STUDIES IN WORDS

BY

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SECOND EDITION

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1967

PREFACE

THIS book is based on lectures given at Cambridge during the last few years and is primarily addressed to students. I have indeed hoped that others also might find it of interest but I must warn them what it is not. It is not an essay in the higher linguistics. The ultimate nature of language and the theory of meaning are not here my concern. The point of view is merely lexical and historical. My words are studied as an aid to more accurate reading and chosen for the light they throw on ideas and sentiments. The notes on some common types of semantic change given in the first chapter are a rough and ready attempt at practical guidance; if any deeper issues are raised by implication, this was not my intention.

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June 1959

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book has grown out of a practice which was at first my necessity and later my hobby; whether at last it has attained the dignity of a study, others must decide. In my young days when I had to take my pupils through Anglo-Saxon and Middle English texts neither they nor I could long be content to translate a word in the sense which its particular context demanded while leaving the different senses it bore in other places to be memorised, without explanation, as if they were wholly different words. Natural curiosity and mnemonic thrift drove us, as it drives others, to link them up and to see, where possible, how they could have radiated out from a central meaning. Once embarked, it was impossible not to be curious about the later senses of those which survived into Modern English. Margins and notebooks thus became steadily fuller. One saw increasingly that sixteenth- and even nineteenth-century texts needed such elucidation not very much more rarely, and in a more subtle way, than those of the eleventh or twelfth; for in the older books one knows what one does not understand but in the later one discovers, often after years of contented misreading, that one has been interpolating senses later than those the author intended. And all the while one seems to be learning not only about words. In the end the habit becomes second nature; the slightest semantic discomfort

in one's reading rouses one, like a terrier, to the game. No doubt I thus learned rather laboriously from my own reading some things that could have been learned more quickly from the *N.E.D.* But I would advise everyone to do the same so far—a serious qualification—as his time allows. One understands a word much better if one has met it alive, in its native habitat. So far as is possible our knowledge should be checked and supplemented, not derived, from the dictionary.

At the same time a prospective reader may reasonably ask what difference there will be, for him, between reading one of my chapters and looking up one of my words in the dictionary. The answer is that I offer both less and more. Less, because I do not even attempt to be exhaustive; as regards the greater words I am already too old to hope for that. I offer more, first, because I drive words of different languages abreast. I depart from classical English philology by having no concern with sounds, nor with derivations simply as such. I am concerned solely with the semantic relations of, say, *natura* and *nature*; the fact that one is 'derived' from the other is for my purpose unimportant. That is why *phusis* and *kind* come in with just as good a title as *natura*. Something will be said later about what I think can be gained from such a procedure. And secondly, I have been able to say more about the history of thought and sentiment which underlies the semantic biography of a word than would have been possible or proper in a dictionary. I have of course checked my results by the *N.E.D.* It has often given me the perfect example for which I had searched my own

reading in vain; often (*pereant qui ante nos!*) mortified me by anticipating the beautiful example I had already found for myself; and sometimes given what I thought, perhaps with foolish partiality, to be not so good an example as mine. In a few places, not without diffidence, I have ventured to dissent from it.

The readers I have principally in view are students. One of my aims is to facilitate, as regards certain words, a more accurate reading of old books; and therefore to encourage everyone to similar exploration of many other words. I am sometimes told that there are people who want a study of literature wholly free from philology; that is, from the love and knowledge of words. Perhaps no such people exist. If they do, they are either crying for the moon or else resolving on a lifetime of persistent and carefully guarded delusion. If we read an old poem with insufficient regard for change in the overtones, and even the dictionary meanings, of words since its date—if, in fact, we are content with whatever effect the words accidentally produce in our modern minds—then of course we do not read the poem the old writer intended. What we get may still be, in our opinion, a poem; but it will be our poem, not his. If we call this *tout court* 'reading' the old poet, we are deceiving ourselves. If we reject as 'mere philology' every attempt to restore for us his real poem, we are safeguarding the deceit. Of course any man is entitled to say he prefers the poems he makes for himself out of his mistranslations to the poems the writers intended. I have no quarrel with him. He need have none with me. Each to his taste.

And to avoid this, knowledge is necessary. Intelligence and sensibility by themselves are not enough. This is well illustrated by an example within my own experience. In the days of the old School Certificate we once set as a gobbet from *Julius Caesar*

> Is Brutus sick and is it physical
> To walk unbraced and suck up the humours
> Of the dank morning[1]

and one boy explained *physical* as 'sensible, sane; the opposite of "mental" or mad'. It would be crass to laugh at that boy's ignorance without also admiring his extreme cleverness. The ignorance is laughable because it could have been avoided. But if that ignorance had been inevitable—as similar ignorances often are when we are dealing with an ancient book—if so much linguistic history were lost that we did not and could not know the sense 'mad' for *mental* and the antithesis of *mental–physical* to be far later than Shakespeare's time, then his suggestion would deserve to be hailed as highly intelligent. We should indeed probably accept it, at least provisionally, as correct. For it makes excellent sense of the passage and also accounts for the meaning it gives to *physical* by a semantic process which—if we did not know that chronology ruled it out—we should regard as very possible.

So far from being secured against such errors, the highly intelligent and sensitive reader will, without knowledge, be most in danger of them. His mind bubbles over with

[1] II, i, 261.

possible meanings. He has ready to hand un-thought-of metaphors, highly individual shades of feeling, subtle associations, ambiguities—every manner of semantic gymnastics—which he can attribute to his author. Hence the difficulty of 'making sense' out of a strange phrase will seldom be for him insuperable. Where the duller reader simply does not understand, he misunderstands—triumphantly, brilliantly. But it is not enough to make sense. We want to find the sense the author intended. 'Brilliant' explanations of a passage often show that a clever, insufficiently informed man has found one more mare's nest. The wise reader, far from boasting an ingenuity which will find sense in what looks like nonsense, will not accept even the most slightly strained meaning until he is quite sure that the history of the word does not permit something far simpler. The smallest semantic discomfort rouses his suspicions. He notes the key word and watches for its recurrence in other texts. Often they will explain the whole puzzle.

By driving words from different languages abreast I have been able to bring out something which interests me far more than derivations. We find in the history, say, of *phusis*, *natura*, and *kind*, or again in that of *eleutherios*, *liberalis*, *free*, and *frank*, similar or even identical semantic operations being performed quite independently. The speakers who achieved them belonged to different stocks and lived in different countries at different periods, and they started with different linguistic tools. In an age when the linguistic analysts have made us afraid that our thought may be almost wholly conditioned by our speech this

seems to me encouraging. Apparently there is at least some independence. There is something, either in the structure of the mind or in the things it thinks about, which can produce the same results under very different conditions.

After hearing one chapter of this book when it was still a lecture, a man remarked to me 'You have made me afraid to say anything at all'. I know what he meant. Prolonged thought *about* the words which we ordinarily use to think *with* can produce a momentary aphasia. I think it is to be welcomed. It is well we should become aware of what we are doing when we speak, of the ancient, fragile, and (well used) immensely potent instruments that words are.

This implies that I have an idea of what is good and bad language. I have. Language is an instrument for communication. The language which can with the greatest ease make the finest and most numerous distinctions of meaning is the best. It is better to have *like* and *love* than to have *aimer* for both. It was better to have the older English distinction between 'I haven't got indigestion' (I am not suffering from it at the moment) and 'I don't have indigestion' (I am not a dyspeptic) than to level both, as America has now taught most Englishmen to do, under 'I don't have'.

In the following pages we shall see good words, or good senses of words, losing their edge or, more rarely, recovering it or getting a new edge that serves some different purpose. I have tried not to obtrude the moral, but I should be glad if I sent any reader away with a new

sense of responsibility to the language. It is unnecessary defeatism to believe that we can do nothing about it. Our conversation will have little effect; but if we get into print—perhaps especially if we are leader-writers, reviewers, or reporters—we can help to strengthen or weaken some disastrous vogue word; can encourage a good, and resist a bad, gallicism or Americanism. For many things the press prints today will be taken up by the great mass of speakers in a few years.

Verbicide, the murder of a word, happens in many ways. Inflation is one of the commonest; those who taught us to say *awfully* for 'very', *tremendous* for 'great', *sadism* for 'cruelty', and *unthinkable* for 'undesirable' were verbicides. Another way is verbiage, by which I here mean the use of a word as a promise to pay which is never going to be kept. The use of *significant* as if it were an absolute, and with no intention of ever telling us what the thing is significant of, is an example. So is *diametrically* when it is used merely to put *opposite* into the superlative. Men often commit verbicide because they want to snatch a word as a party banner, to appropriate its 'selling quality'. Verbicide was committed when we exchanged *Whig* and *Tory* for *Liberal* and *Conservative*. But the greatest cause of verbicide is the fact that most people are obviously far more anxious to express their approval and disapproval of things than to describe them. Hence the tendency of words to become less descriptive and more evaluative; then to become evaluative, while still retaining some hint of the sort of goodness or badness implied; and to end up by being purely evaluative—useless

synonyms for *good* or for *bad*. We shall see this happening to the word *villain* in a later chapter. *Rotten*, paradoxically has become so completely a synonym for 'bad' that we now have to say *bad* when we mean 'rotten'.

I am not suggesting that we can by an archaising purism repair any of the losses that have already occurred. It may not, however, be entirely useless to resolve that we ourselves will never commit verbicide. If modern critical usage seems to be initiating a process which might finally make *adolescent* and *contemporary* mere synonyms for *bad* and *good*—and stranger things have happened—we should banish them from our vocabulary. I am tempted to adapt the couplet we see in some parks—

> Let no one say, and say it to your shame,
> That there was meaning here before you came.

I will close this chapter with a 'statement', as the musicians say, of certain themes which will recur in those that follow.

I. THE EFFECTS OF RAMIFICATION

As everyone knows, words constantly take on new meanings. Since these do not necessarily, nor even usually, obliterate the old ones, we should picture this process not on the analogy of an insect undergoing metamorphoses but rather on that of a tree throwing out new branches, which themselves throw out subordinate branches; in fact, as ramification. The new branches sometimes overshadow and kill the old ones but by no means always. We shall again and again find the earliest senses

of a word flourishing for centuries despite a vast overgrowth of later senses which might have been expected to kill them.

The philologist's dream is to diagrammatise all the meanings of a word so as to have a perfect semantic tree of it; every twig traced to its branch, every branch traced back to the trunk. That this can seldom, if ever, be perfectly achieved does not matter much; all studies end in doubts. But there is apparently some real danger of forgetting that the overwhelming majority of those who use the word neither know nor care anything about the tree. And even those who do know something of it most often use the word without thinking about it. Just in the same way, all men use their muscles when they move but most men do not know or care what muscles they are using; and even anatomists, who do know, are not usually thinking of this during a game of tennis. When we use one word in many different senses we avail ourselves of the results produced by semantic ramification. We can do this successfully without being aware of them.

That is why I cannot agree with Professor Empson's suggestion[1] that when we say 'Use your sense, man!' we are implying that the intellectual effort demanded is as easy as the reception of a sense-impression—in other words that we are using *sense* (i.e. sense-perception) metaphorically. Particular objections will be found in a later chapter: the ramification which produced for the word *sense* the two meanings (gumption and sense-perception) is well over two thousand years old, and need not have

[1] *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951), p. 257.

had anything to do with metaphor. It is handed to the modern speaker 'on a plate'. And that is the general principle I am here concerned with. If we neglect the semantic history of a word we shall be in danger of attributing to ordinary speakers an individual semantic agility which in reality they neither have nor need. It is perfectly true that we hear very simple people daily using several different senses of one word with perfect accuracy —like a dancer in a complicated dance. But this is not because they understand either the relation between them or their history.

