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The wonder and glory of life, 1943.

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THE WONDER AND GLORY OF LIFE
Is There More to Life than War and Muck and Evil

WRHS.
By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver



At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, December 5, 1943

It is rather strange to choose this time in which we live to talk on the wonder and glory of life -- a time full of war, muck and evil. It wounds almost like mockery, does it not? Like bitter sarcasm. For never was human life so exposed to all the ugly inglorious features as in our day -- its cruelty, and bestiality, its hate and vile passions, its horror and suffering, its meanness and greed.

Death is every present today, and is coaxed as it were by man and equipt by man to slay more swiftly and more horribly than ever before. Death stalks today over the face of the earth, hurtles thru the skies, rides upon the waves and stalks from beneath the waves of the seas. Fair cities are blasted into ruins, whole populations are led to the shambles, myriads of human beings are starved and beaten and penned up in dungeons, tortured, hounded or exiled.

And all the workshops of the world, the mills, the factories, the foundries, the laboratories, are working at a feverish pace turning night into day, fashioning deadly and every deadlier weapons to kill, to maim, and to devastate and destroy what man has built for his needs, his shelter, his pride and his sustenance.

Into the foxholes and dug-outs, what Isaiah called the "caves of the rocks and the holes of the earth" into jungle mud and malarial swamps have gone the fine youth of our age. How, then, can one speak today of the wonder and glory of life?

It is, in truth, difficult, as difficult as it is for a very sick man who is racked by disease and ever and pain to think of or to be reminded of the glory of sound health and the wonderful satisfactions of physical well-being. His thoughts are pretty well concentrated on his immediate pain and discomfort to see or experience aught else.

And yet, it is very good for a sick man to be thinking beyond his all-possessing illness, to reach out to the prospect of being restored to good health. It is good for a sick man to be sustained by the thought of recovery, to be confident that sound health is real, possible and obtainable by him. For it is this faith and knowledge

which are an essential part of his cure! They re-inforce his will to recover. And a stout and fighting heart is as good as the best medicine.

Now men in society are desperately sick today and they need a fighting faith to enable them to recover, to survive. They need to believe that they can recover, that it is worthwhile to recover, that there is something fine to recover to, and that life, when it is not made vile by man is wonderful and glorious, and that there is a resplendid future for the human race. Man needs that reassurance. We are told in our Bible that after the Flood when the whole human race was wiped out, Noah and his immediate family had to be reassured that they would not be destroyed again. So God set a rainbow in the sky to tell them that waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. "Be fruitful", God said, "and multiply, and replenish the earth." Build anew, and in rebuilding ye will find yourselves blessed.

Now wherein then is this wonder and glory of life to which man today can turn his eyes? Where is this rainbow of promise today? What can we cling to? What can sustain our tired hearts?

There are of course certain people today, as there has always been that say there never was and never will be any wonder and glory in life. The Universe is just an impersonal machine driven by some blind force and man is just a helpless cog in that machine. They say that the Universe has neither design nor purpose. Human life has no fundamental meaning or reason whatsoever. And those who thought so in the past and think so today are inclined to speak of human life as a comedy, a tragedy, a game of chance, or an endless struggle. "Man", someone said, "is born crying, lives complaining and dies disappointed." Samuel Butler said of life: "It is one long process of getting tired." You will recall the words Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Macbeth: "Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

And in very truth if one believes that the Universe is planless and purposeless

and human life is nothing but a series of physical and chemical reactions then his estimations of life are not at all extreme, especially to one who has struggled much and achieved little of personal happiness in life. And it is only as one can glimpse the outline of some design, some design which includes you and your own stirrings and your own aspiring heart and mind that you feel comforted and strengthened. It is only as you see evidences of reason and intelligence at work in the Universe that you gain confidence in the rationality and meaningfulness of your own little Universe, your own life. It is only as you become convinced that the whole of evolving organic life ever moving and ascending upward through hundreds of millions of years, through cycles of ever increasing perfection, follows some definite scheme and is the fulfillment of some great design at the hands of a Supreme Creator, and tends to some glorious destiny, that your own life becomes ennobled by the thought of that unfolding destiny.

