

CONVERGENCE



**Collected Maxims &
Aphorisms 1977-84**

JOHN O'LOUGHLIN

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Collected Maxims & Aphorisms (1977–84) by

JOHN O'LOUGHLIN

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CDM Philosophy

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PREFACE

This substantial collection of aphorisms and maxims is taken from a variety of projects, including (besides the aforementioned genres) volumes containing either dialogues or essays like *The Illusory Truth*, *The Way of Evolution*, and *The Importance of Technology to the Transcendental Future* or both dialogues and essays like *Future Transformations*, *Post-Atomic Perspectives*, *The Will to Truth*, and *Social Transcendentalism*, which I wrote between 1977 and 1984, and is therefore representative of a comparatively early stage in my philosophical development.

The subject-matter of each section ranges widely between mostly cultural, social, political and religious concerns and somewhat eludes single-subject definition, in spite of my attempt at concise titles, some of which appear unavoidably similar. But despite the inherent problems characterizing anthologies of this nature, it gradually narrows down towards a specific ideological stance which I have equated with Social

Transcendentalism, and thus with a kind of ultimate politico-religious orientation which is less concerned with man than with his hypothetical future transmutation or transfiguration towards what has been called the Post-human Millennium, a period in time or, rather, eternity when, hypothetically speaking, man is superseded and/or transcended by that which stands closer to the godly if not, in a profounder sense, to godliness *per se*.

Such, in a nutshell, is the drift of this chronological collection of aphorisms and maxims, which set me on the road towards my mature writings and thus to the eventual apotheosis of my development as a writer of philosophical-cum-theosophical works, the latter part of this hyphenated term implying – contrary to standard practice – a greater concern with metaphysical truth than with physical knowledge and, hence, with God than with Man.

John O’Loughlin, London 2007 (Revised 2022)

ON BOOKS

001. We all possess a tendency to progressively underestimate a book, whether prosodic, philosophic, or poetic, which we had previously read and enjoyed, and mainly because we have forgotten most of what delighted us about it at the time. We may, for example, have been highly enthusiastic about Hamsun's *Mysteries* at the time of reading it. A year or two later we recall a few shreds of memory associated with our favourite passages from the novel, and these in turn we may couple to a vague recollection that *Mysteries* was a great book. But largely because our minds have moved on to fresh literary pastures, the initial enthusiasm engendered by this novel has if not altogether disappeared then considerably subsided, and we quickly discover the potential for flippancy, superficiality, indifference, oversimplification, irony, exaggeration, hostility, etc., lurking dangerously beneath the fragile surface of our judgement of it. In truth, one is always obliged to outgrow a previous experience. The author of a brilliant book yesterday may well become the author of a comparatively uninspiring one today – at least, so far as the reader is concerned!
002. If as writers and thinkers you cannot clear the ground of what has gone before, you will never have room to raise your own constructions. All

great writers are also destroyers. Not only do they create new works but, in the process, destroy the reputations of old ones, especially those whose reputations were *ripe* for destruction. But when *is* the reputation of an old work ripe for destruction? As soon as a writer has found a substantial hole in it, which is to say as soon as he has exposed the lie in it! Then and only then is it in the wrong and he in the right. But until they are 'found out', even the most undeserved reputations, or decrepit foundations, will remain intact.

003. As a final product, a literary translation is never more than a combination of author and translator, a creation which, strictly speaking, stems neither from the one nor the other. Hence Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* effectively becomes, when translated into English, the product of a third factor – that of the author and translator combined. Thus Nietzsche's work, translated into English by Hollingdale, effectively becomes the work of 'Nietdale', or something of the sort. For we are reading neither Nietzsche's words nor Hollingdale's thoughts.

004. I distinguish between three kinds of literary masterpiece, viz. the small, the medium, and the large. The small applies to a work of under 200 pages in length, the medium to a work of 200-399 pages, and the large to a work in excess of 400 pages. To give an example of each kind of literary

masterpiece, I regard Camus' *The Outsider* as a small masterpiece, Hamsun's *Mysteries* as a medium-sized masterpiece, and Joyce's *Ulysses* as a large masterpiece. As might be expected, it is then logical for me to contend *Ulysses* to be greater than both *Mysteries* and *The Outsider*, but *Mysteries* to be greater than *The Outsider*.