Each new speaker learns his native language chiefly by imitation, partly by those hurried scraps of amateur lexicography which his elders produce in answer to the frequent question 'What does that mean?' He does not at first—how should he?—distinguish between different senses of one word and different words. They all have to be learned in the same way. Memory and the faculty of imitation, not semantic gymnastics, enable him to speak about *sentences* in a Latin exercise and *sentences* of imprisonment, about a cardboard *box* and a *box* at the theatre. He does not even ask which are different words and which merely different senses. Nor, for the most part, do we. How many adults know whether *bows* of ships and *bows* taught by the dancing master—or *down* (a hill) and *down* (*deorsum*)—or a boys' *school* and a *school* of porpoises—are accidental homophones (like *neat* and *neat* or *arms* and *arms*) or products of ramification?

A child may, of course, be philologically minded. If so, it may construct imaginary semantic trees for itself. But

it does so to explain the usages it has already learned; the usage is not a result of the theory. As a child I—probably like many others—evolved the theory that a candle-stick was so called 'because it makes the candle *stick* up'. But that wasn't why I called it a candlestick. I called it a candlestick because everyone else did.

II. THE INSULATING POWER OF THE CONTEXT

It is this most important principle that enables speakers to give half a dozen different meanings to a single word with very little danger of confusion. If ambiguity (in Professor Empson's sense) were not balanced by this power, communication would become almost impossible. There is, I understand, a species of modern poetry which is so written that it cannot be fully received unless all the possible senses of words are operative in the reader's mind. Whether there was any such poetry before the present century—whether all old poetry thus read is misread—are questions we need not discuss here. What seems to me certain is that in ordinary language the sense of a word is governed by the context and this sense normally excludes all others from the mind. When we see the notice 'Wines and Spirits' we do not think about angels, devils, ghosts and fairies—nor about the 'spirits' of the older medical theory. When someone speaks about the Stations of the Cross we do not think about railway stations nor about our station in life.

The proof of this is that the sudden intrusion of any irrelevant sense—in other words the voluntary or involuntary pun—is funny. It is funny because it is un-

expected. There is a semantic explosion because the two meanings rush together from a great distance; one of them was not in our consciousness at all till that moment. If it had been, there would be no detonation. This comes out very clearly in those numerous stories which decorum forbids me to recall (in print); stories where some august person such as a headmistress or a bishop, on a platform, gravely uses a word in one sense, blissfully forgetful of some other and very unsuitable sense—producing a ludicrous indecency. It will usually be found that the audience, like the speaker, had till then quite forgotten it too. For the shouts of open, or the sibilations of suppressed, laughter do not usually begin at once but after several seconds. The obscene intruder, the uninvited semantic guest, has taken that time to come up from the depths where he lay asleep, off duty.

It is of course the insulating power of the context which enables old senses to persist, uncontaminated by newer ones. Thus *train* (of a dress) and *train* (on the railway), or *civil* (courteous) and *civil* (not military), or *magazine* (a store) and *magazine* (a periodical), do not interfere with one another because they are unlikely to occur in the same context. They live happily by keeping out of each other's way.

III. THE DANGEROUS SENSE

When a word has several meanings historical circumstances often make one of them dominant during a particular period. Thus *station* is now more likely to mean a railway-station than anything else; *evolution*, more likely

to bear its biological sense than any other. When I was a boy *estate* had as its dominant meaning 'land belonging to a large landowner', but the meaning 'land covered with small houses' is dominant now.

The dominant sense of any word lies uppermost in our minds. Wherever we meet the word, our natural impulse will be to give it that sense. When this operation results in nonsense, of course, we see our mistake and try over again. But if it makes tolerable sense our tendency is to go merrily on. We are often deceived. In an old author the word may mean something different. I call such senses dangerous senses because they lure us into misreadings. in examining a word I shall often have to distinguish one of its meanings as its *dangerous sense*, and I shall symbolise this by writing the word (in italics) with the letters *d.s.* after it.

Thus, since 'safety' is the *dangerous sense* of the word *security* the symbol *security* (*d.s.*) would stand for '*security* in the sense of safety'. Similarly *philosophy* (*d.s.*) means '*philosophy* in the sense of metaphysics, epistemology, logic, etc. as distinct from the natural sciences'—the sense we are in danger of reading into it when old writers actually mean by it just science. *Fellow* (*d.s.*) would be '*fellow* used as a contemptuous vocative'.

When the *dangerous sense* is a sense which did not exist at all in the age when our author wrote, it is less dangerous. Moderate, and moderately increasing, scholarship will guard us against it. But often the situation is more delicate. What is now the *dangerous sense* may have existed then but it may not yet have been at all dominant.

It may possibly be the sense the old author really intended, but this is not nearly so probable as our own usage leads us to suppose. Our task is not the comparatively simple one of excluding an unqualified candidate; we have to conquer our undue predilection for one of those who are qualified.

IV. THE WORD'S MEANING AND THE SPEAKER'S MEANING

I use *speaker* throughout to cover *writer* as well.

The distinction between what a word means and what a speaker means by a word appears in its crudest form, of course, when a foreigner or imperfectly educated native is actually mistaken as to standard usage and commits a malapropism; using *deprecate*, say, to mean 'depreciate', or *disinterested* to mean 'bored', or *scarify* to mean 'scare'. But this is not what I have in mind. Speaker's meaning and word's meaning may be distinguishable where there is no lexical mistake involved.

'When I spoke of supper after the theatre, I meant by *supper* a biscuit and a cup of cocoa. But my friend meant by *supper* something like a cold bird and a bottle of wine.' In this situation both parties might well have agreed on the lexical (or 'dictionary') meaning of supper; perhaps 'a supernumerary meal which, if taken at all, is the last meal before bed'. In another way they 'meant' different things by it. The use of the verb *mean* both for the word's force and for the speaker's intention can doubtless be criticised, and distinctions could be drawn. But I am not here embarking on 'the meaning of meaning' nor high linguistics. That will not be necessary. To use *mean* thus

without further distinction is good English and will serve our turn.

For there is only one reason why the difference between the speaker's and the word's meaning concerns us. It is this. If some speaker's meaning becomes very common it will in the end establish itself as one of the word's meanings; this is one of the ways in which semantic ramification comes about.

For thousands of Englishmen today the word *furniture* has only one sense—a (not very easily definable) class of domestic movables. And doubtless many people, if they should read Berkeley's 'all the choir of heaven and furniture of earth', would take this use of *furniture* to be a metaphorical application of the sense they know—that which is to earth as tables and chairs and so forth are to a house. Even those who know the larger meaning of the word (whatever 'furnishes' in the sense of stocking, equipping, or replenishing) would certainly admit 'domestic movables' as one of its senses. It would in fact, by my system, be *furniture* (*d.s.*). But it must have become one of the word's meanings by being a very common speaker's meaning. Men who said 'my furniture' were often in fact, within that context, referring to their domestic movables. The word did not yet mean that; *they* meant it. When I say 'Take away this rubbish' I usually 'mean' these piles of old newspapers, magazines, and Christmas cards. That is not what the word *rubbish* means. But if a sufficiently large number of people shared my distaste for that sort of litter, and applied the word *rubbish* to it often enough, the word might come to have

this as one of its senses. So with *furniture*, which, from being a speaker's meaning, has established itself so firmly as one of the word's meanings that it has ousted all the others in popular speech.

Estate is acquiring the dominant sense 'building estate' in our own time by just the same process. *Morality* and *immorality* have in the same way come to mean 'chastity' and 'lechery'. These are the forms of virtue and vice which both the prudish and the prurient most want to talk about. And since most of us have a dash of prudery or prurience and many among us of both, we may say simply 'which most people most want to talk about'. The speaker's meaning of 'all that immorality' was so often 'all that lechery' that lechery becomes one of the word's meanings; indeed, outside highly educated circles, its only meaning.

This is one of the most troublesome phenomena for the historian of a word. If you want to know when 'domestic movables' became one of the meanings (word's meanings) of *furniture*, it is no good just finding the earliest example where the things referred to as *furniture* in that context obviously were *in fact* domestic movables. The usage might record merely a speaker's meaning. You cannot infer a 'word's meaning' any more than you can infer from my most habitual use of *rubbish* that *rubbish* (lexically) had 'old newspapers etc.' as one of its senses in 1958. An old writer may use the word *gentle* of conduct which was clearly in fact what we call gentle (mild, soft, not severe); or may use *wit* to describe what was clearly in fact *wit* (*d.s.*); or *cattle* referring to what we call 'cattle'. But none

of these prove the existence of the modern word's meaning at that date. They might all be speaker's meanings.

V. TACTICAL DEFINITIONS

Most of us who are interested in such things soon learn that if you want to discover how a man pronounces a word it is no use asking him. Many people will produce in reply the pronunciation which their snobbery or anti-snobbery makes them think the most desirable. Honest and self-critical people will often be reduced to saying, 'Well, now you ask me, I don't really know'. Anyway, with the best will in the world, it is extraordinarily difficult to sound a word—thus produced cold and without context for inspection—exactly as one would sound it in real conversation. The proper method is quite different. You must stealthily guide the talk into subjects which will force him to use the word you are chasing. You will then hear his real pronunciation; the one he uses when he is off his guard, the one he doesn't know he uses.

It is with meanings something the same. In determining what a word meant at any period in the past we may get some help from the dictionaries of that period; especially from bi-lingual dictionaries. These are the most trustworthy because their purpose was usually humble and practical; the writer really wants to give you the nearest English equivalent of the Latin or Italian word. A purely English dictionary is more likely to be influenced by the lexicographer's ideas of how words ought to be used; therefore worse evidence of how they actually were used.

But when we leave the dictionaries we must view all definitions with grave distrust. It is the greatest simplicity in the world to suppose that when, say, Dryden defines *wit* or Arnold defines *poetry*, we can use their definition as evidence of what the word really meant when they wrote. The fact that they define it at all is itself a ground for scepticism. Unless we are writing a dictionary, or a text-book of some technical subject, we define our words only because we are in some measure departing from their real current sense. Otherwise there would be no purpose in doing so. This is especially true of negative definitions. Statements that honour, or freedom, or humour, or wealth, 'does not mean' this or that are proof that it was beginning to mean, or even had long meant, precisely this or that. We tell our pupils that *deprecate* does not mean *depreciate* or that *immorality* does not mean simply *lechery* because these words are beginning to mean just those things. We are in fact resisting the growth of a new sense. We may be quite right to do so, for it may be one that will make English a less useful means of communication. But we should not be resisting it unless it had already appeared. We do not warn our pupils that *coalbox* does not mean a hippopotamus.

The chapter devoted to the word *wit* will illustrate this. We shall find old critics giving definitions of it which are contradicted not only by other evidence but out of the critics' own mouths. Off their guard they can be caught using it in the very sense their definition was contrived to exclude. A student who should read the critical debate of the seventeenth century on wit under the impression that

what the critics say they mean by *wit* is always, or often, what they really mean by *wit* would end in total bewilderment. He must understand that such definitions are purely tactical. They are attempts to appropriate for one side, and to deny to the other, a potent word. You can see the same 'war of positions' going on today. A certain type of writer begins 'The essence of poetry is' or 'All vulgarity may be defined as', and then produces a definition which no one ever thought of since the world began, which conforms to no one's actual usage, and which he himself will probably have forgotten by the end of the month. The phenomenon ceases to be puzzling only when we realise that it is a tactical definition. The pretty word has to be narrowed *ad hoc* so as to exclude something he dislikes. The ugly word has to be extended *ad hoc*, or more probably *ad hunc*, so as to bespatter some enemy. Nineteenth-century definitions of the word *gentleman* are also tactical.

I do not of course say (for I don't know) that such definitions cannot have uses of their own. But that of giving information about the actual meaning of a word is not one of them.