In other words, if you can see all the present conditions of imperfection about, the pain, the suffering and the failures and defeats of man and humanity, if you can see all the conditions of inadequacy as only a stage, an inevitable stage in a sure process of growth and becoming as a link in a chain of progressive betterment which will some day reach perfection, that your eyes are open to behold the wonder and the glory of life.

A former Premier of England, Mr. Baldwin once declared: "For myself I say that if I did not feel that our work and the work of all others whether in politics or civic work, was done in the faith and the hope that some day, maybe a million years hence, the Kingdom of God would spread over the whole world, then I would have no hope. I could do no more work, and I would give my office over this morning, to anyone who would take it."

And this faith and hope is predicated on a conviction that the Universe inclusive of human life is a progressive revelation of a supreme intelligence, which being supreme intelligence is also supreme goodness, that there is therefore in life the inherent promise that human life will become grander and more magnificent

and that the Kingdom of God can and will be established over all the earth.

Now religion has always proclaimed design in Creation and in its Creator, God. "The Heavens declared the glory of God". "God saw his handiwork, and behold it was good." Man was fashioned in the highest form of organic life, made in the very image of God and man was given vast power to rule and to rule himself. Man can surmount his physical limitations, sublimate his lower animal instincts, rise to the highest spiritual plane and man can build a society which is free from evil, poverty and war and hate.

It has always been the great classic teaching of Religion that there is design in the world and it tends toward good, and now science has begun to reinforce religion's confident proclamation of purpose and design. A veritable chorus of voices of the most eminent scientists can now be heard postulating on the basis of their scientific studies in the field of science their confident belief that the order evident in all nature, the universality of law, the system and method and harmony everywhere apparent, whether in molecule, living cell, plant or animal, and the evolutionary processes of organic life point inevitably all to the supreme, wisdom, planning and purpose in nature, and to a Lord of/creation.

Professor Albert E. Einstein, the greatest physicist in our time declared recently: "It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity -- to reflect upon the marvelous structure of the universe which we can dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in nature."

A great thinker of today, Professor Rudolf Otto, learned in Science has said that "when we envisage certain things in our world, such as the starry sky, the thickly peopled ocean, the orderliness and progressiveness of life, and give them the keenest and clearest scientific description in our power, there is left in our mind, a feeling of the Holy or the Sacred."

And similarly another eminent scientist in the field of Zoology declared:

"In Nature itself we find, beyond all question, as it seems to me, purpose, force, personality. Man is a part of Nature, and man possesses intelligence. His acts we directly know to be sometimes purposeful; and we know directly that we exercise power toward the attainment of our purposes. We have direct knowledge in ourselves that man is thus a person, a person with capacity for appreciating goodness, honour truth, faith, faithfulness, all of which are aspects of beauty, and that he is capable of feeling the urge, the compulsion, of beauty; he has intellect, stimuli, power to choose and power to endeavour in the line of his choice -- in short, he is a person.

"If such a bit of Nature, built up by Nature in her growth, has the inexpressibly great and valuable qualities inherent in personality, can it be otherwise with Nature herself? Can the part be infinitely greater, qualitatively, than the whole? To me the very asking of the question is its answer. Of course Nature, which made man and which comprehends man, is no less worthy, is no less beautiful, than man."

Now, of course, science no more than religion can give the final, ultimate answers to the great mysteries of existence: What is life, its origin? What is the origin of matter and energy. But Science has come to acknowledge what the religious spirit of man has intuitively divined long ago -- the living spirit working within the physical world, a plan for holding together, the scheme and the directive purpose upon which all Creation moves. When one tends to understand this, one comes to understand the glory of life and the wonder of life not only in the vast pageantry and beauty of physical nature or in the amazing variety, ubiquity, adaptability and intricacy of organic life, not only in the epic of evolution, one sees infinite wonder and glory also most especially in man's inner life.

