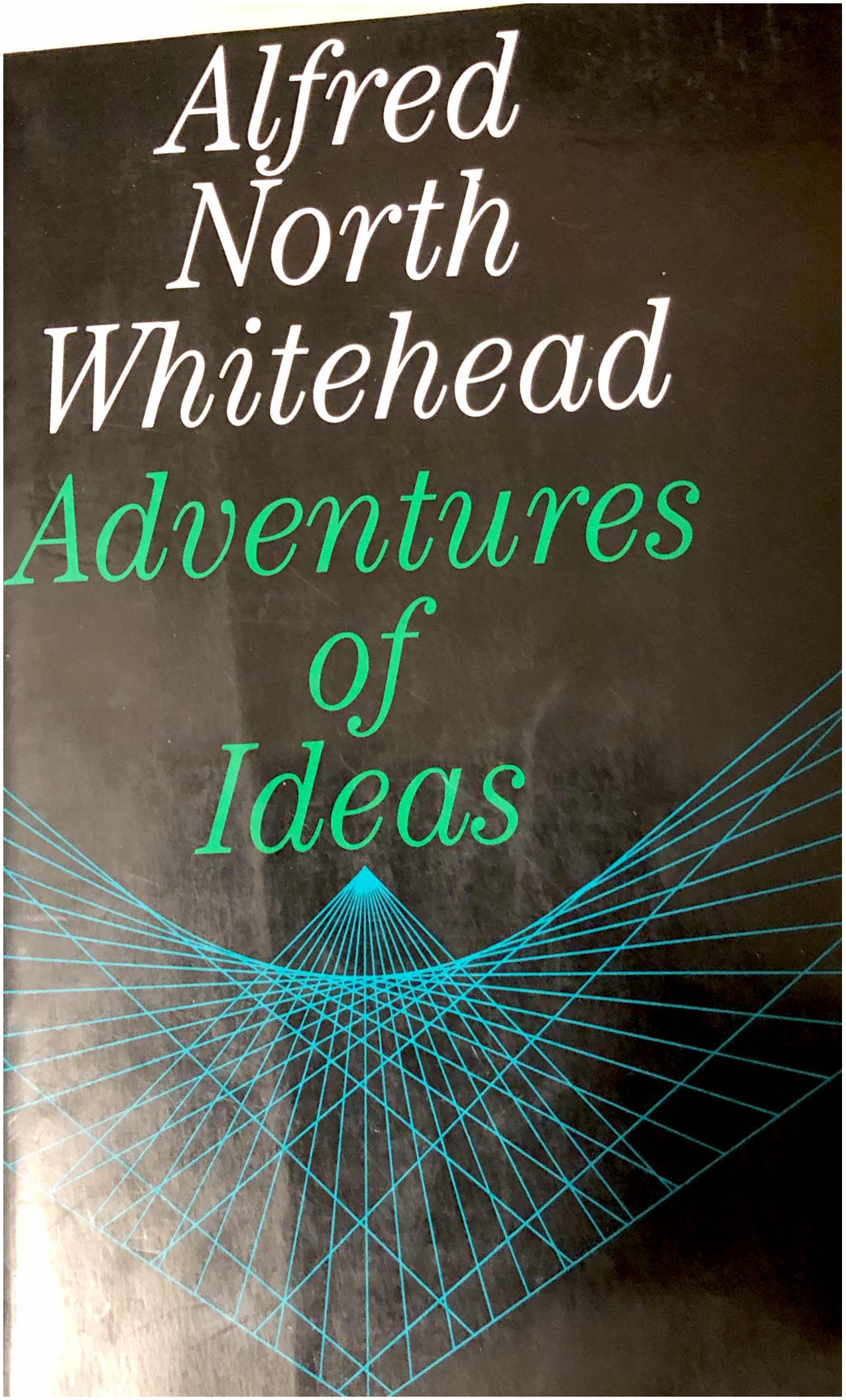
Alfred North Whitehead

Adventures of Ideas



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CHAPTER XX

Peace

SECTION I. Our discussions have concerned themselves with specializations in History, of seven Platonic generalities, namely, The Ideas, The Physical Elements, The Psyche, The Eros, The Harmony, The Mathematical Relations, The Receptacle. The historical references have been selected and grouped with the purpose of illustrating the energizing of specializations of these seven general notions among the peoples of Western Europe, driving them towards their civilization.

Finally, in this fourth and last Part of the book, those essential qualities, whose joint realization in social life constitutes civilization, are being considered. Four such qualities have, so far, been examined: —Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art.

