

ON NOT THINKING FOR YOURSELF / CHARITY TOWARDS THE UNCHARITABLE

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William Hazlitt, from “On Prejudice”:

It is a mistake, however, to suppose that all prejudices are false, though it is not an easy matter to distinguish between true and false prejudice. Prejudice is properly an opinion or feeling, not for which there is no reason, but of which we cannot render a satisfactory account on the spot. It is not always possible to assign a 'reason for the faith that is in us,' not even if we take time and summon up all our strength; but it does not therefore follow that our faith is hollow and unfounded. A false impression may be defined to be an effect without a cause, or without any adequate one; but the effect may remain and be true, though the cause is concealed or forgotten. The grounds of our opinions and tastes may be deep, and be scattered over a large surface; they may be various, remote and complicated; but the result will be sound and true, if they have existed at all, though we may not be able to analyse them into classes, or to recall the particular time, place, and circumstances of each individual case or branch of the evidence. The materials of thought and feeling, the body of facts and experience, are infinite, are constantly going on around us, and acting to produce an impression of good or evil, of assent or dissent to certain inferences; but to require that we should be prepared to retain the whole of this mass of experience in our memory, to resolve it into its component parts, and be able to quote chapter and verse for every conclusion we unavoidably draw from it, or else to discard the whole together as unworthy the attention of a rational being, is to betray an utter ignorance both of the limits and the several uses of the human capacity. The *feeling* of the truth of anything, or the soundness of the judgment formed upon it from repeated, actual impressions, is one thing; the power of vindicating and enforcing it, by distinctly appealing to or explaining those impressions, is another. The most fluent talkers or most plausible reasoners are not always the justest thinkers.

Kenneth Burke, from *The Philosophy of Literary Form*:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated

discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. It is from this “unending conversation” that the materials of your drama arise.

Michael Oakeshott, from “A Place of Learning”:

A culture, particularly one such as ours, is a continuity of feelings, perceptions, ideas, engagements, attitudes and so forth, pulling in different directions, often critical of one another and contingently related to one another so as to compose not a doctrine, but what I shall call a conversational encounter. Ours, for example, accommodates not only the lyre of Apollo but also the pipes of Pan, the call of the wild; not only the poet but also the physicist; not only the majestic metropolis of Augustinian theology but also the “greenwood” of Franciscan Christianity. A culture comprises unfinished intellectual and emotional journeyings, expeditions now abandoned but known to us in the tattered maps left behind by the explorers; it is composed of light-hearted adventures, of relationships invented and explored in exploit or in drama, of myths and stories and poems expressing fragments of human self-understanding, of gods worshipped, of responses to the mutability of the world and of encounters with death. And it reaches us, as it reached generations before ours, neither as long-ago terminated specimens of human adventure, nor as an accumulation of human achievements we are called upon to accept, but as a manifold of invitations to look, to listen and to reflect.

C. S. Lewis, from *That Hideous Strength*:

But here comes the point that concerns you, young man. You have no choice whether you will be used or not. There is no turning back once you have set your hand to the plow. No one goes out of the NICE. Those who try to turn back will perish in the wilderness. But the question is, whether you are content to be one of the instruments which is thrown aside when it has served His turn — one which

having executed judgment on others, is reserved for judgment itself — or will you be among those who enter on the inheritance?

This was the first thing Mark had been asked to do which he himself, before he did it, clearly knew to be criminal. But the moment of his consent almost escaped his notice; certainly, there was no struggle, no sense of turning a corner. There may have been a time in the world's history when such moments fully revealed their gravity, with witches prophesying on a blasted heath or visible Rubicons to be crossed. But, for him, it all slipped past in a chatter of laughter, of that intimate laughter between fellow professionals, which of all earthly powers is strongest to make men do very bad things before they are yet, individually, very bad men.

“But,” said Jane, “I don't know anything about all this. Do I? I don't want to take sides in something I don't understand.”

“But don't you see,” broke in Camilla, “that you can't be neutral? If you don't give yourself to us, the enemy will use you.”

The words “give yourself to us” were ill-chosen. The very muscles of Jane's body stiffened a little: if the speaker had been anyone who attracted her less than Camilla she would have become like stone to any further appeal. Denniston laid a hand on his wife's arm.

“You must see it from Mrs. Studdock's point of view, dear,” he said. “You forget she knows practically nothing at all about us. And that is the real difficulty. We can't tell her much until she has joined. We are in fact asking her to take a leap in the dark.” He turned to Jane with a slightly quizzical smile on his face which was, nevertheless, grave. “It is like that,” he said, “like getting married, or going into the Navy as a boy, or becoming a monk, or trying a new thing to eat. You can't know what it's like until you take the plunge.”

Augustine, from *On Christian Teaching*:

It is to be understood that the plenitude and the end of the Law and of all the sacred Scriptures is the love of a Being [that is, God] which is to be enjoyed and of a being [that is, our neighbor] that can share that enjoyment with us.... Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them in such a way that it [i.e., his interpretation] does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand [the Scriptures] at all. Whoever finds a lesson there useful to the building of charity, even though he has not said what the author may be shown to have intended in that place, has not been deceived, nor is he lying in any way.

Michael Oakeshott, from “The Tower of Babel”:

[According to one model of the moral life,] The moral life is *a habit of affection and behaviour*; not a habit of reflective *thought*, but a habit of *affection and conduct*.... We acquire habits of conduct, not by constructing a way of living upon rules or precepts and learned by heart and subsequently practiced, but by living with people who habitually behave in a certain manner: we acquire habits of conduct in the same way as we acquire our native language.... [According to a second model,] an activity is determined, not by a habit of behavior, but by *the reflective application of a moral criterion*.... This is a form of the moral life in which a special value is attributed to self-consciousness, individual or social; not only is the rule or the ideal the product of reflective thought, but the application of the rule or the ideal to the situation is also a reflective activity.

Leszek Kolakowski, from *The Presence of Myth*:

Metaphysical questions and beliefs reveal an aspect of human existence not revealed by scientific questions and beliefs, namely, that aspect that refers intentionally to nonempirical unconditioned reality. The presence of this intention does not guarantee the existence of the referents. It is only evidence of a need, alive in culture, that that to which the intention refers should be present. But this presence cannot in principle be the object of proof, because the proof-making ability is itself a power of the analytical mind, technologically oriented, which does not extend beyond its tasks. The idea of proof, introduced into metaphysics, arises from a confusion of two different sources of energy active in man's conscious relation to the world: the technological and the mythical.

Zygmunt Bauman, *Does Ethics Have A Chance In A World of Consumers?*:

In a liquid-modern society, swarms tend to replace groups, with their leaders, hierarchies, and pecking orders Swarms need not be burdened by the group's tools of survival: they assemble, disperse, and come together again from one occasion to another, each time guided by different, invariably shifting relevancies, and attracted by changing and moving targets A swarm has no top, no center; it is solely the direction of its current flight that casts some of the self-propelled swarm units into the position of “leaders” to be followed for the duration of a particular flight or a part of it, though hardly longer.