I came across, recently a moving story told by Mr. C. T. Hudson, brother

of William Hudson who wrote Green Mansions. "He tells us of a couple of geese on his brother's sheep farm near Buenos Ayres. It was spring migration time, when the wintering flocks had left for the south, but the farmer noticed a pair left behind and moving strangely on the plains. When he rode near them, he saw that the female was walking steadily on in a southerly direction, while the male was some distance ahead, greatly excited, calling loudly, and often returning. At intervals he would rise in the air and call to his mate with his wildest and most piercing cries, urging her to follow. But it was soon evident that the female had one wing broken, and being unable to fly was essaying the long journey to the Magellanic Islands on foot! He mate, though strongly impelled by the mysterious migratory urge, would not forsake her. 'And on that sad, anxious way they would journey on to the inevitable end, when a pair or family of carrion eagles would spy them from a great distance -- the two travellers left far behind by their fellows, one flying, the other walking; and the first would be left to continue the journey alone.'"

Now we are moved by this simple story of behavior in animal life. This evidence of devotion and tenderness is not rare even in animal life. But how often do we witness its noblest manifestations in human life, in human relationship -- this bond of love, this sacrificial love, a love which is greater than life itself, a love which surmounts the instincts even of self-preservation -- the love of parents for children, the love of one person for another. Is there wonder and glory greater than that. Life today in spite of all wickedness, sorrow and ugliness is replete with infinite manifestations of such love among human beings wherein there is wonder and glory, something precious.

There is glory also, my dear friends, in man's insatiable hunger after righteousness, the sense of duty which has sent men to the rack and the stake, prophets to their death, idealists to their sorrowful road of frustration and persecution. Why do men do that? Why is it that on this earth in every generation there are men who will not yield to wrong and tyranny and unrighteousness, and offer up themselves

and everything for the sake of establishing righteousness and justice in the world. Why are their men who will chose death rather than slavery, and who die in war and who seek a Kingdom of God and who foresake all worldly goods -- comforts, pleasure, personal glory? This hunger for righteousness which is resplendently manifested in every generation regardless of sin and crime. Here is wonder and glory in life.

There is also wonder and glory in man's insatiable hunger for knowledge which keeps the race alive, his amazing intellect, his curisoity, his probing, questing, searching to discover more and more, to learn more and more, to control, to invent, to use, to tunnel mountains, to soar into space, to plumb the depths of the ocean, to send his voice round the globe, to manipulate all metals, to transmute all elements, to scan the inter-stellar spaces. His soaring imagination. There is wonder and infinite glory there.

There is wonder and glory in man's love for beauty, love of beauty which enkindles his heart in the sight of everything that is fit and just right and perfect, that hunger for beauty which drives man through labyrinths/of imperfection to reach out for that which iss perfect, harmonious, for adequate form or sound or line, or color or mass. There is wonder and glory in man's appreciation, admiration for that which is beautiful, that sense of beauty, that sensitiveness to beauty.

All these are with us today in this sad, sinful world full of war, muck and evil and they are our promise that it will yet be well with the world. For as long as there is great love in the world and among some men the e persists the hunger for Righteousness, for Truth, and for Beauty. As long as there are men in the world who believe that this Universe is not blind chaos, but a cosmos, a planned and purposeful world, there is hope that man will find his way back to the royal highway of his own resplendent destiny. And that , I believe, is what the Prophet really meant when he said: "Though I walk in the Valley of the Shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." ^{God} Good is in the world and all may yet be well with the world.

1) Strange to choose. Full of war, muck + evil.

Sounds almost like mockery - bitter sarcasm.

For never was human life so exposed in all its ^{ugly} un glorious features as in our day. Its cruelty + bestiality, its hate + vile passions, its honor + suffering, its meanness + poor

Death, coaxed + equipped by man to slay more swiftly and more horribly than ever before, stamps over the face of earth, hurts the skies, rides upon the waves, and under the wings of the sea.

Cities are blasted into ruins, whole populations are led to the shambles, myriads of human beings are starved, beaten, ~~crushed~~, penned up in dungeons, tortured, hounded or exiled.

