostles' Creed states (and we stupid Methodists dropped it out) that Christ descended into hell, as well as ascended into heaven. Don't get in here too quickly with this Christ Word here. How are we going to tell that story? Do you suppose for a moment that the Christ Word was the open door in Sartre's play? That didn't change anything. You sow to the wind, you reap the whirlwind. You find your way out of the struggle through a billion-and-one possible deceits, illusions, and then change.

Yet, you see the burden on Samuel. I DON'T WANT HUMANNESS, IF THIS IS WHAT IT IS! That's what it means to struggle against Being in itself. The one (these kind of words hurt me, really) who doesn't hate life, never loved it. The one who does not protest against God, will never know what it means to love God. The figures you have down in hell--the gaze of the neighbor, the mirror--I tried to find other things for heaven--what are these going to be? It's a little too simple, it's injecting the Christ word in too quickly when you say it will just be the same thing. The blinkless eyes will still be there. When the guy in heaven looks into the mirror he doesn't find a saint staring back at him. I don't want to say what he finds. Everybody in the room knows that. I'm reminded of Revelation: There won't be any Temple anymore. The temple is the gaze of the neighbor. What will he speak? You are frozen for eternity. Do you suppose that's the reason we fear having to live the next year, the next ten years, the next twenty years? I asked a group of you the other day to consider the question: What are you going to do in the next 20 years? (You couldn't have ever gotten that on tape, but it was very interesting.) What are you going to do the next 20 years? Do you suppose, really, the horror of that kind of question is this business of being frozen for eternity?

Who is going to write that play? It's sentimentalized in so many ways. They used to say that if Jesus came you wouldn't want to be caught in certain situations. Remember that? They moralized it. (That's what we mean by sentimentalism); though there isn't anybody who stood before that rather sloppy utterance that wasn't touched by it--but you also vomited because it had been sentimentalized. You shove that down into the ontological deeps, you damn well had better not be caught anywhere where you wouldn't want to be if Gautama should appear. Did I say Gautama? H. Richard Niebuhr. Did I say H. Richard Niebuhr? If the Christ figure would appear. You don't want to be caught in a state of being other than the struggle of NO and YES.

What is heaven? In our day we're going to have to get this said. It's this issue, and what this points to, that's going to be the spirit dimension or the existential edge. For the sake of everyone you teach in RS-1 you've got to decide where the spirit-edge is down underneath that layer after layer after layer of papers by

Bultman, Tillich, Bonhoeffer, and Niebuhr, and all that verbosity coming out of some guy up there who gives the God lecture, the Christ lecture, the Freedom lecture, the Church lecture. The cruciality is only where you decide the agony of humanness is in this moment as you teach.

REFLECTIONS - DISCUSSION

How do you rejoice when you're ripped and gouged by the struggle? For me, the closest word to that lately is just being absorbed in the struggle; or, the only thing I'm glad about is that I'm not somebody who has nothing to absorb me. That may be a reduced version of the depth of what heaven is about. It's that aspect that's a little hard to get hold of, and why I am having trouble finding one of our songs that quite catches the feel of "When we all get to heaven." I find that while I chose a song that is rather "dancy," some of you chose the sombre one. The "dancy" one comes through the horror of this; my guess is, that if you're living in the pole of the wonder of this (mark you, they never can be separated) it is probably the sombre one.

M. Jones: You said the Christ Word was perhaps the door. The thing about that door in No Exit is that it doesn't go anywhere. If you walk out and look, you wind up in another room. It's all the same. That's the point of that door. There really isn't any exit, or there isn't any up-yonder that's going to be any different. So perhaps it's got to be the same play written.

JMM: Can't you just see Marshall watching that play? He peeked out that door! Not only do the actors come out and intrude in your life; you go in there and intrude too. Marshall couldn't stand it any longer. He got up out of his seat, walked into that play, and peeked out the door.

T. Lush: Isn't the difference between authenticity and inauthenticity the question? Every man sees the gift, and every man in one way or another refuses to deal with it. So who's authentic and who's inauthentic? Or, what do those categories mean? Isn't everyone in hell?

JMM: The indicative of that Christ word is that God will love you just as much (to use this poetry) you walk into hell as you walk into heaven. Therefore, you don't have to do a single thing. Nobody can tell you anything about what you've got to do with your life. There are no blueprints. That's the indicative. That is the unbelievable wonder of the gospel. But, you see, you don't sit around and grin at that. I suspect that only when you don't have to do anything, do you have the unavoidable imperative. That's the horror of freedom. Samuel went. Why? He could do no other!

Take Jesus in the garden of Gethsemene: In a way, Jesus was telling the Old Man to go to hell! Just like old Samuel. But when the sun came up, he went. Now, there are a lot of relative imperatives when you live out of relative indicatives. You notice the Lord knew what he was doing. He knew what was going on all along with Samuel. So when he came to the point where Samuel got the message of the indicative, the Lord lowered his voice. To declare the Christ Word today is to declare the unavoidability of the imperative. You lower your voice. You can understand why if you've got any of the histrionic in you at all. I just die when one of my colleagues reads that great line "The Lord be with you" as "the LORD BE with YOU." That's to be the greatest failure on the stage that I can imagine. It sounds as if "be" is an imperative of some kind. No--that be mean is. And that's always in a low voice. The Lord is with you. The Lord is with you. I mean he's here, and better "wet your britches," because when THE LORD IS WITH YOU, that's one thing.

You don't have to wet your britches; but when the Lord is with you, then you'd better wet your britches. The rigor my colleagues feel with that phrase is the rigor in anybody's guts when they hear it. The Lord is with you. The Lord is with you.

This year you're going to be dealing more than you ever have in your life, I think, with people struggling not with doing, not with knowing, but with being. That's going to be the roughest, hard-headedest bank president who might show up.

What I've said, that's not important. But what we've done here this morning is the only important thing. Whoever else we are in history--and that date, July 1, 1972, for those of you who are concerned for our task in history, ought to be in your mind night and day. (That's wrong--1975. I wonder how I made that mistake? The death-urge? Hoping we'd skip '72!) We've got to know something about ourselves in '72. However we are able to create our story, it's going to be something like a group of people from all over the world, who will come together and talk about what we are talking about this morning--that's all they'll talk about. And then they'll scatter back to the four corners of the earth for a year and just ooze out what we were talking about. In this sense you'll always be hidden. When permeation comes more to the fore you are going to see that. I hope you people who are teaching Imaginal Education, which is the forerunner of, I suspect, a great complex of permeation, understand that you're not there to help people become better teachers or to change the educational structures of the world. You're just out to communicate what we've got on the board while you help people get ahold of the tools whereby they can become better teachers and whereby they can alter the educational structures. But it's not those tools you give them. It's going to be that spark. They might not know for 20 years that you deposited that spark in their life. They may know it in 20 minutes. That's our job. Every course you and I teach this year, every consultation we hold, is to deal with what we were talking about here, this morning.