SECTION II. Something is still lacking. It is difficult to state it in terms that are wide enough. Also, where clearly distinguished and exposed in all its bearings, it assumes an air of exaggeration. Habitually it is lurking on the edge of consciousness, a modifying agency. It clings to our notion of the Platonic 'Harmony', as a sort of atmosphere. It is somewhat at variance with the notion of the 'Eros'. Also the Platonic 'Ideas' and 'Mathematical Relations' seem to kill it by their absence of 'life and motion'. Apart from it, the pursuit of 'Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art' can be ruthless, hard, cruel; and thus, as the history of the Italian Renaissance illustrates, lacking in some essential quality of civilization. The notions of 'tenderness' and of 'love' are too narrow, important though they be. We require the concept of some more general quality, from which 'tenderness'

emerges as a specialization. We are in a way seeking for the notion of a Harmony of Harmonies, which shall bind together the other four qualities, so as to exclude from our notion of civilization the restless egotism with which they have often in fact been pursued. 'Impersonality' is too dead a notion, and 'Tenderness' too narrow. I choose the term 'Peace' for that Harmony of Harmonies which calms destructive turbullence and completes civilization. Thus a society is to be termed civilized whose members participate in the five qualities—Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art, Peace.

SECTION III. The Peace that is here meant is not the negative conception of anæsthesia. It is a positive feeling which crowns the 'life and motion' of the soul. It is hard to define and difficult to speak of. It is not a hope for the future, nor is it an interest in present details. It is a broadening of feeling due to the emergence of some deep metaphysical insight, unverbalized and yet momentous in its coördination of values. Its first effect is the removal of the stress of acquisitive feeling arising from the soul's preoccupation with itself. Thus Peace carries with it a surpassing of personality. There is an inversion of relative values. It is primarily a trust in the efficacy of Beauty. It is a sense that fineness of achievement is as it were a key unlocking treasures that the narrow nature of things would keep remote. There is thus involved a grasp of infinitude, an appeal beyond boundaries. Its emotional effect is the subsidence of turbulence which inhibits. More accurately, it preserves the springs of energy, and at the same time masters them for the avoidance of paralyzing distractions. The trust in the self-justification of Beauty introduces faith, where reason fails to reveal the details.

The experience of Peace is largely beyond the control of purpose. It comes as a gift. The deliberate aim at Peace very easily passes into its bastard substitute, Anæsthesia. In other words, in the place of a quality of 'life and motion', there is substituted their destruction. Thus Peace is the removal of inhibition and not its introduction. It results in a wider sweep of conscious interest. It enlarges the field of attention. Thus Peace is self-control at its widest,—at the width where the 'self' has been lost, and interest has been transferred to coördinations wider than personality. Here the real motive interests of the spirit are meant, and not the superficial play of discursive ideas. Peace is helped by such superficial width, and also promotes

it. In fact it is largely for this reason that Peace is so essential for civilization. It is the barrier against narrowness. One of its fruits is that passion whose existence Hume denied, the love of mankind as such.

SECTION IV. The meaning of Peace is most clearly understood by considering it in its relation to the tragic issues which are essential in the nature of things. Peace is the understanding of tragedy, and at the same time its preservation.

We have seen that there can be no real halt of civilization in the indefinite repetition of a perfected ideal. Staleness sets in. And this fatigue is nothing other than the creeping growth of anæsthesia, whereby that social group is gradually sinking towards nothingness. The defining characteristics are losing their importance. There may be no pain or conscious loss. There is merely a slow paralysis of surprise. And apart from surprise, intensity of feeling collapses.

Decay, Transition, Loss, Displacement belong to the essence of the Creative Advance. The new direction of aim is initiated by Spontaneity, an element of confusion. The enduring Societies with their rise, culmination, and decay, are devices to combine the necessities of Harmony and Freshness. There is the deep underlying Harmony of Nature, as it were a fluid, flexible support; and on its surface the ripples of social efforts, harmonizing and clashing in their aims at ways of satisfaction. The lower types of physical objects can have a vast endurance of inorganic life. The higher types, involving animal life and the dominance of a personality primarily mental, preserve their zest by the quick succession of stages from birth, culmination, to death. As soon as high consciousness is reached, the enjoyment of existence is entwined with pain, frustration, loss, tragedy. Amid the passing of so much beauty, so much heroism, so much daring, Peace is then the intuition of permanence. It keeps vivid the sensitiveness to the tragedy; and it sees the tragedy as a living agent persuading the world to aim at fineness beyond the faded level of surrounding fact. Each tragedy is the disclosure of an ideal: —What might have been, and was not: What can be. The tragedy was not in vain. This survival power in motive force, by reason of appeal to reserves of Beauty, marks the difference between the tragic evil and the gross evil. The inner feeling belonging to this grasp of the service of tragedy is Peace—the purification of the emotions.