The workshops, the world, the mills, the factories, the foundries, the laboratories are working ^{at feverish pace turning} night into day, preparing to deadly + ever deadlier weapons to kill, to maim, to devastate + destroy what man has built for his needs, his shelter, his pride and his sustenance.

Into fox holes and dug-outs, into the caves, the rocks and the holes of the earth (barracks) into jungle wood + malarial swamps have gone the peoples of our age.

How can we speak today, the wonder of life.

2) It is, in truth, very difficult. As difficult as it is for a sick man, rocked by disease open, to think or to be reinvolved in the glory of sound health, and the wonderful satisfactions of physical well-being. His thoughts are pretty well circumscribed as his immediate pain + discomfort to see or experience anything else.

And yet. it is very sad for the sick man to think beyond his all-consuming illness, + reach out for the prospect of being restored to good-health, + be sustained by the

confident hope that sound health is real, possible and obtainable by him. This faith and knowledge are an essential part of his cure! They re-enforce his will to recover! And a stout and fighting heart is the best machine!

- 3) Man & Society are desperately sick to-day. They need a fighting faith to enable them to survive, they need to believe that they can recover - and that life, when not made vile by man, is wonderful & glorious - and that there is a resplendent future for the human race.

Man needs reassurance! After the Flood - "What is the use? Rainbow of Promise!" - "The waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh" - "Be fruitful & multiply and replenish the earth. Build an ark and in building ye will find yourselves blessed."

- 4) Wherein then is the wonder & glory of life to which man, troubled & sorely beset can turn his eyes - & drink deep of renewed hope? Where is the Rainbow of Promise? What can we cling to? What can sustain our tired hearts?

- 5) Some say - there is neither wonder nor glory either in the Universe or in human life.

U. is an ~~absurd~~ ^{un-forgiving} machine, - an automatic mechanism, driven by blind force - and man is just a cog in that machine. The U. has neither design nor purpose - and human life as well has no fundamental meaning or reason.

Human life has been called a Comedy, Tragedy, a jest, a game, chance, an endless struggle, "Man is born crying, lives complaining & dies disappointed"

"One long process of getting tired": Samuel Butler.
"Shakespeare" (Irish) pamphlet.

6) And, in very truth, if the Un. is planless & purposeless - and happ
nothing more than a series of chem. & phys. reactions - then
these ^{elaborate} ~~destinies~~ ^{get} ~~are~~ not at all extreme - esp. to him who
has suffered much and achieved little of personal success or
happiness.

It is only as you can glimpse the outlines of some
design in the U. which includes you and your ^{own} ~~things & self~~
your ^{own} ~~aspiring~~ heart and mind in it - that you feel comforted
and strong there! It is only as you see evidence of Reason &
Intelligence at work in the U. - that you gain confidence that
in the ~~unseen~~ rationality & meaning of your own ^{own} ~~acts~~
little universe - which is your own life. It is only as
you become convinced that the whole of existing ~~is~~ ^{is} your
life ^{over} ~~is~~ then ~~hundreds of millions of years~~ ^{is} your
perfecting ^{from best. instincts} ~~follows some def. scheme~~ ^{is} the fulfilment of some
great design at the hands of a Supreme Creator, and tends
to some planned destiny, that your own life becomes en-
raptured by the that ^{that unfolding} ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~destiny~~.

In other words - if you ^{can} see the present condition of im-
perfection as only a stage, an inevitable stage, in a sure
process of growth & becoming, & as a link in a chain of
progressive betterments which will surely reach perfection
for then your eyes are open to behold ~~the perfect happiness~~ to see the wonder & the
glory of life.

7) A former Premier of England - Mr. Baldwin - once declared;
"For myself I say that if I did not feel that our work

(4)

and the work of all others, whether in politics or civic work, was done in the faith and the hope the same day, maybe a million years hence, the Kingdom of God would spread over the whole world, then I would have no hope, I could do no more work, and I would give my office on this morning, to anyone who would take it."