005. There are always authors who refrain from drawing attention to the works of certain other authors not, as might at first appear, because they don't particularly like their works (or, for that matter, their authors), but primarily because they are acutely conscious of the striking similarities between their own work and the works of these others, or acutely conscious, it may be, of how profoundly influenced they were by them, and therefore do not wish to be regarded as mere plagiarists.

006. There are those who not only regard their collection of books as a kind of 'work of art' in itself, that is to say as a carefully-determined, pre-arranged, and almost regimentally-ordered selection of interrelated material, but, more importantly, as a kind of 'intellectual shrine' in the presence of which they often pay unconscious, and sometimes conscious, homage to the deity of their literary obsessions. One doesn't act unseemly, i.e. flippantly or disrespectfully, in the presence of one's array of choice books. On the contrary, one

retains an appropriate decorum which testifies to an almost religious awe and devotion vis-à-vis the proximity of intellectual greatness, as though one's bookcase were a kind of altar to the intellect upon which the vertical columns of books repose in sanctified beatitude.

007. All Christians who genuinely believe in Heaven and Hell should be aware of the fact that the concept of Heaven is only feasible because of the antithetical concept of Hell, and that unless, in strict accordance with the intrinsic dualism of Christian theology, 'the wicked' were destined for Hell, 'the good' themselves would never be able to enter Heaven. In short, their presumed future salvation partly depends upon the damnation of 'the wicked'. They are in great need of 'the wicked' if there is to be any salvation at all.
008. Many of those rather insular people who believe in the concept of a Creator 'up above', a Creator who is Lord of the Universe, tend to overlook the fact that there is undoubtedly a great deal more to the Universe than they naively imagine, and that, in all probability, it also extends to an incalculable extent 'down below'. But let us not ignore the fact that an Englishman and an Australian would each be pointing in opposite directions if they stood in their own country and posited a Creator 'up above'. The Englishman's 'above' would be the Australian's 'below', and *vice versa*.

009. If one could distinguish between priests who take those aspects of the Bible literally which were better taken symbolically and, conversely, those who take symbolically that which appears literal, I feel certain that, even these days, there would be more priests in the former category than in the latter one. In other words, there would be more priests who would believe material relating, for example, to the Garden of Eden to be an historical documentation of something that actually existed and happened than ones who, taking it symbolically, regard it as an account of man's rise to consciousness and the inevitable break with an unconscious, and comparatively blissful, identification with nature which this attainment necessarily entailed, as, outgrowing the animal plane, man became fully human and was obliged to abandon nature, or the 'Garden', for the toil and struggle of the world, with its redemptive promise. Thus could the clerical wheat be divided from the clerical chaff, as one sought to distinguish the more imaginative and possibly intelligent priests from their comparatively simple-minded, fundamentalist, and Bible-punching colleagues!

010. Man is neither an angel nor a demon but a being who incorporates aspects of both the angelic and the demonic. However, to refer to him as both angel and demon would hardly be nearer the truth! For such arbitrary designations presuppose

absolutes, or ideal beings, which exist independently of each other and are thus incapable of mutual reconciliation. All one can reasonably contend is that there is a 'watered-down' angel and a 'watered-down' demon in every man; a part which aspires towards the angelic and, conversely, a part which aspires towards or, rather, stems from the demonic, without ever being in a position to make man either wholly the one or the other.

011. Whether, in fact, there was only one First Cause or, alternatively, numerous First Causes ... is something about which we have no definite knowledge at this point in time. Although scientists are inclined to reason, probably in deference to a monotheistic tradition, in terms of a single First Cause, a 'Big Bang', as it is somewhat colloquially called, the probability is that there were many creative influences, though not necessarily in this galaxy (of which our solar system is but a tiny and relatively insignificant component), but throughout the universe of galaxies as a whole. After all, polytheism preceded monotheism in the evolution of religion from gods to God, and it could be that the concept of a First Cause is simply a more evolved scientific point-of-view than that of First Causes – one analogous to monotheism.