SECTION V. The deepest definition of Youth is, Life as yet untouched by tragedy. And the finest flower of youth is to know the lesson in advance of the experience, undimmed. The question here for discussion is how the intuition of Peace asserts itself apart from its disclosure in tragedy. Evidently observation of the earlier stages of personal life will afford the clearest evidence.

Youth is distinguished for its whole-hearted absorption in personal enjoyments and personal discomforts. Quick pleasure and quick pain, quick laughter and quick tears, quick absence of care, and quick diffidence, quick courage and quick fear, are conjointly characters of youth. In other words, immediate absorption in its own occupations. On this side, Youth is too chequered to be termed a happy period. It is vivid rather than happy. The memories of youth are better to live through, than is youth itself. For except in extreme cases, memory is apt to count the sunny hours. Youth is not peaceful in any ordinary sense of that term. In youth despair is overwhelming. There is then no tomorrow, no memory of disasters survived.

The short-sightedness of youth matches the scantiness of its experience. The issues of its action are beyond its ken, perhaps with literature supplying a delusory sense of knowledge. Thus generosity and cruelty are equally natural, by reason of the fact that their full effects lie beyond conscious anticipation.

All this is the veriest commonplace in the characterization of Youth. Nor does the modern wealth of social literature in any fundamental way alter the case. The reason for its statement here is to note that these features of character belong to all animals at all ages, including human beings at every stage of their lives. The differences only lie in relative proportions. Also the success of language in conveying information is vastly over-rated, especially in learned circles. Not only is language highly elliptical, but also nothing can supply the defect of first-hand experience of types cognate to the things explicitly mentioned. The general truth of Hume's doctrine as to the necessity of first-hand impressions is inexorable.

There is another side. Youth is peculiarly susceptible to appeals for beauty of conduct. It understands motives which presuppose the irrelevance of its own person. Such motives are understood as contributing to the magnification of its own interests. Its very search for

personal experience thus elicits impersonality, self-forgetfulness. Youth forgets itself in its own ardour. Of course, not always. For it can fall in love. But the test of the better nature, so happily plentiful, is that love passes from selfishness to devotion. The higher forms of love break down the narrow self-regarding motives.

When youth has once grasped where Beauty dwells—with a real knowledge and not as a mere matter of literary phraseology in some poetic, scriptural, or psychological version—when youth has once grasped, its self-surrender is absolute. The vision may pass. It may traverse consciousness in a flash. Some natures may never permit it to emerge into attention. But Youth is peculiarly liable to the vision of that Peace, which is the harmony of the soul's activities with ideal aims that lie beyond any personal satisfaction.

SECTION VI. The vigour of civilized societies is preserved by the wide-spread sense that high aims are worth-while. Vigorous societies harbour a certain extravagance of objectives, so that men wander beyond the safe provision of personal gratifications. All strong interests easily become impersonal, the love of a good job well done. There is a sense of harmony about such an accomplishment, the Peace brought by something worth-while. Such personal gratification arises from aim beyond personality.

The converse tendency is at least equally noticeable; the egotistic desire for fame—'that last infirmity'—is an inversion of the social impulse, and yet presupposes it. The tendency shows itself in the trivialities of child-life, as well as in the career of some conqueror before whom mankind trembled. In the widest sense, it is the craving for sympathy. It involves the feeling that each act of experience is a central reality, claiming all things as its own. The world has then no justification except as a satisfaction of such claims. But the point is that the desire for admiring attention becomes futile except in the presence of an audience fit to render it. The pathology of feeling, so often exemplified, consists in the destruction of the audience for the sake of the fame. There is also, of course, the sheer love of command, finally devoid of high purpose. The complexity of human motive, the entwinement of its threads, is infinite. The point, which is here relevant, is that the zest of human adventure presupposes for its material a scheme of things with a worth beyond any single occasion. However perverted, there is required for zest that craving to

stand conspicuous in this scheme of things as well as the purely personal pleasure in the exercise of faculties. It is the final contentment aimed at by the soul in its retreat to egoism, as distinct from anæsthesia. In this, it is beyond human analysis to detect exactly where the perversion begins to taint the intuition of Peace. Milton's phrase states the whole conclusion—'That last infirmity of noble mind'.

