

DUALISM

John O'Loughlin



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Comprising the titles *Between Truth and Illusion*
& *The Illusory Truth*

JOHN O'LOUGHLIN

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PREFACE

This project, divided into two books, both of which originally date from 1977 but have now been extensively revised and reissued in a new format, signifies an attempt by me to return to basics in philosophy and to understand the connections – and, indeed, interrelations – of antitheses, polarities, opposites, and other such neat philosophical categories in relation to the relativity of everyday life.

It is not an express attempt to expound *the* Truth ... in respect of metaphysical knowledge ... but, rather, a modest undertaking, on my part, to comprehend the paradoxes of the world in which we happen to live, and to seek to unveil some of the illusions and superstitions which make the pursuit of metaphysical knowledge such a difficult, not to say protracted, task.

Hopefully the result of this undertaking is a franker and maturer approach to those very paradoxes which were the inspiration for this project, and which duly led to some of its most striking contentions.

John O'Loughlin, London 2022

BOOK ONE – BETWEEN TRUTH AND ILLUSION

PART ONE – APHORISTIC ESSAYS ON PHILOSOPHICAL DUALISM

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF OPPOSITES

Work and play, love and hate, day and night, up and down, north and south, big and small, high and low, pleasure and pain, man and woman, sun and moon, yes and no, right and wrong, good and evil, health and sickness, in and out, hard and soft, hot and cold, old and new, war and peace, quick and slow, young and old, life and death, awake and asleep, rich and poor, tragic and comic, for and against, truth and illusion, etc.

The duality of life would seem to be an indisputable fact, a condition not permitting any serious refutation. For what happens when we isolate the word 'big', say, from the existence of its antithesis, 'small'? – Simply that the word in question ceases to be meaningful. By itself, and totally isolated from the word 'small', our adjective is reduced to a sound, the simple basis of a new word. We could speak of a *big* bird, a *big* house, or a *big* garden but, not knowing what 'big' meant, we would be none the wiser.

Thus we can see how absolutely interdependent the words 'big' and 'small' really are, how they can only serve a useful function when used in a mutual relationship. Once

the polarities have been established, however, it is then possible to conclude a bird 'big' in relation to a speck of dust but 'small' in relation to a man; 'small' in relation to a house but 'big' in relation to a moth, and so on.

It should therefore follow that unless we accept the dualities of life as being interrelated, part of a larger whole, and even, in a limited sense, the key to the metaphysical nature of reality, we shall be perpetually deluding ourselves. In other words, without hate there can be no love, without death no life, without sadness no happiness, without pain no pleasure, without evil no good, without illusion no truth, without realism no naturalism, and without materialism no idealism.

Thus it can be assumed that a society which strives to remove what it regards as a detrimental or undesirable antithesis to a given ideal condition or concept ... is inevitably letting itself in for a lot of futile and pointless labour. A tolerable world isn't a place where things don't go wrong or where conditions are always pleasant, people happy, work agreeable, and health unimpaired; for that, believe it or not, would soon prove to be quite an intolerable one. But in order that people *may* experience pleasant conditions, a degree of happiness, a sense of purpose, and the joys of good health, a tolerable world will also include correlative experience of unpleasant conditions, sadness, absurdity, and sickness – to name but a handful of possibilities.

Hence when a person is feeling sad, he ought to face-up to the reality of his situation by accepting its rightful place and thereby bearing with it as a sort of passport to the possibility of subsequent happiness. Indeed, if he is something of a philosopher, and can sufficiently detach himself from his immediate sadness for a few seconds, he may even think along such lines as: 'Without this moment or hour of sadness, what happiness could I possibly expect today?' In doing so, he will be acknowledging the validity of what might popularly be described as a means to a desirable end.

Naturally, I don't mean to imply that people *should* think like this when inflicted with depressing circumstances, but simply that they should learn to acquiesce in their various uncongenial moods without vainly endeavouring to fight shy of them. For the trickery too often advocated by people who foolishly strive to rid themselves of an unhappy mood, as though secretly afraid to 'pay their dues', strikes me as little more than a species of intellectual perversion. If we were really supposed to lead one-sided lives, life would have been considerably different to begin with, and it is doubtful that man would have conceived of the dual concepts of Heaven and Hell, concepts which, on a more concrete level, are clearly relative to life on this earth, and to a life, moreover, which prohibits man from ever dedicat-ing himself to the one at the total exclusion of the other!