And this faith & hope - is predicated on conviction that the U. S. includes of human life in a progressive evolution of a superior intelligence, which being intelligent is also superior goodness - and that there is in life the inherent promise ^{human life will & is becoming grander & more magnificent} that the Kingdom of God can & will be established over all the earth.

7) Religion has always proclaimed design in Creation & ^{its} God! to whom - (2) God saw His handiwork & beheld it was good (3) Man was made to the highest manifestation of organic life - made in the very image of God. (4) Man was given vast power to rule, & to rule himself - He can surmount his phys. limitations, ^{sublimely} and his lower animal instincts, rise to highest sp. plane - ~~and now with faith~~ and build a Society from which evil, poverty, war, and power be banished.

8) Science has re-echoed Religion's proclamation of ^{confident} Design - A veritable chorus of voices of most eminent sc. - ^{can} now be heard - postulating on basis of their sc. studies ⁱⁿ fields of science - their belief that the order existent in all nature, the universality, law, the cosmic unity, system and method ^{+ harmony} everywhere apparent, whether in election, minerals, living all, plant, or animal, ^{+ the evil forces of ag. & the} point inevitable

to Intelligence in Nature and to a God of all Creation. (Juste). C

9) Science, no more than religion, can give the final answers to the great ^{eternal} mysteries of existence. What is life? What is its origin? What is matter & matter of energy? But Science has come to acknowledge what the religious spirit has intuitively divined long ago - the Creator behind all Creation - & the living Spirit which works within the physical world.

10) Wonder & glory of life are revealed not only in the vast ^{variety} of physical nature & in the amazing variety, complexity, adaptability, & intricacy of organic life, & the breath-taking speed of its evolution, but in man's inner life which even the evil & much of his world does not wholly obscure.

① C.T. Hudson by the Rev. H. Hudson - he who with Alice Macfarlane wrote "The Story of a Couple of Years as his Brothers' Sheep Farm near Buenos Aires" (Juste p. 311)

"Gentle & manly" the following story of a couple of years as his brothers' sheep farm near Buenos Aires (Juste p. 311) ^{where} we are moved by this story of behavior in animal life. This evidence of devotion & tenderness is not rare even in animal life? But how often do we witness its utmost manifestation in human life. Sacrificial love! There is in human life more > life itself! Herein is ~~real~~ ^{real} wonder & glory of life!

② Man's hunger after righteousness - ^{seeing of duty} sent men to the rack & the stake - ^{sent men to the} ~~perished~~ ^{perished} to their death - ^{rebelled} ~~rebelled~~ to their sorrowful road of frustration & persecution

— not to yield to wrong - tyranny - injustice - (6)
— to choose death > slavery. ^{Die in war - To seek the Kingdom}
There is wonder & glory!

④ Main love & Beauty - Kindle his heart at the
sight of the fit & the perfect.

Drive him thus longing for imperfection, to reach
not for that which is perfect, ^{for} the adequate power -
~~for~~ in sound, or line, or color, or mass.

Main aesthetic huge appreciation - wonder & glory there!

⑤ Main hunger for Knowledge - ^{which keep rose young} his amazing intell.

curiosity - his probing, questing, searching - ^{to}
discover, to correct, to invent, to use! To
cut tunnel thro' - scan into space - plumb the
depth of the ocean - send his voice round the globe -
manipulate all matter ^{to transmute} all elements - to scan the
interstellar spaces - ^{His soaring imagination} There is wonder & glory there!

11/ All these are with us today in this sad, sinful, world
full, with much evil

They are our promise that it will yet be well with
the world.