012. It should always be remembered that the use of the term 'First Cause' indicates a scientific point-of-view, the use of the term 'God' or 'Creator', by

contrast, a religious one. Strictly speaking, the scientists are no more wrong to reject God than the priests to reject the First Cause. What we are dealing with here are two ways of looking at the Universe, a factual and a figurative, a scientific and a religious, and anyone who specializes in the one can hardly be partial to the other, since they tend to be as mutually exclusive as monarchs and popes.

013. When we say that the sun is in the region of 93,000,000 miles away, we indicate that at least we know in theory what an immense distance the sun is from the earth. As, however, to knowing in practice what 93,000,000 miles are, none of us will ever do so, and consequently our knowledge of this astronomical fact remains incomplete or, at best, highly partial. Modern science presents us with a considerable number of fantastic figures to swallow, many of which are considerably more fantastic than the simple example cited above. Though, for all its breathtaking achievements in this context, we are usually left little or no wiser in the long run!

014. I can state that the average human brain is composed of approximately a billion neurons, or nerve cells, but I cannot expect you to know exactly what a billion of anything actually means, still less how we arrived at this fantastic figure. You will, of course, have the impression that a tremendous number of neurons are involved in the brain's

composition. But that, alas, is as much as you can gather! Our fantastic figure will remain an isolated fact, not really telling us very much about anything at all. Thus we are regularly confronted, in modern science, by what may be termed the triumph of facts and figures over meaning. Unfortunately, the greater the lacunae between these facts and figures and our practical understanding of them, the greater is the danger of our becoming the dupes and victims of abstractions which exist beyond the pale of rational comprehension. In this respect, modern science has to a significant extent annexed the premium on faith formerly held by orthodox religion.

015. To suggest that we humans live in a man's world would be as presumptuous as for ants to suggest, assuming they could speak, that they live in an ant's world, or for flies to suggest that they live in a fly's world, since there are as many different kinds of worlds as there are living species. However, it is of course fair to suggest that we live in a man's world insofar as we are human beings, just as it would be reasonable for ants or flies to suggest that they live in their own respective worlds insofar as they are different kinds of insects. But their worlds, the contexts in which they live, would not qualify them to know for a fact that the Earth belonged to them, any more than our world, the context in which we live, qualifies us to know for a fact that it belongs to us. All we can really be certain of is that we live

on planet Earth, and that our lives co-exist with those of the many other species who co-inhabit it. For we are dealing here with an ecological balance which affects everyone ... from the smallest of the small to the biggest of the big, and which ultimately serves to indicate the eternal interdependence of the many species who subsist on a common planet.

016. Our flight from boredom, time, pain, worry, etc., often leads us to turn simple wisdom into complex folly. We are never satisfied that we know enough, even though we usually know far more than we need to know in order to survive, as well as far more than is generally good for us, and are consequently led to undermine the intrinsic value of much of our knowledge. Beyond a certain point knowledge acquires the same treatment as material possessions: the more of it we have the less value do we attach to its individual parts and the more value, by sheer force of habit, to accumulating as much of it as possible. Knowing too much is the spiritual counterpart of possessing too much, and all extremities are equally fatal!
017. The picture one has of the world is so related to the nature of one's intelligence that the most intelligent people will never appear recognizable as such to those of lower intelligence, to those, in other words, who have no compatible criterion by which to evaluate and/or appreciate their intelligence. What one sees of a person of greater intelligence is only

what one's intelligence *permits* one to see, not the greater intelligence itself. Hence one is always restricted to a partial and necessarily misleading perspective of people more intelligent than oneself.

018. An extremist in one context will always be moderate in another. Indeed, one wouldn't know anything about moderation at all unless one was also extreme, unless one's extreme tendencies served both as a goad and as a counterbalance to