Therefore it can be deduced from the aforementioned

contentions that man's fundamental nature is typified by its capacity for experiencing seemingly contradictory phenomena, viz. happiness and sadness, good and evil, truth and illusion, which, if he is to do justice to both himself and his kind, should be accepted and cultivated according to his individual or innate disposition.

An author, for example, who may well be 'great' by dint of the fact that he accepts himself as a whole man, should reconcile himself to the logical contradictions, cynical statements, brash generalizations, callous accusations, superficial appreciations, cultivated vanities, dogmatic assertions, etc., which frequently appear in his writings (and constitute manifestations of his negative, or evil, side), in order to safeguard his integrity as both a man *and* a writer.

THE CONFLICT OF OPPOSITES

My philosophy is neither optimistic nor pessimistic but a subtle combination of both optimism and pessimism.

Perhaps this respect for duality, this acceptance of polarity, entitles it to be regarded as a metaphysics drawn primarily from life itself, rather than imposed upon it by the whims or perversions of the human mind. Of course, its author is perfectly aware that he may think optimistically whilst experiencing a good mood and pessimistically whilst in the grip of a bad mood. But

these separate inclinations are well suited to the purposes of this philosophy.

For example, if he should one moment secretly pronounce, after the fashion of Schopenhauer, that life is inherently bad because there is too much suffering and not enough pleasure in it, he will subsequently reflect, when the time and mood are propitious, that his previous oracular pronouncement was largely attributable to the persistence of a bad mood and/or uncongenial circumstances; that life was only 'bad' because he had been in a negative frame-of-mind, had set up a chain of negative reactions and accordingly dismissed optimism in the name of suffering, thereby passing judgement in a thoroughly one-sided manner.

If, however, he should sometime pronounce, after the fashion of Gide, that life is inherently good and bubbles over with joy, pleasure, intelligence, etc., he will later reflect, doubtless when the time and mood have shifted down a gear or two, that his previous oracular pronouncement was largely attributable to the prevalence of a good mood and/or congenial circumstances; that life was only 'good' because he had been in a positive frame-of-mind, had set up a chain of positive reactions and accordingly dismissed pessimism or, rather, affirmed optimism in the name of well-being, thereby passing judgement in a no-less thoroughly one-sided manner.

The claim that life is therefore both good *and* bad,

according to the context of the occasion or circum-stances of the individual, is doubtless a proposition that most fair-minded people would be prepared to accept. But to proclaim, like some philosophers, that life is either good or bad is surely to misrepresent or slander it in such a way as to render oneself contemptible to the more realistic spirits of this world! Let it be hoped that we dualists can see life on fairer terms than they did.

THE NECESSARY ILLUSION

Just as one must know one's truths if they are to remain valid *as truths*, so one must remain ignorant of one's illusions if they are to remain invalid *as illusions*.

Whenever the spell of an illusion is broken one automatically becomes disillusioned, which is to say, somewhat saddened by the realization that what one formerly took to be the truth wasn't really true at all but, rather, a misconception on one's part. Thus, by way of compensation, the shattered illusion then becomes a kind of negative truth, in that one can now see through it and thereby establish a truer opinion on the subject. So, in a sense, one's illusions are all sham truths until one becomes disillusioned.

But this realization, this process of creeping disillusionment, doesn't automatically mean that one is steadily getting closer to absolute truth, that one is

'cutting down' on one's illusions and consequently converting the knowledge of their fallacies into relative truth, while simultaneously safeguarding one's inherent or acquired grasp of truth. For as everything exists in polarity, so must the newly acquired disillusionment subsequently make way for other illusions which replace those one possessed at the time of becoming disillusioned with a particular illusion, in order to maintain the balance of opposites.