VI. THE METHODOLOGICAL IDIOM

Suppose that a conversation which we overhear contains the remark 'I'm afraid Jones's psychology will be his undoing'. Most of us, I suppose, would take this to mean that the state of his *psyche* will endanger his success and happiness. But suppose we then discover that the conversation is between two examiners; that Jones is a candidate

in the examination; and that psychology is one of the three subjects in which he is being examined. The remark might now bear a different meaning—that Jones, having done fairly well on the other two subjects, had ruined his chances of the prize by his bad work on psychology. In other words, *psychology* is the name both of a science and of the things (or even one specimen of the things) which that science studies.

This transference I call the methodological idiom. It may produce ambiguity: 'Freud's psychology' might mean either a subject of which we have all heard much or one which, some would say, has been examined too little. But 'my anatomy' would almost certainly mean those facts about me which an anatomist would speak of as an expert, rather than my theories or proficiency in his science. It would be difficult to explain the word *physical* if one ignored the methodological idiom. When Milton says in *The Reason of Church Government*[1] that the Psalms are better than Pindar and Callimachus 'not in their divine argument alone but in the very critical art of composition', *critical art* must surely, by this idiom, mean the art that critics expound; those who practice it are the poets. The curious expression 'a scientific fact' may originally have meant a fact that is literally scientific or 'science-making'—a key fact whose discovery makes possible a wide range of further discoveries. But most modern users, I believe, mean merely 'a fact of the sort that scientists know about'. The methodological idiom, applied to *history*, has produced some confusion. It is

[1] Preface to Book II.

often hard to be sure whether the word means the past events themselves as they really were or the study that tries to discover and understand them.

VII. MORALISATION OF STATUS-WORDS

Words which originally referred to a person's rank—to legal, social, or economic status and the qualifications of birth which have often been attached to these—have a tendency to become words which assign a type of character and behaviour. Those implying superior status can become terms of praise; those implying inferior status, terms of disapproval. *Chivalrous*, *courteous*, *frank*, *generous*, *gentle*, *liberal*, and *noble* are examples of the first; *ignoble*, *villain*, and *vulgar*, of the second.

Sometimes there are complexities. All my life the epithet *bourgeois* has been, in many contexts, a term of contempt, but not for the same reason. When I was a boy —a *bourgeois* boy—it was applied to my social class by the class above it; *bourgeois* meant 'not aristocratic, therefore vulgar'. When I was in my twenties this changed. My class was now vilified by the class below it; *bourgeois* began to mean 'not proletarian, therefore parasitic, reactionary'. Thus it has always been a reproach to assign a man to that class which has provided the world with nearly all its divines, poets, philosophers, scientists, musicians, painters, doctors, architects, and administrators. When the *bourgeoisie* is despised for not being proletarian we get an exception to the general principle stated above. The name of the higher status implies the worse character and behaviour. This I take to be the peculiar, and transi-

tory, result of a revolutionary situation. The earlier usage —*bourgeois* as 'not aristocratic'—is the normal linguistic phenomenon.

It will be diagnosed by many as a symptom of the inveterate snobbery of the human race; and certainly the implications of language are hardly ever egalitarian. But that is not the whole story. Two other factors come in. One is optimism; men's belief, or at least hope, that their social betters will be personally better as well. The other is far more important. A word like *nobility* begins to take on its social-ethical meaning when it refers not simply to a man's status but to the manners and character which are thought to be appropriate to that status. But the mind cannot long consider those manners and that character without being forced on the reflection that they are sometimes lacking in those who are noble by status and sometimes present in those who are not. Thus from the very first the social-ethical meaning, merely by existing, is bound to separate itself from the status-meaning. Accordingly, from Boethius down, it becomes a commonplace of European literature that the true nobility is within, that *villanie*, not status, makes the villain, that there are 'ungentle gentles' and that 'gentle is as gentle does'. The linguistic phenomenon we are considering is therefore quite as much an escape from, as an assertion of, that pride above and servility below which, in my opinion, should be called snobbery. The behaviour ideally, or optimistically, attributed to an aristocracy provides a paradigm. It becomes obvious that, as regards many aristocrats, this is an unrealised ideal. But the

paradigm remains; anyone, even the bad aristocrat himself, may attempt to conform to it. A new ethical idea has come into power.

I think its power has been greatest at that frontier where the aristocrats and the middle class meet. The court takes from the class below it talented individuals—like Chaucer, say—as its entertainers and assistants. We ordinarily think of Chaucer learning his courtesy at court. And no doubt he did; its manners were more graceful than those of his own family. But can we doubt that he also taught courtesy there? By expecting to find realised at court the paradigm of courtesy and nobility, by writing his poetry on the assumption that it was realised, such a man offers a critique—and an unconscious critique—of the court's actual *ethos*, which no one can resent. It is not flattery, but it flatters. As they say a woman becomes more beautiful when she is loved, a nobility by status will become more 'noble' under such treatment. Thus the Horaces, Chaucers, Racines, or Spensers substantially ennoble their patrons. But also, through them, many graces pass down from the aristocracy into the middle class. This two-way traffic generates a culture-group comprising the choicest members of two groups that differ in status. If this is snobbery, we must reckon snobbery among the greatest nurseries of civilisation. Without it, would there ever have been anything but wealth and power above and sycophancy or envy below?

2

NATURE

[WITH *PHUSIS, KIND, PHYSICAL* ETC.]

In this chapter we shall have to consider Greek *phusis*, Latin *natura* (with its derivatives), and English *kind*. Each of the three has a great number of senses, and two of these senses are common to all of them. One appears to have been reached independently by all three words. The other was at first peculiar to *phusis* and was thence transferred to *natura*, and through *natura* to *kind*. Thus it is *phusis* that complicates the whole story, and that story will therefore be most easily told if, in defiance of chronology, we begin with some account of the Latin and English words in their un-hellenised condition, and only after that turn to the Greek.

I. 'NATURA'

By far the commonest native meaning of *natura* is something like sort, kind, quality, or character. When you ask, in our modern idiom, what something 'is like', you are asking for its *natura*. When you want to tell a man the *natura* of anything you describe the thing. In nineteenth-century English the word 'description' itself ('I do not associate with persons of that description') is often an exact synonym for *natura*. Caesar sent scouts to find out *qualis esset natura montis*, what the hill was like, what sort of a hill it was.[1] Quintilian speaks of a man *ingenii naturâ*

[1] *De Bello Gallico* I, 21.

praestantem (XII, 1), outstanding by the quality of his mind. Cicero's title *De Natura Deorum* could be translated 'What the gods are like'.

It will be noticed that whereas Caesar wanted to know the (doubtless unique) character of a particular hill, Cicero wrote about the common character of all gods, and Horace[1] can speak of *humana natura*, the character common to all men. There is a logical distinction here, but linguistically the two usages are the same. A class or species has a *natura*, and so has a particular or an individual.

It is not always possible, or necessary, to decide whether the idea of the species or that of the particular is uppermost. Cicero says that '*omnis natura* strives to preserve itself'.[2] It makes little difference whether we render *omnis natura* 'every class or species' or 'every kind (of thing)', hence 'a thing of whatever kind', and hence almost 'everything'.

Those who wish to go further back will notice that *natura* shares a common base with *nasci* (to be born); with the noun *natus* (birth); with *natio* (not only a race or nation but the name of the birth-goddess); or even that *natura* itself can mean the sexual organs—a sense formerly born by English *nature*, but apparently restricted to the female. It is risky to try to build precise semantic bridges, but there is obviously some idea of a thing's *natura* as its original or 'innate' character.

If we look forward, the road is clear. This sense of *natura*, though soon to be threatened by vast semantic growths of another origin, has shown astonishing persis-

[1] *Ars Poetica*, 353. [2] *De Finibus* IV, 7.

tence and is still as current a sense as any other for English *nature*. Every day we speak about 'the nature of the case' (or of the soil, the animal, the problem).

II. 'KIND'

From the earliest period of our language this has been both a noun (Anglo-Saxon *gecynd* and *cynd*) and an adjective (*gecynde* and *cynde*).

The meanings of the noun are very close to those of *natura*. The Anglo-Saxon word can mean what its modern descendant means, a 'kind' or sort. Thus *wæstma gecynde* are 'kinds' of fruit, or the rods which had miraculously been turned into gold in Ælfric's homily on the *Assumption of St John* can be presently turned back to their former *gecynde*. The meaning 'species', though now archaic, is still familiar to readers of A.V.: 'every winged fowl after his kind'.[1]

The *gecyndlimu* or 'kind-limbs' are certainly the genitals. When the author of the Anglo-Saxon *Phoenix* says (l. 355) that God only knows that bird's *gecynde* he certainly means its sex. But whether this is the author's meaning or the word's meaning may be doubted. He may use *gecynde* for 'sex' only because sex is a kind of kind, nameless and definable only by the context; just as Ælfric in his *Grammar* uses it for 'gender' when he glosses *neutrum* as 'neither *cynd*'. We easily forget how peculiar Latin is in having a special name for this kind of kind; Greek has to make do with *genos*, and German with *Geschlecht*.

Kind also means 'progeny', 'offspring'. In *Piers Plow-*

[1] Gen. i. 21.

man the beasts all 'follow reason', show moderation, 'in etying, in drynking, in gendrynge of kynde',[1] and there is a curse on all married couples who produce no *kynde*.[2] Closely linked to this is the larger sense of 'family' or 'stock'; a whole kindred is a *kind*, as when Jacob in the Middle English *Genesis and Exodus* left Canaan with many a man of his *kinde* (ll. 239 f.). 'Gentle kind' and 'noble stock' are almost certainly a doublet of synonyms (like the Prayer Book's 'acknowledge and confess') when Shakespeare writes 'came of a gentle kind and noble stock'.[3]

Thus the noun, though not historically connected with *natura* (unless you go back very far indeed), has a tolerably similar semantic area and presents no very serious difficulties. The adjective (*gecynde*, *cynde*, *cyndelic*, *kind* and *kindly*) has a more complicated repertory of meanings. It is not possible to reconstruct the bridges between them, still less to be sure in which direction the traffic crossed them. Indeed 'bridges' are probably too mechanical an image and the mutual influences between meaning and meaning are as subtle and reciprocal as those between a group of friends.

1. The adjective means 'hereditary'—the hereditary being, of course, what comes to one in virtue of one's birth or family (or *kind*). Thus we are told in *Beowulf* (l. 2197) that the hero and Hygelac both had *gecynde* land, hereditary estates, in their native country. Similarly, a *kind* or *kindly* lord is one who inherits his lordship. In the Anglo-Saxon *Metres of Boethius* the Goths are said to have had two *gecynde* kings.[4] In Malory Arthur tells Launcelot

[1] C. XIV, 144. [2] C. XIX, 223. [3] *Pericles* v, i, 68.
[4] *Alfred's Boethius*, ed. W. J. Sedgefield (1899), p. 151.

and Bors to go and look after their dead fathers' lands 'and cause youre lyege men to know you as for their kynde lord'.[1] Presumably by an extension from this, any thoroughly legitimate lord, as distinct from a conqueror or usurper, may be 'kindly'. 'The Red City and all that be therein will take you for their kindly lord.'[2]

It is interesting to notice that the derivatives, both French and English, of Latin *naturalis* develop the same sense. In Villehardouin's *Conqueste de Constantinople* the crusaders present Alexius to the Byzantines as *vostre seignor naturel*; in Sidney we find 'your naturall prince';[3] and in Shakespeare 'his natural king'.[4] It is most improbable that *naturalis* could have reached this sense by a native Latin development. But those who knew the noun *kind*, or its Frankish equivalent, as their word for Latin *natura*, might come, when they were writing Latin, to think that *naturalis* would do for the adjective *kind*.