= As long as there is great love in the world, and, among some
men there persists the hunger for Rightness, for Truth, for Good,

As long as there are men who believe that this Un. ^(P)
is not blind chaos, but a planned, purposeful
world -

- There is hope that man will find his way
back to the royal highway of his own
Destiny -



In Nature itself we find, beyond all question, as it seems to me, purpose, force, personality. Man is a part of Nature, and man possesses intelligence. His acts we directly know to be sometimes purposeful; and we know directly that we exercise power toward the attainment of our purposes. We have direct knowledge in ourselves that man is thus a person, a person with capacity for appreciating goodness, honour, truth, faith, faithfulness, all of which are aspects of beauty, and that he is capable of feeling the urge, the compulsion, of beauty; he has intellect, sensitiveness to qualities, as well as sensitivity to quantitative stimuli, power to choose and power to endeavour in the line of his choice -- in short, he is a person.

If such a bit of Nature, built up by Nature in her growth, has the inexpressibly great and valuable qualities inherent in personality, can it be otherwise with Nature herself? Can the part be infinitely greater, qualitatively, than the whole? To me the very asking of the question is its answer. Of course Nature, which made man and which comprehends man, is no less worthy, is no less beautiful, than man.

Man is able to reveal his soul to other beings who have souls and so can appreciate man's personal revelation. Similarly Nature can reveal her soul, God can reveal his personality, to those who have souls to receive the revelation. The extent of the possible revelation is measured by the breadth and depth of the possible recipient. This is the confession of faith of one humble follower of science on whom the endeavour to view all phenomena honestly has indelibly impressed the spiritual phenomena of personality, the overwhelming importance of the personal. To me the spiritual is primary, the physical derivative from the spiritual, not only in worth and purpose, but also factually in causation. I have felt my will acting upon my body, and through my body producing physical effects. This causation is more than antecedent and consequent. It is real, vital, personal, in myself, and it is effective force.

With the ever-present urge toward unifying underlying relations, I cannot but feel that the physical and spiritual are essentially one and that the spiritual aspect is primary, the physical its outworking; in other words, that God's will sustains everything and that all is directed by intelligence and is purposeful. And this conception of the universe as intelligent force I get mainly from animals, especially from that animal which I am.

--Intelligent Plan In Nature, by Maynard M. Metcalf, Research Associate in Zoology, Johns Hopkins University (p. 218, The Great Design)

Survey the whole sweep of evolution; the wonder of regulation amid the immensities of the universe, beyond the reach of the most powerful telescope; the equal wonder of regulation amid the minutiae of atomic structure and behaviour, far beyond the penetration of the microscope; the emergence of life on the Earth, on that speck of the universe of which we know most; the gradual development of intelligence, of reason, of appreciation of beauty and of power to create beauty, even the transcendent beauty of personal character. A star is no greater than a violet; gravitation as a force cannot transcend love, for Love seems incomparably more effective, more forceful than any physical force, lying as it does at the very root of the universe. But it is all one, beginning in the dust and reaching up into persons who can appreciate and create beauty, and feel love -- a constantly changing whole, alive, personal. And it doth not yet appear what there shall be.

--(Same as above, p. 222)

"It is enough for me to contemplate the mystery of conscious life perpetuating itself through all eternity -- to reflect upon the marvelous structure of the universe which we can dimly perceive, and to try humbly to comprehend even an infinitesimal part of the intelligence manifested in nature".

-- Albert Einstein
(Preface, The Great Design)
p. 6

A great thinker of today, Professor Rudolf Otto, learned in Science, has said that when we envisage certain things in our world, such as the starry sky, the thickly peopled ocean, the orderliness and progressiveness of life, and give them the keenest and clearest scientific description in our power, there is left in our mind, a feeling of the Holy or the Sacred.

--from Introduction, The Great Design
p. 13

... This is little enough, but we are confident that our feet are firmly set on the path that leads to further knowledge, and we have already made enough progress in reading and interpreting the messages sent to us in the light from the stars to recognize that, for all its gigantic dimensions, all the bewildering complexities of its structure and motions, all the endless variety of its contents, our great stellar system, our universe so far as it has come within our range of observation, is an organic whole, exhibiting an underlying structural symmetry, built up throughout of the same basic elements, and governed by the same great laws.

-- Behold The Stars, by Robert Grant
Aitken, Director, Lick Observatory,
Mt. Hamilton, Cal.
p. 36, The Great Design

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing." - Macbeth.