Fame is a cold, hard notion. Another half-way house between the extreme ecstasy of Peace and the extreme of selfish desire, is the love of particular individual things. Such love is the completion almost necessary for finite reality, and all reality is in some way finite. In the extreme of love, such as mother's love, all personal desire is transferred to the thing loved, as a desire for its perfection. Personal life has here evidently passed beyond itself, but with explicit, definite limitation to particular realities. It is partly based upon the importance of the individuality of details for the æsthetic value of objective appearance. This has been discussed before.[1] This aspect of personal love is simply a clinging to a condition for selfish happiness. There is no transcendence of personality.

But some closeness of status, such as the relation of parent to child or the relation of marriage, can produce the love of self-devotion where the potentialities of the loved object are felt passionately as a claim that it find itself in a friendly Universe. Such love is really an intense feeling as to how the harmony of the world should be realised in particular objects. It is the feeling as to what would happen if right could triumph in a beautiful world, with discord routed. It is the passionate desire for the beautiful result, in this instance. Such love is distracting, nerve-racking. But, unless darkened by utter despair, it involves deep feeling of an aim in the Universe, winning such triumph as is possible to it. It is the sense of Eros, hovering between Peace as the crown of Youth and Peace as the issue of Tragedy.

SECTION VII. The general health of social life is taken care of by formularized moral precepts, and formularized religious beliefs and religious institutions. All of these explicitly express the doctrine that the perfection of life resides in aims beyond the individual person in question.

It is a doctrine of great generality, capable of a large variety of

[1] Ch. Ch. XVII, Sect. VIII, and Ch. XIX, Sect. IV.

specialization, not all of them mutually consistent. For example, consider the patriotism of the Roman farmers, in the full vigour of the Republic. Certainly Regulus did not return to Carthage, with the certainty of torture and death, cherishing any mystic notions of another life—either a Christian Heaven or a Buddhist Nirvana. He was a practical man, and his ideal aim was the Roman Republic flourishing in this world. But this aim transcended his individual personality; for this aim he entirely sacrificed every gratification bounded by such limits. For him there was something in the world which could not be expressed as sheer personal gratification—and yet in thus sacrificing himself, his personal existence rose to its full height. He may have been mistaken in his estimate of the worth of the Roman Republic. The point is that with that belief, he achieved magnificence by the sacrifice of himself.

In this estimate, Regulus has not in any way proved himself to be exceptional. His conduct showed heroism that is unusual. But his estimate of the worth of such conduct has evoked widest assent. The Roman farmers agreed; and generation after generation, amid all the changes of history, have agreed by the instinctive pulse of emotion as the tale is handed down.

Moral codes have suffered from the exaggerated claims made for them. The dogmatic fallacy has here done its worst. Each such code has been put out by a God on a mountain top, or by a Saint in a cave, or by a divine Despot on a throne, or, at the lowest, by ancestors with a wisdom beyond later question. In any case, each code is incapable of improvement; and unfortunately in details they fail to agree either with each other or with our existing moral intuitions. The result is that the world is shocked, or amused, by the sight of saintly old people hindering in the name of morality the removal of obvious brutalities from a legal system. Some *Acta Sanctorum* go ill with civilization.

The details of these codes are relative to the social circumstances of the immediate environment—life at a certain date on 'the fertile fringe' of the Arabian desert, life on the lower slopes of the Himalayan Mountains, life on the plains of China, or on the plains of India, life on the delta of some great river. Again the meaning of the critical terms is shifting and ambiguous, for example, the notions of ownership, family, marriage, murder, God. Conduct which in one

environment and at one stage produces its measure of harmonious satisfaction, in other surroundings at another stage is destructively degrading. Each society has its own type of perfection, and puts up with certain blots, at that stage inevitable. Thus the notion that there are certain regulative notions, sufficiently precise to prescribe details of conduct, for all reasonable beings on Earth, in every planet, and in every star-system, is at once to be put aside. That is the notion of the one type of perfection at which the Universe aims. All realization of the Good is finite, and necessarily excludes certain other types.