2. Any behaviour or state which shows a thing's, or a person's, kind or nature—which is characteristic of it, typical, normal, and therefore to be expected—may be called 'kind'. We are told that on a particular occasion Beowulf behaved with valour, as was *gecynde* to him (l. 2696)—as was 'just like him'. Malory leaves two lovers in a bed 'clipping and kissing as was kindly thing'—as of course they would.[5] And here again the sense of the Latin derivative may have been influenced by that of the Germanic word. *Naturaliter* did not mean 'of course', as

[1] Vinaver, p. 245, l. 17. Not in Caxton.
[2] Vinaver, p. 714, l. 5. Not in Caxton.
[3] *Arcadia* II, xxvi, 4.
[4] *Hen. VI*, Pt 3, I, i, 82.
[5] XI, viii. Vinaver, pp. 804–5.

'naturally' and *naturellement* often do. This sense is so strangely remote from other senses of 'naturally' that we can say 'As my hostess had cooked it herself, I *naturally pretended* to like it'. But it becomes easy enough when the original equivalence of *gecynd* and *natura* has worked for centuries towards the possible infection of almost any sense of one by almost any sense of the other.

From the idea of the characteristic or normal to that of the proper, the fitting, the desirable, is an easy transition. Indeed the sense-development of the word *proper* itself, from that which belongs to a thing or makes part of its definition to that which ought to be found in it, is a striking instance. When Philautus says 'so unkinde a yeare it hath beene . . . that we felt the heate of the Summer before we coulde discerne the temperature of the Spring',[1] 'unusual' would cover all he need mean by *unkinde*, though one may suspect that some complaint of unfitness or unsuitability goes with it. When Criseyde asks how any plant or living creature can last without 'his kinde noriture',[2] it is impossible to draw any distinction between an organism's characteristic or normal, and its suitable or appropriate, food. But the value judgement is clear, and the sense 'fitting' or 'proper' is certain when Malory, enumerating the knights who tried to heal Sir Urre, says 'we must begin at King Arthur, as is kindly to begin at him that was the most man of worship'.[3]

3. Sometimes the adjective has a range of meaning

[1] *Euphues and his England*, ed. Arber (1919), p. 465.
[2] Chaucer, *Troilus and Crysyde*, IV, 768.
[3] XIX, x. Vinaver, p. 1147, l. 3, *was* for *is*.

very like that of *pius* in classical Latin; somewhere between 'dutiful' and 'affectionate'. The man who is *pius* or 'kind' (in this sense) is one who does not good offices in general, but good offices to which close kinship or some other personal relationship binds him. When Sidney speaks of 'the Paphlagonian unkinde king and his kind son'[1] he means that the father was a very bad (unfatherly) father and the son a very good (filial) son. Here again we shall find the derivative of *natura* taking on the sense of the Germanic words, so that *unnatural* and *natural* mean 'lacking (or having) due family affection', and *nature* itself can mean *pietas*. Both usages come together when William Bulleyn writes 'Parents are more natural to their children then children to their fathers and mothers. Nature doth descend but not ascend.'[2] The Latin and English words are used as a doublet by Shakespeare: 'A brother in his love towards her ever most kind and natural.'[3] But the family (or *kind*), though the usual, is not the only ground of the special obligation which 'kindness' fulfils. Ingratitude is also 'unkindness'. Sloth, in *Piers Plowman*, confesses he is 'unkynde ageyns courtesye';[4] do him a good turn and he will not respond.

4. The next meaning in our catalogue is closely parallel to that of Latin *generosus*. If *genus* is a stock or lineage, *generosus* ought in logic to mean 'pertaining to, or having, a lineage'. But in that sense it would be a useless word and to call a man *generosus* would be to say nothing; for every

[1] *Arcadia* II, 10, Rubric.
[2] *Dialogue Against the Fever Pestilence* (1564).
[3] *Measure for Measure* III, i, 225.
[4] C. VIII, 43.

man has a lineage of some sort. In fact, *generosus* means well-born, noble, having a good lineage. Similarly when the Germans call a man *geboren* they mean *hoch-geboren*, well or nobly born. In just the same way the adjective *kind* means not 'having a family or kind' but 'noble'. In all three languages one can imagine different routes by which this sense would be reached. When a man advertises his shop as 'the shop for quality', he ignores the fact that badness is just as much a quality as goodness; by 'quality' he means 'good quality'. By a similar ellipsis 'a man of family' means, or used to mean, 'a man of good family'. That is one way in which *generosus* and *kind* could come to mean not merely 'familial' but 'of a good (noble) family'. Or it might be that certain people were deemed, by earlier societies, to have 'no family' in a far more nearly literal sense. The slave, the beggar, the stranger belong to none of the groups which we have been taught, in this settlement, to call families. No doubt (if you come to think of it) they must, in physical fact, have had parents and even grandparents. But not ones we know. They may not even know them themselves. If you ask of which family they come—are they Erlings or Birmings or Wolfings?—the answer is 'none'. They are outside the organisation we know, as animals are outside it.

By whatever process, *kind*, then, comes to mean 'noble' or 'gentle': thus in *Genesis and Exodus* (l. 1452) we have 'begotten of kinde blood'. As we should expect —did not our ancestors speak of 'noble' and 'base' metals?—this can be extended beyond the human sphere, so that one Hales (*c.* 1656) talks of grafting 'apples and

kind fruit upon thorns'. It is possibly along this branch of meaning that we reach Cleopatra's 'kindly creatures, turn all to serpents'[1]—let all the nobler or gentler creatures turn into those we most abhor. The passage in Malory where Percivale helps a lion in its fight against a snake because it is 'the more naturall beast of the two' is curious.[2] If 'more naturall' means nobler, superior in the supposed social hierarchy of beasts, this will be another instance of the Latin derivative's semantic infection by the corresponding Germanic word.

Instances of the purely social meaning for *kinde* are not plentiful. More often (like 'noble' itself) it has a vaguely eulogistic sense. Hence 'kind jeweler' in *Pearl* (l. 276), or 'kinde caroles' in *Gawain* (l. 473).

5. The meanings 'suitable', *pius*, and 'noble'—and especially the last, as the parallel development of *gentle* shows—may all have played a part in producing that of 'exorable, compassionate, beneficent—the opposite of cruel'. 'Each Christian man be kinde to other', says Langland,[3] meaning, I think, exactly what we should mean now. This is the *dangerous sense* of the word *kind*. We may sometimes read it into an old text where it was not intended. In Chaucer's 'He was a gentil harlot and a kinde'[4] the modern meaning for both adjectives is probable, but not, I think, certain. In Herbert's 'I the unkinde, ungratefull' (from *Love*) the modern meaning would be disastrous; the idea of general beneficence from man to God borders on the absurd. Herbert is classing himself

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra* II, v, 78.
[2] XIV, vi. Vinaver, p. 912, l. 25.
[3] A. XI, 243.
[4] *Canterbury Tales*, A. 647.

with 'unkind mothers' and 'unnatural children' as one who, with gross insensibility, makes no response to the arch-natural appeal of the tenderest and closest personal relation that can be imagined; one who is loved in vain.

The peculiar erotic use of the word *kind* is not a special sense but a special application of the sense 'beneficent or exorable'—especially the latter. The woman who yields to your suit is exorable, therefore *kind*. Euphemism and gallantry, not always without a touch of irony, probably lie behind this. It must not be hinted that the lady has any passions or senses, and so her favours must be attributed as in the medieval tradition, to mercy, *pite*, or *ore*. Hence Collins writes

> fair Circassia where, to love inclin'd,
> Each swain was bless'd for every maid was kind.[1]

Elsewhere the euphemism almost ceases to be a euphemism and *kindness* can become a name for (a woman's) violent sexual passion; so that Dryden, in a startling phrase, speaks of Roman ladies whispering Greek endearments to their lovers 'in the fury of their kindness'.[2]

III. PHUSIS

(G)*nasci* and *kind* have a common root, if you go far enough back. *Phusis* has quite a different origin. Its representatives, or what seem to be its representatives, in various Indo-Germanic languages suggest two main branches of meaning; the one, something like 'inhabit,

[1] *Persian Eclogues* IV, 1.
[2] *Dramatic Poesy*. *Essays*, ed. Ker, vol. I, p. 54.

live (at), dwell, remain, be' (at a place or in a condition); the other, 'to grow (transitively, as one "grows" cucumbers or a beard, and intransitively as beards and cucumbers grow), to become'. The latter branch is well represented by the Greek verb *phuein*. Dionysus grows (*phuei*) the vine for mortals;[1] a father begets (*phuei*) a son;[2] 'not to have been born (*phunai*) has no fellow', says Sophocles.[3]

The noun *phusis* can hardly mean anything except 'beginning, coming-to-be' when Empedocles says 'there is neither a *phusis* nor an end of all mortal things'.[4] On the other hand, it much more often means, like *natura* or *kind*, sort or character or 'description'. 'A horrid *phusis* of mind',[5] 'the *phusis* of the Egyptian country',[6] 'the philosophic *phusis*',[7] are typical. The connection between this and the meaning of the verb *phuein* is not obvious, though as usual 'bridges' can be devised. Aristotle is trying his hand at one in his famous definition; 'whatever each thing is like (*hoion hekaston esti*) when its process of coming-to-be is complete, that we call the *phusis* of each thing'.[8] On this view a thing's *phusis* would be what it *grows* into at maturity.[9] This explanation does not seem to me at all improbable, but Aristotle's statement is no evidence for it, and Sir David Ross thinks it philologically wrong. Like all philosophers, Aristotle gives words the definitions which will be most useful for his own purpose

[1] Euripides, *Bacchae*, 651.
[2] Euripides, *Helena*, 87.
[3] *Oed. Col.* 1222.
[4] *Fragment* 8.
[5] Euripides, *Medea*, 103.
[6] Herodotus II, 5.
[7] Plato, *Republic*, 410 e.
[8] *Politics*, 1252 b.
[9] Cf. *Metaphysics*, 1014 b.

and the history of his own language is one of the few subjects in which he was not a distinguished pioneer.

But already, before Aristotle wrote, *phusis* had taken on, in addition to the meaning 'sort', a new and quite astonishing sense. The pre-Socratic Greek philosophers had had the idea of taking all the things they knew or believed in—gods, men, animals, plants, minerals, what you will—and impounding them under a single name; in fact, of regarding Everything as a thing, turning this amorphous and heterogeneous collection into an object or pseudo-object. And for some reason the name they chose for it was *phusis*. Thus in the late sixth or early fifth century we have the great philosophical poem of Parmenides, whose title is everywhere given as *About Phusis*. In the fifth century we have that of Empedocles *About the Phusis tôn ontôn* (the *Phusis* of the things that are).

Why they chose the name *phusis* is a question to which I can give no confident answer.

We have already noticed that in one of the fragments of Empedocles the word appears to mean 'a beginning'. This at first sounds hopeful; a work on 'everything' might possibly be entitled 'About the Beginning' or 'About Becoming'. But not, unfortunately, a work of Empedocles. For in that very fragment he is denying that there are any beginnings, and we know that his whole system excluded them. Growth and change, and every sort of becoming, he regarded as an illusion. Whatever others might do, he of all men could not write a poem about *beginning*.

Another hypothesis would be that *phusis* sometimes meant for him 'being'. We have seen that words from the same root can mean something like that in other Indo-Germanic languages. And from what we know about the behaviour of language in general we cannot deny the possibility that this sense, protected from the others by the insulating power of the context, might have occurred, and even lasted for centuries, in Greek. The real difficulty is that it has left no trace. We are inventing, to explain one difficulty, a usage for which we have not a shred of evidence.