A philosopher who categorically asserts his will to truth at any price, and thereupon declares himself to be the sworn enemy of illusion, is, unwittingly, the victim of an illusion which presupposes that truth can be acquired without a constant metaphysical price – namely that of simultaneously maintaining and acquiescing in illusions which must, of necessity, enter into his work from time to time, thereby preventing the ultimate realization of his notably idealistic ambitions.

THE LEGITIMACY OF STUPIDITY

As each person retains his capacity for truth *and* illusion throughout life, so, likewise, does each person retain his capacity for cleverness and stupidity. That this is a just condition hardly needs proving; for were he not subject to the experience of both tendencies, he would have little or no prospect of maintaining either. Hence his illusion

guarantees the continual existence of his truth, his stupidity the continual existence of his cleverness.

To lament, however, over the realization that even one's favourite philosophers, novelists, and poets display periodic manifestations of illusion or stupidity is, willy-nilly, to display one's own illusion or stupidity, since these authors must also be subject to the metaphysical coercion of the human spirit. and therefore be equally incapable of ultimately transcending its dualism. Were a few of them to remain wholly consistent with one's own mode of thinking, were even one of them to do so, there would surely be reasonable grounds for assuming the impossible had come to pass, that one had come face-to-face with one's double and somehow ac-quired exactly the same truths and illusions as had previously been recorded by a man who hadn't so much as even suspected one's existence.

Consequently, it will be no great surprise or hardship to an enlightened reader when he eventually comes to realize that his attitude towards each of his 'favourite' writers is bound to be ambivalent, to entail both agreement and disagreement, approval and disapproval, faith and scepticism. For as there have never been two people exactly alike in the world (so-called 'identical twins' possibly excepted), so it is inevitable that one man's meat will continue to be another man's poison.

Even the greatest writers must, of necessity, be subject to

the continuous prevalence of antithetical values, if they are to live as men and not degenerate into lopsided monsters! The pernicious idea of someone's being 'all too human' simply because he makes mistakes, acts stupidly, suffers from ignorance, fosters certain misleading arguments, etc., is clearly founded upon a superficial grasp of human reality (as though the person accusing another of being 'all too human' on account of such failings wasn't, in reality, 'all too human' himself for failing to detect their ultimate legitimacy!). But being 'all too human' is really an indication of human perfection rather than of imperfection. For a man who never made mistakes, never committed an illusion or absurdity to paper, would be highly imperfect – a sort of computerized robot, and therefore no man at all!

MORE POSITIVE THAN NEGATIVE

If illusions are only illusions insofar as man is basically unaware of their illusory nature, can it not be deduced from this that his real evil, stupidity, illogicality, injustice, etc., only come to the fore when he is basically unaware of the fact, not when he wills it? In other words, because the life-force is essentially positive, because everything arises in nature to fulfil itself, is not man's deepest inclination likewise to seek the positive rather than the negative, to aspire towards his individual truth, goodness, cleverness, profundity, logic, justice, etc. as an *inherent*

inclination rather than towards their opposites which, being negative, are things that he is fundamentally unconscious of, i.e., in the sense that one is unconscious of an illusion until one becomes disillusioned with it?

Men aspire towards truth while still besotted with illusions, towards goodness while still fostered on evil, towards social order while still subject to the chaos of their individual lives. They often think they are doing the right thing when it subsequently transpires to being wrong; they often consider themselves to be acting justly when, to those upon whom they have acted, the consequences are manifestly unjust; they often imagine themselves to be doing good when, to those who are the recipients of their goodness, the main consequences are evil. It is only out of ignorance that they act wrongly at all, but it is a necessary ignorance which ultimately transpires to being justified, a fact which may well explain why the dying Christ gave utterance to the words: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do', and why Nietzsche asserted: 'Man always acts rightly'.

Thus man is largely ignorant of his real evil, stupid, illogical, and superficial tendencies because his innate positivity generally leads him to treat every action as a good, no matter what its nature. He doesn't attack others, whether verbally or physically, simply for the pleasure of doing so, but primarily because he feels *justified* in doing so, because, by a quirk of fate, context, experience, or life-history, he feels that to be the right thing to do under

the prevailing circumstances.