But what these codes do witness to, and what their interpretation by seers of various races throughout history does witness to, is the aim at a social perfection. Such a realized fact is conceived as an abiding perfection in the nature of things, a treasure for all ages. It is not a romance of thought, it is a fact of Nature. For example, in one sense the Roman Republic declined and fell; in another sense, it stands a stubborn fact in the Universe. To perish is to assume a new function in the process of generation. Devotion to the Republic magnified the type of personal satisfactions for those who conformed their purposes to its maintenance. Such conformation of purpose to ideal beyond personal limitations is the conception of that Peace with which the wise man can face his fate, master of his soul.

SECTION VIII. The wide scope of the notion of 'society' requires attention. Transcendence begins with the leap from the actuality of the immediate occasion to the notion of personal existence, which is a society of occasions. In terms of human life, the soul is a society. Care for the future of personal existence, regret or pride in its past, are alike feelings which leap beyond the bounds of the sheer actuality of the present. It is in the nature of the present that it should thus transcend itself by reason of the immanence in it of the 'other'. But there is no necessity as to the scale of emphasis that this fact of nature should receive. It belongs to the civilization of consciousness, to magnify the large sweep of harmony.

Beyond the soul, there are other societies, and societies of societies. There is the animal body ministering to the soul: there are families, groups of families, nations, species, groups involving different species associated in the joint enterprise of keeping alive. These various societies, each in its measure, claim loyalties and

loves. In human history the various responses to these claims disclose the essential transcendence of each individual actuality beyond itself. The stubborn reality of the absolute self-attainment of each individual is bound up with a relativity which it issues from and issues into. The analysis of the various strands of relativity is the analysis of the social structure of the Universe, as in this epoch.

Although particular codes of morality reflect, more or less imperfectly, the special circumstances of social structure concerned, it is natural to seek for some highly general principles underlying all such codes. Such generalities should reflect the very notions of the harmonizing of harmonies, and of particular individual actualities as the sole authentic reality. These are the principles of the generality of harmony, and of the importance of the individual. The first means 'order', and the second means 'love'. Between the two there is a suggestion of opposition. For 'order' is impersonal; and love, above all things, is personal. The antithesis is solved by rating types of order in relative importance according to their success in magnifying the individual actualities, that is to say, in promoting strength of experience. Also in rating the individual on the double basis, partly on the intrinsic strength of its own experience, and partly on its influence in the promotion of a high-grade type of order. These two grounds in part coalesce. For a weak individual exerts a weak influence. The essence of Peace is that the individual whose strength of experience is founded upon this ultimate intuition, thereby is extending the influence of the source of all order.

The moral code is the behaviour-patterns which in the environment for which it is designed will promote the evolution of that environment towards its proper perfection.

SECTION IX. The attainment of Truth belongs to the essence of Peace. By this it is meant, that the intuition constituting the realization of Peace has as its objective that Harmony whose interconnections involve Truth. A defect in Truth is a limitation to Harmony. There can be no secure efficacy in the Beauty which hides within itself the dislocations of falsehood.

The truth or falsehood of propositions is not directly to the point in this demand for Truth. Since each proposition is yoked to a contradictory proposition, and since of these one must be true and the other false, there are necessarily as many false as there are true

propositions. This bare 'truth or falsehood' of propositions is a comparatively superficial factor affecting the discursive interests of the intellect. The essential truth that Peace demands is the conformation of Appearance to Reality. There is the Reality from which the occasion of experience springs—a Reality of inescapable, stubborn fact; and there is the Appearance with which the occasion attains its final individuality—an Appearance including its adjustment of the Universe by simplification, valuation, transmutation, anticipation. A feeling of dislocation of Appearance from Reality is the final destructive force, robbing life of its zest for adventure. It spells the decadence of civilization, by stripping from it the very reason for its existence.

There can be no necessity governing this conformation. Sense-perception, which dominates the appearance of things, in its own nature re-arranges, and thus in a way distorts. Also there can be no mere blunt truth about the Appearance which it provides. In its own nature Sense-perception is an interpretation, and this interpretation may be completely misleading. If there were a necessary conformation of Appearance to Reality then Morality would vanish. There is no morality about the multiplication table, whose items are necessarily linked. Art would also be a meaningless term. For it presupposes the efficacy of purpose. Art is an issue of Adventure.

The question for discussion is whether there exists any factor in the Universe constituting a general drive towards the conformation of Appearance to Reality. This drive would then constitute a factor in each occasion persuading an aim at such truth as is proper to the special appearance in question. This concept of truth, proper to each special appearance, would mean that the appearance has not built itself up by the inclusion of elements that are foreign to the reality from which it springs. The appearance will then be a generalization and an adaptation of emphasis; but not an importation of qualities and relations without any corresponding exemplification in the reality. This concept of truth is in fact the denial of the doctrine of Appearance which lies on the surface of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is a denial of his answer to the question,—How are synthetic *a priori* judgments possible? It is at least the introduction of guarding limitations, which Kant explicitly in that work does not introduce.