A third hypothesis would begin from noticing that Parmenides' title alone is troublesome. We could explain the Empedoclean 'About the *phusis* of the things that are' and the Lucretian *De Rerum Natura*. Both could mean 'What things are like', and both would be simply two more instances of *phusis* and *natura* in the sense 'character, sort'. If we then assumed that *phusis* in the title of Parmenides' poem had originally been followed by a genitive (of things, of all things, of all), the story would become perfectly clear. Men begin by asking what this or that thing is like, asking for its *phusis*. They then get the idea of asking what 'everything' or 'the whole show' is like. The answer will give the *phusis* of everything. By an ellipse, the qualifying genitive then comes to be omitted, and the word which originally meant 'sort', in certain contexts, and protected by those contexts, comes to mean 'everything' or the universe. All this, I believe, could have happened; I am not claiming to know that it did.

However it came about, the amazing leap was made.

A comparatively small number of speculative Greeks invented *Nature*—Nature with a capital, *nature* (*d.s.*) or *nature* in the dangerous sense, for of all the senses of all the words treated in these pages this is surely the most dangerous, the one we are readiest to intrude where it is not required. From *phusis* this meaning passed to *natura* and from *natura* to *kind*. All three become names for what in China (I am told) is called 'the ten thousand things'.

Linguistically *nature* (*d.s.*) is more important for the slightly different senses which it led into than for any great use which was made of it in its purity. *Nature* (*d.s.*), if taken strictly, has no opposite. When we say that any particular thing is part of *nature* (*d.s.*), we know no more about it than before. 'Everything' is a subject on which there is not much to be said. Perhaps the chief use of *nature* (*d.s.*) in its purity is as the grammatical subject for expressions of optimism or pessimism: it is in that way rather like the word *life*.

But when *nature* (*d.s.*) loses its purity, when it is used in a curtailed or 'demoted' sense, it becomes important.

Parmenides and Empedocles had thought that they were giving, in principle, an account of everything. Later thinkers denied this; not in the sense that they wanted to add particular items here and there, but in the sense that they believed in realities of a quite different order from any that their predecessors took account of. They expressed this not in the form '*phusis* contains more than our ancestors supposed', but in the form (explicitly or implicitly), 'there is something else besides *phusis*'. The

moment you say this, *phusis* is being used in what I call its demoted sense. For it had meant 'everything' and you are now saying there is something in addition to it. You are in fact using *phusis* to mean 'all the sort of things which our predecessors believed to be the only things'. You are also executing a movement of thought which would have been very much more difficult if those predecessors had not already impounded all those things in a single noun and, in fact, made the mere aggregate into what seemed to be an object with a determinate character of its own. Once that had been done it was possible, and convenient, to use the word *phusis* for that object, now no longer equated with everything. The 'demoted *d.s.*' presupposes and profits by, the pure *d.s.* By (so to speak) inventing Nature the old thinkers had made possible, or at least facilitated, the question whether there is anything else.

There were three principal movements towards demotion.

1. *The Platonic.* In Platonism, as everyone knows, the whole perceptible universe in space and time is an imitation, and product, of something different: the imperceptible, timeless, archetypal forms. This product or imitation, since it contains all the things which the older writers include in *phusis*, easily comes to be itself called *phusis*; as when Plotinus says that the arts imitate, not sensible objects, but those principles (*logoi*) from which *phusis* itself proceeds.[1] It is a demoted *phusis* because, far from being all that is, it is far less real and valuable than the realm of forms.

[1] *Enneads* v, viii, 1; some editions xxviii, 1.

2. *The Aristotelian.* Aristotle criticised thinkers like Parmenides because 'they never conceived of anything other than the substance of things perceptible by the senses'.[1] *Phusis* he defines as that which has in itself a principle of change. It is the subject-matter of natural (*phusike*) philosophy. (This is illuminating. We are getting to the age of universities and *phusis* (*d.s.*) *demoted* can be defined as the 'subject' of a particular discipline. Soon, in a new sense, everyone will 'know what *phusis* is': it is what so-and-so lectures on. The methodological idiom thus gets to work.) But there are two things outside *phusis.* First, things which are unchangeable, but cannot exist 'on their own'. These are the subject-matter of mathematics. Secondly, there is one thing which is unchangeable and does exist on its own. This is God, the unmoved mover; and he is studied by a third discipline.[2] On him 'the sky and all *phusis* depend';[3] words reproduced by Dante in *Paradiso* XXVIII, 41.

3. *The Christian.* Christianity involves a God as transcendent as Aristotle's, but adds (this was what it inherited from Judaism and could also have inherited from Plato's *Timaeus*) the conception that this God is the Creator of *phusis. Nature* (*d.s.*) *demoted* is now both distinct from God and also related to him as artifact to artist, or as servant to master; so that God in Tasso has *natura* under his feet.[4]

In the Middle Ages a still further demotion or restriction occurred, by which *nature* no longer covered the

[1] *De Caelo* III, 278 b.
[2] *Metaphysics,* 1064 a. Everyman trans. p. 156.
[3] *Ibid.* 1072 b. Trans. p. 346.
[4] *Gerusalemme* IX, 56.

whole even of the created universe. *Nature's* realm was supposed to extend only as far upwards as the orbit of the moon.[1] That may lend an unsuspected precision to the words which Chaucer puts into the mouth of *nature* personified.

> Eche thing in my cure is
> *Under the Mone* that mai waxe and wane.[2]

Childish as this particular demotion may sound, it goes back to a respectable division between the sublunary and the translunary which Aristotle made in order to cover what observation seemed, in his time, to show.[3] Even in the passage already quoted, it will be remembered, not only *phusis* but 'the sky and *phusis*' hung upon God.[4]

When we emphasise the idea that *nature* is a divine artifact, we get yet another contrast. Pagan myths (you will find them in the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) and *Genesis* seemed to agree that matter first existed in a state of disorder (*tohu-bohu* or chaos) and was afterwards ordered and worked up into a *kosmos* (*kosmein*, to arrange, organise, embellish, whence also *cosmetics*). The cosmos can then be called *nature* and contrasted with the preceding —and perhaps subsequent—disorder. Hence Milton describes chaos as 'the womb of Nature and perhaps her grave'.[5]

But besides all these demotions there was also apotheosis. This would perhaps have been hardly possible before *nature* (*d.s.*) had been named, and seems wholly

[1] See Deguileville, *Pilgrimage*, trans. Lydgate, 3415.
[2] *Phisicien's Tale*, C. 22.
[3] *De Mundo*, 392 a.
[4] *Metaphysics*, 1072 b.
[5] *Paradise Lost* II, 911.

foreign to the spirit of the earliest Greek mythology.[1] But once you can talk about *nature* (*d.s.*) you can deify it —or 'her'. Hence the sense which I shall call *Great Mother Nature*; *nature* used to mean not simply all the things there are, as an aggregate or even a system, but rather some force or mind or *élan* supposed to be immanent in them. It is of course often impossible to be sure in a given instance whether the sense Great Mother Nature implied genuine personalisation (a deity believed in) or merely personification as a rhetorical figure. When Cicero says that Cleanthes gave the name of God to the mind and spirit of all *natura*[2] it is almost certainly the former. But when he says 'What workman save *Natura* could have attained such skill?'[3] it might be not much more than a figure. When Marcus Aurelius, or any sound Stoic, calls *Phusis* 'the eldest of deities' (IX, 1), I think this is the language of actual religion; about the *natura* who appears in Statius' *Thebaid* I am in doubt. But the *kinde*[4] or *natura* and *physis*[5] or *nature*,[6] the 'vicaire of the almightie Lorde',[7] who so dominates medieval poetry, is a personification, though a very grave and active one.

Great Mother Nature has proved a most potent sense down to the present day. It is 'she' who does nothing by leaps, abhors a vacuum, is *die gute Mutter*, is red in tooth and claw, 'never did betray the heart that loved her',

[1] The gods of mythology, who had parents and a history and known birthplaces, were of course items in *nature* (*d.s.*).

[2] *De Natura Deorum* I, 14.

[3] *Ibid.* II, 57.

[4] Langland, C. XXIII, 80.

[5] Bernardus Silvester, Alanus ab Insulis.

[6] *Romance of the Rose.*

[7] Chaucer, *Parlement*, 379.

eliminates the unfit, surges to ever higher and higher forms of life, decrees, purposes, warns, punishes and consoles. Even now I am not sure that this meaning is always used purely as a figure, to say what would equally make sense without it. The test is to remove the figure and see how much sense remains. Of all the pantheon Great Mother Nature has, at any rate, been the hardest to kill.

IV. 'NATURE' AND ITS OPPOSITES

The sense we have just been considering might seem so overwhelming that, once reached, it would dominate, or perhaps devour, all other senses of the word. But we daily prove that this is not so by speaking of 'the nature of the case' or 'a good-natured man' when there is before our mind no idea of *nature* (*d.s.*), strict or demoted, personified or literal. For the hierarchy of meanings is not like the hierarchy of things. That sense of the word which refers to the most ancient thing need not be the most ancient sense; that which refers to an all-embracing thing need not be the all-embracing sense. The thing we mean by *nature* (*d.s.*) may be the trunk on which we all grow; the sense *nature* (*d.s.*) is by no means the semantic trunk on which all the meanings grow. It is itself only one of the branches. Hence we shall go widely astray if we assume that whenever authors use the word *nature* they must be thinking of *nature* (*d.s.*). Especially, we shall go astray if we think that all uses of the word *nature* which carry approval indicate an optimistic, and all disapproving usages a pessimistic, view of *nature* (*d.s.*). These usages may have a different source and need imply no view of

nature (*d.s.*) at all. Of course the hovering presence of *nature* (*d.s.*) in the background often moulds the rhetorical form, and sometimes even modifies the thought when the author is saying things which (fundamentally) require different senses.

The best clue is to ask oneself in each instance, what is the implied opposite to *nature*, and a list of such opposites will now occupy us for some pages. Their very existence proves how little the sense *nature* (*d.s.*) (which has no opposite) is involved.

V. 'NATURAL AND UNNATURAL'

There are two chief branches.

1. Since *natural* can mean 'having due affection', or *pius*, *unnatural* (as already noticed) of course means the reverse. Thus old Hamlet's ghost says that, while all murder is 'most foul', his own murder was 'strange and unnatural', because it was fratricidal.

2. Anything which has changed from its sort or kind (*nature*) may be described as *unnatural*, provided that the change is one the speaker deplores. Behaviour is *unnatural* or 'affected', not simply when it is held to be a departure from that which a man's *nature* would lead to of itself, but when it is a departure for the worse. When the timid man forces himself to be brave, or the choleric man to be just, he is not called *unnatural*. '*Unnatural* vices' are so called because the appetite has exchanged its characteristic and supposedly original bent, its *phusis*, for one which most men think worse. (Perpetual continence, though equally a departure from the *phusis*, would be, and is,

called *unnatural* only by those who disapprove of it.) It is just possible that the Great Mother Nature meaning has had an influence here, for in medieval personifications of her she is very apt to talk about fertility, and the 'plaint' which she makes in Alanus ab Insulis' *De Planctu Naturae* is one against homosexuality. But I do not think this at all probable.

Why *unnatural* should always (as *unearthly* is not) be a term of reprobation is not easy to understand. The strongly pejorative force of its first usage (lacking in due affection) may have something to do with it.

It is sufficiently obvious that neither sense is derived from *nature* (*d.s.*) which of course includes fratricide and perversion as it includes everything else.

VI. THE 'NATURAL' AND THE INTERFERED WITH

A beautifully pure example of this sense occurs in Chaucer. Medieval astronomers believed that the lower heavenly spheres had an inherent impulse to move from west to east, but that the *Primum Mobile*, moving from east to west, forced them backwards in that direction. Chaucer complains that the 'firste moeving cruel firmament' thus forces westward all those things 'that naturelly wolde holde another way'.[1] Now of course both movements are equally within *nature* (*d.s.*). But Chaucer is not thinking of *nature* (*d.s.*). Nor are we while we read his line. His usage is still so familiar and intelligible that we all know at once, without having to think about it, what he means by 'would *naturally*'; he means 'would spontaneously, of their own accord, if they were let alone'.

[1] *Man of Law's Tale*, B. 298.

Similarly, we feel no difficulty when Aristotle says 'We must study what is *natural* (*phusei*) in specimens which are *in their natural condition* (*kata phusin*), not in those which have been damaged'.[1]

This, as it is one of the oldest, is one of the hardiest senses of *nature* or *natural*. The nature of anything, its original, innate character, its spontaneous behaviour, can be contrasted with what it is made to be or do by some external agency. A yew-tree is *natural* before the topiarist has carved it; water in a fountain is forced upwards against its *nature*; raw vegetables are *au naturel*. The *natural* here is the Given.

This distinction between the uninterfered with and the interfered with will not probably recommend itself to philosophers. It may be held to enshrine a very primitive, an almost magical or animistic, conception of causality. For of course in the real world everything is continuously 'interfered with' by everything else; total mutual interference (Kant's 'thorough-going reciprocity') is of the essence of *nature* (*d.s.*). What keeps the contrast alive, however, is the daily experience of men as practical, not speculative, beings. The antithesis between unreclaimed land and the cleared, drained, fenced, ploughed, sown, and weeded field—between the unbroken and the broken horse—between the fish as caught and the fish opened, cleaned, and fried—is forced upon us every day. That is why *nature* as 'the given', the thing we start from, the thing we have not yet 'done anything about', is such a persistent sense. *We* here, of course, means man. If ants

[1] *Politics*, 1254 a.

had a language they would, no doubt, call their anthill an artifact and describe the brick wall in its neighbourhood as a *natural* object. *Nature* in fact would be for them all that was not 'ant-made'. Just so, for us, *nature* is all that is not man-made; the *natural* state of anything is its state when not modified by man. This is one source of the antithesis (philosophically so scandalous) between *nature* and Man. We as agents, as interferers, inevitably stand over against all the other things; they are all raw material to be exploited or difficulties to be overcome. This is also a fruitful source of favourable and unfavourable overtones. When we deplore the human interferences, then the *nature* which they have altered is of course the unspoiled, the uncorrupted; when we approve them, it is the raw, the unimproved, the savage.

Inevitably this contrast is represented in all the languages we have had to consider. Things may be in a satisfactory condition either by *nature* (*phusei*) or by art (*techne*), in Plato.[1] A death which occurs of itself, without external violence, is a *natural* (*kata phusin*) death. The peasant to whom Electra had been, outrageously, married, abstained from her bed for various reasons, one being that he *was naturally* (*ephu*) chaste; not through fear, nor by painful efforts of resolution—he was 'that sort of man'.[2] Quintilian says that in oratory *natura* can do much without training but training can do little without *natura* (II, xix). The *nature* in question is of course the 'given' capacity in the pupil, what the teacher finds to work upon. Addison speaks of 'the rustic part of the species who on all occasions

[1] *Republic*, 381 a. [2] Euripides, *Electra*, 261.

acted bluntly and *naturally*':[1] no efforts of their own had modified their given behaviour (given by temperament, environment, and the passions) in the direction either of refinement or affectation.

This contrast easily accommodates, without substantial change of what is being said, allusions to Great Mother Nature; as in Milton's description of the paradisal flowers

> which not nice Art
> In Beds and curious knots, but nature boon
> Pourd forth profuse[2]

Sometimes it is difficult to say whether Great Mother Nature, even rhetorically, is intended or not. Sannazaro, in the Proem to his *Arcadia*, prefers to the products of the gardener's art the trees on the rude mountains 'brought forth by *nature*' (*de la natura produtti*). Is *natura* here intended to arouse the image of the Great Mother, or does it only mean *naturally*? Seneca says 'for *natura* does not give virtue; it is an art to become good'.[3] It might mean simply 'We are not born with all the virtues, they don't come of their own accord. We have to work at them.' On the other hand, he was a Stoic and Great Mother Nature was very often in his mind. It is of course very possible that neither he nor Sannazaro could have answered the question or had ever raised it.

VII. THE 'NATURAL' AS AN ELEMENT IN MAN

I divide this class into three sub-classes and must give warning that I am in some doubt about all of them except

[1] *Spectator*, 119. [2] *Paradise Lost* IV, 241. [3] *Epistles* XC, 44.

the first. The second I am not sure that I have understood; the third, for a reason which will appear, is bound to have an uncertain fringe. I think it better to give the reader even a dubious classification (which he can then pull to pieces for himself) than a jungle of *miscellanea* at the end.

1. Speaking of worldly goods Boethius says that *natura* is content with few of them.[1] Alfred, correctly, translates 'in very little of them *kind* (*gecynd*) has enough'. Spenser, probably with the Boethian passage in mind, remarks 'with how small allowance Untroubled Nature doth herself suffice'.[2] When Adam and Eve and the Archangel dined together they ate what 'sufficed, not burdened nature'.[3] The implied contrast in all these is between what the *nature* of man wants—what a man wants simply in virtue of being the *kind* of organism he is—and what this or that man learns to want by being luxurious, fanciful, or fashionable. This would be an application of the more general contrast of *nature* as the given against the interfered with. Our 'built in' appetites are interfered with by our individual ways of life.

2. But what are we to make of the following usages? A *natural* is an idiot or imbecile. 'Love is like a great natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole.'[4] Again, the unconscious vital powers in a man's body can be *nature*. 'Ther nature wol not wirche', says Chaucer of the dying Arcite, 'Far-wel Physik! Go bear the man to chirche'.[5] Most startling of all, Dryden's

[1] *Consolation* II, Pr. v.
[2] *Faerie Queene*, II, vii, 15.
[3] *P.L.* v, 451.
[4] *Romeo and Juliet* II, iv, 92.
[5] *Knight's Tale*, A. 2759.

Abdalla says 'Reason's a staff for age when nature's gone'.[1] We could, at a pinch, get rid of the Chaucerian passage. *Nature* in it might be Great Mother Nature refusing to work in one man's body. The two other specimens are alike in suggesting a contrast between *nature* and reason. The idiot is a *natural* for lacking it, and Abdalla will not use it as long as he has *nature* instead. Now, since the *nature* of man was defined as 'rational animal', it seems very odd that the absence, or opposite, of reason in him should be *natural*.

The explanation I would suggest is as follows. We have already seen how the contrast between *nature* and man arises from our practical life. But it was also reinforced from another direction. Man is represented both in the *Timaeus* and in *Genesis* as the subject of a separate and special creation; as something added, by a fresh act of God, to the rest of *nature* (*d.s.*) *demoted*. (In Bernardus and in the *Anticlaudian* of Alanus the creation of man becomes even more special and more separate.) And of course 'the rest of *Nature*' could easily, in opposition to Man, be called simply *nature*. It could therefore be felt that what man shares with (the rest of) *nature*, what he has only because he is a creature and not because he is a special creature, is *natural* in contradistinction to his specific, specially created, differentia. Thus, paradoxically but not unintelligibly, man could be most *natural* (most united with the rest of *nature*) in those states and activities which are least rational. And we may perhaps add to this that the specifically human, the exercise and domination of

[1] *Conquest of Granada*, Pt. I, II, i.

reason, is achieved in each man only by effort. The state of a man before reason has developed in him, or while reason is in abeyance, may therefore be *natural* also in the sense of being 'given'—being what happens if nothing is done about it. The idiot has only remained in the state of irrationality in which we all began. Abdalla identifies *nature* either with passion itself or with the dominance of passion because passion both arises and rules us unless we 'interfere' with ourselves.

Along these lines the word *nature* could reach the sense 'that in man which is not specifically human, that which he shares with the animals'. Hence such euphemisms as 'a call of *nature*'. Hence, as perhaps in the Chaucerian passage, the unconscious processes (digestion, circulation etc.) could be *nature*.

3. Here I feel pretty confident that the class I am discussing is a real class; but one older meaning of *nature* makes it doubtful whether certain instances fall within it or not. We have seen that *nature* can mean 'due affection' or *pietas*. Thus there are two possible ways of taking the ghost's words to Hamlet 'If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not' (I, v, 81), and Prospero's 'You, brother mine that entertained ambition, expelled remorse and nature' (V, i, 75). The ghost might mean 'if you have any filial feelings'; Prospero might mean 'You expelled all the feelings of a brother'. But equally the ghost might mean 'If you still retain the *nature* of a man, if you have not departed from the human *phusis*'. And Prospero might mean 'You drove out the given *nature* of humanity, voluntarily depraved yourself from your kind.' I suspect the first explanation

is the more likely for these passages. (Both senses might of course be present, or the distinction might never have been consciously before Shakespeare's mind.) But the second seems more probable when Lady Macbeth prays that 'no compunctious visitings of nature' may shake her fell purpose (I, v, 45). She might possibly be praying that the 'due affection' and loyalty which she owes to Duncan as king, guest, kinsman, and benefactor, should not visit her with compunction. But, taken in connection with 'unsex me here', *nature* seems more likely to mean 'my original *datum* of human *nature*'. She is deliberately casting out, and forbidding to return, her womanhood, her humanity, her reason (as our ancestors understood the word *reason*).

Nature here appears as good because the creature is departing from its *phusis* for something worse. This has nothing to do with an optimistic view of human *nature* in general, much less of *nature* (*d.s.*). We can interfere with our given *nature* either to mend or to mar it; we can climb above it or sink below it. Thus in a man who is depraving himself his *nature* will be the only trace of good still left in him (his form has not yet lost *all* her original brightness). Later, it will be the good he has finally lost. But when a man is growing better, rising above or (as we say) 'conquering' his original psychological *datum*, *nature* will be relatively bad—the element in him still unconquered or uncorrected. Banquo is a good man, but he has to pray 'Merciful powers, Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose' (II, i, 7). The original human *datum* in him is not yet so conquered that

it cannot raise its head in his dreams.[1] Thus Johnson can say 'We are all envious naturally but by checking envy we get the better of it.[2] Pope's usage is more complex—a good subject for Professor Empson—when he makes Eloisa say

> Then Conscience sleeps and, leaving Nature free,
> All my loose soul unbounded leaps to thee.[3]

From the point of view of her pious resolutions *nature* here is the given which ought to be conquered and whose persistence is therefore bad. But she probably also pleads by implication that her passion for Abelard is after all *natural* and therefore excusable (a usage we must return to); *natural* as ordinary, to be expected, and also perhaps as something authoritatively sanctioned or irresistibly imposed by Great Mother Nature. The idea that sexual desire is *natural* because it is not specifically human may also come in.

My examples so far have all been ethical, the *natural* element in a man appearing as something morally better or worse than what he may make of it. But it can be contrasted as 'given' with things which are not, in the context, regarded as obligatory or culpable. An example (despite the borrowing of a religious term in it) is Coleridge's

> And happly by abstruse research to steal
> From my own nature all the natural man.[4]

Coleridge was determining, like Lady Macbeth, to depart from his *phusis*, but not (on most views) to deprave it.

[1] This degree of psycho-analysis is as old as Plato's *Republic*, 571 a–572 d.

[2] Boswell, 12 April 1778. [3] Line 227. [4] *Dejection*, VI.

We get the same non-moral contrast, complicated by Great Mother Nature, in this from *Tristram Shandy* (v, iii): 'When Tully was bereft of his daughter at first he listened to the voice of nature and modulated his own unto it...O my Tullia, my daughter, my child...But as soon as he began to look into the stores of philosophy and consider how many excellent things might be said upon the occasion...no body on earth can conceive, says the great orator, how joyful it made me.' 'Voice' here brings in the personification; but substantially the contrast is between the given—what Cicero, what anyone, would spontaneously feel—and what philosophy and rhetoric (conceived by Sterne as affectations) could make out of it.