SECTION X. The answer to this question must issue from a survey of the factors in terms of which individual experience has been interpreted: —The antecedent World from which each occasion springs, a World of many occasions presenting for the new creature harmonies and discords: the easy road of Anæsthesia by which discordant factors are dismissed into irrelevance: the activity of the mental poles in building conceptual experience into patterns of feeling which rescue discords from loss: the spontaneity of the mental action and its persuasion by a sense of relevance: the selective nature of consciousness and its initial failure to discriminate the deeper sources of feeling: that there is no agency in abstraction from actual occasions, and that existence involves implication in agency: the sense of a unity of many occasions with a value beyond that of any individual occasion; for example, the soul, the complete animal, the social group of animals, the material body, the physical epoch: the aim at immediate individual contentment.

The justification for the suggestion derived from this group of factors must mainly rest upon their direct elucidation of first-hand experience. They are not, and should not be, the result of an argument. For all argument must rest upon premises more fundamental than the conclusions. Discussion of fundamental notions is merely for the purpose of disclosing their coherence, their compatibility, and the specializations which can be derived from their conjunction.

The above set of metaphysical notions rests itself upon the ordinary, average experience of mankind, properly interpreted. But there is a further set for which the appeal lies to occasions and modes of experience which in some degree are exceptional. It must be remembered that the present level of average waking human experience was at one time exceptional among the ancestors of mankind. We are justified therefore in appealing to those modes of experience which in our direct judgment stand above the average level. The gradual emergence of such modes, and their effect on human history, have been among the themes of this book in its appeal to history. We have found the growth of Art: its gradual sublimation into the pursuit of Truth and Beauty: the sublimation of the egoistic aim by its inclusion of the transcendent whole: the youthful zest in the transcendent aim: the sense of tragedy: the sense of evil: the persuasion towards Adventure beyond achieved perfection: the sense of Peace.

SECTION XI. The concept of Civilization, as developed up to this stage, remains inherently incomplete. No logical argument can demonstrate this gap. Such arguments are merely subsidiary helps for the conscious realization of metaphysical intuitions.—*Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum.* This saying, quoted by Cardinal Newman,[2] should be the motto of every metaphysician. He is seeking, amid the dim recesses of his ape-like consciousness and beyond the reach of dictionary language, for the premises implicit in all reasoning. The speculative methods of metaphysics are dangerous, easily perverted. So is all Adventure; but Adventure belongs to the essence of civilization.

The incompleteness of the concept relates to the notion of Transcendence, the feeling essential for Adventure, Zest, and Peace. This feeling requires for its understanding that we supplement the notion of the Eros by including it in the concept of an Adventure in the Universe as One. This Adventure embraces all particular occasions but as an actual fact stands beyond any one of them. It is, as it were, the complement to Plato's Receptacle, its exact opposite, yet equally required for the unity of all things. In every way, it is contrary to the Receptacle. The Receptacle is bare of all forms: the Unity of Adventure includes the Eros which is the living urge towards all possibilities, claiming the goodness of their realization. The Platonic Receptacle is void, abstract from all individual occasions: The Unity of Adventure includes among its components all individual realities, each with the importance of the personal or social fact to which it belongs. Such individual importance in the components belongs to the essence of Beauty. In this Supreme Adventure, the Reality which the Adventure transmutes into its Unity of Appearance, requires the real occasions of the advancing world each claiming its due share of attention. This Appearance, thus enjoyed, is the final Beauty with which the Universe achieves its justification. This Beauty has always within it the renewal derived from the Advance of the Temporal World. It is the immanence of the Great Fact including this initial Eros and this final Beauty which constitutes the

[2] *Grammar of Assent.*

zest of self-forgetful transcendence belonging to Civilization at its height.

At the heart of the nature of things, there are always the dream of youth and the harvest of tragedy. The Adventure of the Universe starts with the dream and reaps tragic Beauty. This is the secret of the union of Zest with Peace: —That the suffering attains its end in a Harmony of Harmonies. The immediate experience of this Final Fact, with its union of Youth and Tragedy, is the sense of Peace. In this way the World receives its persuasion towards such perfections as are possible for its diverse individual occasions.

the poet does not give us the structure