VIII. 'NATURE' AND GRACE

Banquo's evening prayer brought us already to the frontier of this class. Human *nature* (man as he is of himself) can be contrasted not only, as above, with man as he can become by moral effort but with man as he can be refashioned by divine grace. The antithesis is now not merely moral. 'The loss of my husband', says Christiana, 'came into my mind, at which I was heartily grieved; but all that was but natural affection'.[1] What is here depreciated or discounted as 'but natural' is nothing depraved or sub-human; on the contrary, it is something, on its own level and in its own mode, lawful, commanded, entirely good. But it involves none of the new motives, the new perspective, the revaluation of all things, which, on the Christian view go with conversion. It does not

[1] *Pilgrim's Progress*, Pt 2.

(in most theologies) need to be repented of; but neither does it indicate 'the New Man'. It is therefore merely *nature*, not grace—or not of faith, or not spiritual. Often, of course, this contrast is merely implicit:

> see, sons, what things you are!
> How quickly nature falls into revolt
> When gold becomes her object![1]

The choice of the word *nature*, in the context, would in Shakespeare's time have made the theological implication clear. *Nature* means 'we human beings in our natural condition', that is, unless or until touched by grace. This is what '*Nature*' means as the title of one of Herbert's poems. It is about the element of untransformed, ungraced human nature in the poet—his Old Man, Old Adam, his *vetustas*, full of rebellion and venom, untamed, precarious, and perishing. The classic place for this contrast is the *Imitation* (III, liv): 'Diligently watch the motions of nature and of grace. . . nature is subtle and always has self for end. . . grace walks in sincerity and does all for God.' In the next chapter the author adds a linguistic note: 'for nature is fallen and so the very word *nature* (though she was created good and right) now means the weakness of fallen nature.'

IX. NATURE AND THE MIMETIC ARTS

The contrasts we have hitherto been considering are all really variations upon a single contrast; that of *nature* as the given or uninterfered with, over against what has

[1] *Hen. IV*, Pt 2, IV, v, 65.

been, for better or worse, made of it. We now come to a different contrast; the *nature* of a thing as its real character, over against what it is thought to be or represented as being or treated as if it were.

Thus poets and painters are said to be imitating *nature*. *Nature* in this context primarily means the real character (the *phusis* or what-sortedness) of the things they are representing. When the horses in your picture are like real horses or the lovers in your comedy behave like real lovers, then of course your work is 'true to nature' or 'natural'. And just as we call the painted shapes 'horses' and the dramatic personages 'lovers', so the correct depiction of them in the mimetic work can itself be called *nature*. Thus Pope can speak of a work 'Where nature moves and rapture warms the mind';[1] or Johnson can complain 'In this poem there is no nature for there is no truth.'[2]

A full account of *nature* as a term in neo-classical criticism would require a whole book and will not, of course, be attempted here. But two points must be made.

1. Some of those who were neo-classical critics held optimistic views about *nature* (*d.s.*) and willingly used the figure of Great Mother Nature. But their frequent eulogies on *nature* in works of art are not necessarily connected with this. They may be emotionally tinged by it, or the writers themselves may sometimes be confused. But in logic, if your theory of art is mimetic, then of course you must praise artists for 'following' *nature* and blame them for departing from it—must praise *nature* in a work of art and censure the absence of *nature*—whatever

[1] *Essay on Criticism*, 236. [2] *Life of Milton*.

you think about *nature* (*d.s.*). An imitation must be judged by its resemblance to the model.

2. We have already learned from Aristotle that the *phusis* of anything is 'what it is like when its process of coming to be is complete'.[1] We have learned also from Aristotle, that we must 'study what is natural from specimens which are in their natural condition, not from damaged ones'.[2] An immature or deformed specimen does not display its *phusis* accurately. Now if you once get (from Aristotle's *Poetics* and Horace's *De Arte*) the theory that art imitates the general, not the individual, that the *nature* to be imitated is really the *natures* of whole classes (horses, lovers), then the same principles apply to art as to biology. This doctrine of generality was of course widely held in the neo-classical period; 'nothing can please many and please long' except by 'just representations of general nature'.[3] It would have been clearer[4] if he had said 'general natures'. Obviously you can depict the general *nature* of a class only by displaying it in a fully developed, normal, undeformed specimen. The general *nature* of feet is not revealed by a drawing, however accurate, of a club foot (though of course club feet are an item in *nature* (*d.s.*)). The general nature of pedlars is not revealed by Wordsworth's portrait of the Wanderer in

[1] *Politics*, 1252 b. [2] *Ibid.* 1254 a.

[3] Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare*.

[4] Clearer for an understanding of the theory as usually held. Johnson has his own modification of it. Where others wanted the generality *King* or *Senator* to show through the individual Claudius or Menenius he wanted the universal *Man* to show through the generality *King* or *Senator*.

The Excursion (though of course it is not strictly impossible that *nature* (*d.s.*) should once have included an individual pedlar who was just like him).

This view explains some otherwise unintelligible statements by Thomas Rymer. 'Nature knows nothing in the manners which so properly distinguishes woman as doth her modesty'.[1] This does not mean that Rymer is so simple as to deny the existence of immodest women. He knows perfectly well that *nature* (*d.s.*) includes immodest women, as it includes bearded women, hunchbacks and homosexuals. But they are not specimens in which we can observe general female *nature*. He makes this quite clear by adding 'if a woman has got any accidental historical impudence' (i.e. immodesty, *impudicitia*) 'she must no longer stalk in Tragedy... but must rub off and pack down with the carriers into the *Provence* of Comedy'.[2] She is proper in comedy (no doubt) because its corrective function is precisely to pillory aberrations from (general) *nature*. But female 'impudence' is no matter for serious poetry because, though it certainly occurs in *nature* (*d.s.*), when it does so it is merely 'accidental' (in the logical sense) and 'historical'. That is, it merely records the particular, which, as Aristotle had taught, is the function of history, not of tragedy.[3] It is in the light of this that we must understand his notorious remark about Iago. He condemns Iago for being an 'insinuating rascal' instead of a 'plain-dealing souldier'—'a character constantly worn

[1] *Tragedies of the Last Age*. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the XVIIth Century*, vol. II, p. 193.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 194.

[3] *Poetics*, 1451 a–b.

by them for thousands of years in the World'.[1] Rymer is not in the least denying that such a soldier as Iago could exist; the point is that, if he did, he would be a mere historical accident, not instructive as to the general *nature* of soldiers, and therefore improper in tragedy.

It will be seen that this demand for the typical easily merges into a demand for the perfect. The quest for the wholly normal cabbage—as we significantly say 'the perfect specimen'—would involve the rejection of every cabbage which had suffered from such historical accidents as bad soil, unequal sun (and therefore different growth) on this side and that, too much or too little rain, and so on. In the end you would be looking for the ideal cabbage. This development, I suspect, is more easily seen in the criticism of painting. But Rymer is moving in that direction when he says that 'no shadow of sense can be pretended for bringing any wicked persons on the stage'.[2] I fear he was encouraged by Aristotle's strange maxim that the characters in a tragedy should, before everything else, be 'good'.[3]

X. BY 'NATURE' OR BY LAW

Here, as in the preceding contrast, *nature* is the actual. What a thing is in its own *nature* and therefore really is, is set against what law (or custom, or convention) treats it as being. The claims made by women when the suffragist movement began, or by native Africans in parts of Africa, could in traditional language have taken the form

[1] *Short View of Tragedy*, *ibid.* p. 224.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 197. [3] *Poetics*, 1454 a.

'Our inferiority to you (men or whites) is legal or conventional, not *natural*'. A good example is the discussion on slavery in the first book of Aristotle's *Politics*. Aristotle thought that some men were specially qualified by their character to be slaves and others to be masters. The one sort were therefore *natural* slaves, the other *natural* masters. But of course the actual working of the slave trade, which gets its livestock by kidnapping, purchase, or capture in war, did not at all insure that only the *natural* slaves were enslaved. (He oddly ignores the equally obvious truth that those who own slaves will often not be *natural* masters.) We must therefore distinguish the *natural* from the *legal* slave: him who ought to be, who is fit only to be, a slave, from him who is a slave in the eyes of the law.

Again, it must have been a primeval question whether what your father, or teacher, or king, or the laws of your country declared to be just or right was 'really' just or right. Linguistic analysts may (and what a comfort that will be to all governments!) succeed in convincing the world that the expression 'really right' is meaningless; but for millennia it was accepted as full of meaning. The idea of the 'really right', as against the law of the political ruler, is expressed in its purity by Sophocles through the mouth of Antigone: 'I did not think your proclamation of such force that you, a man, destined to die, should override the laws of the gods, unwritten and unvarying. For those are not of yesterday nor of today, but everlasting. No one knows when they began.'[1]

[1] *Antigone*, 453.

In plain prose the antithesis takes the following form. Someone in Plato's *Gorgias* (482[e]) speaks of things 'which are laudable (*kala*) not by *phusis* but by law or convention (*nomô*)'. Or Cicero says 'If, as it is *naturally* (*naturâ*), so it were in men's thoughts, and each regarded nothing human as alien from him'.[1] Plato's *phusis* could here be rendered 'really': Cicero's *natura* 'in reality'. But such thoughts lead to a new usage which has, historically, been more important even than the conception of *nature* (*d.s.*). We can see it beginning in another passage from the *Gorgias*: 'They do these things according to the *phusis* of justice and, by heaven, according to the law of *phusis*, though perhaps not according to the law we men lay down' (483[e]).

Notice, first, that an abstract like Justice (at least, it is an abstract for modern thought) can now have its *phūsis*. This I take to be a consequence of asking whether the state's 'justice' is *real* justice or not. For this seems to imply that the question 'What's justice like—really like?' is significant; and what would you then be asking about if not about the real *phusis* of justice?

Secondly, we now have the conception 'law of *phusis*'. I am not at all sure what Plato meant by this second *phusis*; but it would seem at least to mean 'reality'. The law of reality would be the real law. But is he also bringing in something of *nature* (*d.s.*) or of Great Mother Nature? (His own particular demotion of *nature* (*d.s.*) is not relevant at this point.)

However that may be, the way is now open to the gigantic antithesis (ancient, medieval, and early modern)

[1] *Laws*, I, xii.

between *natural* and *civil* law; the unchangeable and universal law of *nature* and the varying law of this or that state. But the ambiguity of the word *nature* allowed men to use this antithesis for the expression of very different political philosophies.

On the one hand, if *nature* is thought of mainly as the real (opposed to convention and legal fiction) and the laws of *nature* as those which enjoin what is really good and forbid what is really bad (as opposed to the pseudo-duties which bad governments praise and reward or the real virtues which they forbid and punish), then of course 'the law of *nature*' is conceived as an absolute moral standard against which the laws of all nations must be judged and to which they ought to conform. It will be in fact the sort of thing Antigone was talking about. Great Mother Nature may well come in at this point but she will be either, for Stoics, a deified Mother Nature, or, for Christians, a Mother Nature who is the 'vicaire of the almightie lord', inscribing her laws, which she learned from God, on the human heart. This is the conception of *natural* Law that underlies the work of Thomas Aquinas, Hooker and Grotius.

On the other hand *nature* may mean *nature* (*d.s.*), and even with a special emphasis on the non-human parts of it (the obstinate contrast of Nature and man helps here) or, within man, on those motives and modes of behaviour which are least specifically human. The 'laws of *Nature*' on this view are inferred from the way in which non-human agents always behave, and human agents behave until they are trained not to. Thus what Aquinas or

Hooker would call 'the law of *Nature*' now becomes in its turn the convention; it is something artificially imposed, in opposition to the true law of *nature*, the way we all spontaneously behave if we dare (or don't interfere with ourselves), the way all the other creatures behave, the way that comes 'naturally' to us. The prime law of *nature*, thus conceived, is self-preservation and self-aggrandisement, pursued by whatever trickeries or cruelties may prove to be advisable. This is Hobbes's *Natural Law*.

XI. THE STATE OF 'NATURE' AND THE CIVIL STATE

On either of these views civil law is man-made and *natural* law is not. The one is a contrivance, the other a given; so that this contrast, though it seems to begin in that of real and conventional, slides back into the more familiar one of the raw (or unspoiled) and the improved (or sophisticated). That was perhaps why nearly all political thinkers except Aristotle assumed that men had once lived without social organisation and obeyed no laws except those (whatever those were) of *nature*. That pre-civil condition was described as *nature* or 'the state of *nature*'. This too, of course, might be conceived in opposite ways. It might be a primeval innocence from which our transition to the civil state was a fall. 'The first of mortals and their children followed nature, uncorrupted, and enjoyed the nature of things in common', says Seneca.[1] The 'nature of things' which they enjoyed is

[1] Epistle XC, 4, 38.

nature (*d.s.*). The *nature* they followed is primarily their own, still unspoiled, *phusis*. But they enjoyed 'the *nature* of things in common' because civil government and private property had not yet been contrived—not while they were in the state of *nature*. So Pope:

> Nor think in Nature's state they blindly trod;
> The state of Nature was the reign of God.[1]

On the other hand it could be conceived of as the state of savagery to escape from which we had contrived the civil state, finding that in the state of *nature* man's life was, as Hobbes said, 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.[2]

The state of *nature* which (it was thought) had preceded civil society, and would return if civil society were abolished, still in a sense underlies it. Government is supposed to do for us certain things we should have done for ourselves in the state of *nature*; it can be maintained that where it fails to do any of them we are, as regards those things, still in the state of *nature* and may act accordingly. Johnson says that a man whose father's murderer, by a peculiarity of Scotch Law, has escaped hanging, might reasonably say 'I am among barbarians who refuse to do justice. I am therefore in a state of nature and consequently. . . I will stab the murderer of my father.'[3]

It should be noticed that the expression 'state of *nature*' is sometimes borrowed from its proper political context and given a meaning which really attaches it to our

[1] *Essay on Man* III, 147. [2] *Leviathan*, 13.
[3] Boswell, *Hebrides*, 22 August 1773.

section VI. It may be used to mean not the pre-civil but the pre-civilised; the condition of man, not without government, but without arts, inventions, learning, and luxury. Thus in another part of his *Hebrides* Boswell records 'our satisfaction at finding ourselves again in a comfortable carriage was very great. We laughed at those who attempted to persuade us of the superior advantages of a state of nature.'[1] The 'state of nature' here means ponies and mountain tracks as against carriages and metalled roads. He even uses *nature* by itself in what I take to be the same sense when he speaks of wishing 'to live three years in Otaheite and be satisfied what pure nature can do for man'.[2]

XII. 'NATURAL' AND 'SUPERNATURAL'

1. In its strict theological sense this distinction presents little difficulty. When any agent is empowered by God to do that of which its own *kind* or *nature* would never have made it capable, it is said to act *super-naturally*, above its *nature*. The story in which Balaam's ass speaks is a story of the *supernatural* because speech is not a characteristic of asinine *nature*. When Isaiah saw the seraphim he saw *supernaturally* because human eyes are not by their own *nature* qualified to see such things. Of course examples of the *supernatural* need not be, like these, spectacular. Whatever a man is enabled to receive or do by divine grace, and not by the exercise of his own *nature*, is *supernatural*. Hence 'ioy, peace and delight' (of a certain sort) can be described by Hooker as 'super-

[1] *Hebrides*, 27 October 1773. [2] *Life*. Just before 29 April 1776.

naturall passions' (I, xi, 3). If this were the only sense the word bore, I should of course have mentioned it above when we were dealing with *nature* and *grace*. Unfortunately it has others.

2. We have already noticed that Aristotle speaks about things being 'in their natural condition': i.e. not damaged, or otherwise interfered with. But things can be changed from this *natural* condition: changed, in that sense, from their *nature*. A farmer can give a pig a degree of fatness which its *nature*, unaided, would never have achieved. It would then be fat 'above (its) *nature*'. Illness can raise a man's temperature higher than in his *natural* (normal, unimpaired) condition it would rise. To call him then *supernaturally* hot would now be startling, but the word could once, and quite intelligibly, be so used. Elyot says 'Unnaturall or supernaturall heate destroyeth appetite'.[1] In *The Flower and the Leaf* (l. 413) 'Unkindly hete' means, with some hyperbole, feverishness, pathological heat.

3. But neither of these senses is very close to that which *supernatural* bears in modern, untheological English. Why is a ghost called *supernatural*? Certainly not because it stands outside *nature* (*d.s.*). The proper word for 'outside *nature* (*d.s.*)' is 'non-existent'. But that cannot be what *supernatural* means, for it would be used of ghosts equally by those who believe and those who disbelieve in them. Nor does anyone call phlogiston *supernatural*. You could of course make 'demotions' of *nature* (*d.s.*) which would exclude the ghost, but they would have to be artificially contrived for that express purpose. The Platonic one

[1] *Castle of Health.*

would not do, for ghosts, being particulars, could not be in the realm of forms; nor the Aristotelian, for ghosts are not God, nor are they mathematical concepts; nor the Christian, for they are creatures. It is indeed doubtful whether the modern usage arises from *nature* (*d.s.*).

Macbeth calls the witches' prophesying a 'supernatural soliciting' (I, iii, 130). Witchcraft and magic are at first *supernatural*, I think, in a sense close to the theological. By the aid of spirits the magician does that which his own *nature* could not have done, or makes other objects do to each other what their *natures* were not capable of. It is not the spirits by whose aid he works that are *supernatural* but the operations performed. Again, when a prophet sees angels his experience is *supernatural*, in the sense already explained. It is equally so when he foresees the future. To call the angels themselves *supernatural* is, at first sight, no less odd than if we called the future *supernatural*. But certainly modern usage allows us to speak of '*supernatural* beings'. It is a usage philosophically scandalous. If demons and fairies do not exist, it is not clear why they should be called *supernatural* any more than the books that no one ever wrote. If they exist, no doubt they have their own *natures* and act according to them.

Several causes probably contributed to this sense. Whatever such creatures might be in themselves, our encounters with them are certainly not *natural* in the sense of being ordinary or 'things of course'. It may even be supposed that when we see them we are acting above our *nature*. If on these two grounds the experience were vaguely felt to be *supernatural*, the adjective might then

be transferred to the things experienced. (It is of course linguistically irrelevant whether the experience is regarded as veridical or hallucinatory.) Again, such creatures are not part of the subject matter of '*natural* philosophy'; if real, they fall under pneumatology, and, if unreal, under morbid psychology. Thus the methodological idiom can separate them from *nature*. But thirdly (and I suspect this might be most potent of all), the beings which popular speech calls *supernatural*, long before that adjective was applied to them, were already bound together in popular thought by a common emotion. Some of them are holy, some numinous, some eerie, some horrible; all, one way or another, uncanny, mysterious, odd, 'rum'. When the learned term *supernatural* enters the common speech, it finds this far older, emotional classification ready for it, and already in want of a name. I think the learned word, on the strength of a very superficial relation of meaning to the thing the plain man had in mind, was simply snatched at and pummelled into the required semantic shape, like an old hat. Just so the people have snatched at once learned words like *sadist*, *inferiority-complex*, *romantic*, or *exotic*, and forced them into the meanings they chose.

The process is apt to shock highly educated people, but it does not always serve the ends of language (communication) so ill as we might expect. *Supernatural* in this modern and, if you like, degraded sense, does its work quite efficiently. Anthropologists find it convenient to talk of '*supernatural* beings' and everyone understands them; and if our friend says, 'I can't stand stories about the *supernatural*', we know, for all ordinary purposes, what books

not to lend him. A general term whose particulars are bound together only by an emotion may be quite a practicable word provided that the emotion is well known and tolerably distinct.

4. Finally we have once (in Golding) 'the supernaturalls of Aristotle', meaning his *Metaphysics*. That leads to my next.

XIII. PHYSICAL AND METAPHYSICAL

Aristotle's works were usually arranged in the following order: 1. The *Organon* (tool) or works on logic. 2. The scientific works or *phusika*. 3. A book or books on God, Unity, Being, Cause, and Potentiality. 4. Works on human activities (*Ethics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, *Poetics*). As it was not very easy to find a name for the things in the third section, they were named simply from their position and called 'the things after the *phusika*' (*ta meta ta phusika*). When these 'things' came (no doubt wrongly) to be regarded as one book, this book was called 'the *Metaphysics*'.

It would be easy to make an ironic point by saying that the word *metaphysical*, for all its grandiose suggestions, thus has no higher origin than a librarian's practical device for indicating a subdivision of the Aristotelian corpus which nobody could find a name for. But the name is not so unhappy and certainly not so foreign to Aristotle's thought as this sally would suggest. We have already seen that he believed in realities outside what he called *phusis* and made them the subject of disciplines distinct from *phusike* (or *natural* philosophy). If the names are superficial, the division they express is genuinely Aristotelian.

These names, and the academic arrangements which go with them, affect the semantic situation. Originally a thing was *phusikon* because you thought it belonged to, or was included in, *phusis*; your own definition of *phusis* would come into play. But once *phusike* (natural philosophy) as a subject, distinct from *mathematike* and *metaphusike*, exists, most people have a shorter way of deciding what is or is not *phusikon*. Any thing is *phusikon* if you meet it while doing your course in *phusike*. You need not ask what *phusis* itself is; you need only know whose lectures a thing comes in, in what year you read about it, finally for what examination it prepares you. Here, in fact, we have the Methodological Idiom at work.

Aristotle's division of studies, or divisions derived from it, lasted for centuries. Under it a man who is *phusikos* means, not a '*natural*' man but that particular kind of learned man who studies *phusike*. '*Savants* (*philosophi*)', says Isidore, 'are either *physici* or *ethici* or *logici*.'[1] The *physici* study *natures*—sort things out and tell you their *kinds*. But the part of their work which the public is most interested in is, of course, that which may relieve our pains or preserve our life. Hence the *physicus* or *physician* comes to mean primarily a doctor of medicine. The stuff he gives you becomes *physic* ('throw physic to the dogs', says Macbeth, v, iii, 47). The adjective *physical* comes to mean medicinal, or 'good for you'; so that Portia can say

> Is Brutus sick, and is it physical
> To walk unbraced and suck up the humours
> Of the dank morning?[2]

[1] *Etymologics* VIII, vi, 3.

[2] *Julius Caesar* II, i, 261.

Metaphysical, as we should expect, comes to mean (in the popular sense) *supernatural*; either as 'pertaining to what things do when acting beyond their natures', or (more probably) 'studied by arts and sciences which go beyond those of the *physicus*'. Hence in Marlowe a magical ointment has been 'tempered by science metaphisicall';[1] and witchcraft is for Lady Macbeth 'metaphysical aid' (I, v, 30).

Phusike (*natural* philosophy) had from its beginning been 'principally concerned with bodies', as Aristotle notes.[2] It was therefore to be expected that *physical*, by the methodological idiom, would sooner or later come to its modern sense of 'corporeal'. This tendency would be encouraged by the fact that, as special sciences which dealt with bodies from a special point of view (like chemistry) or with only some bodies (like botany) were quarried out of the once undifferentiated *phusike*, and were given their separate names, *phusike*, left like a sort of rump, became the name of that science which still dealt with bodies, or matter, as such. The plural form *physics* survives to remind us that it was once all 'the *phusika*', as *metaphysics* were once 'the things after the *phusika*'. A singular form, *metaphysic*, is now gaining ground, but *physics* will perhaps hardly drop its final *-s* until the meaning 'medicine' for the word *physic* has become more completely archaic.

'Corporeal' is a mildly dangerous sense of *physical*. When Baxter says 'common love to God and special saving love to God be both acts upon an object physically

[1] *Tamburlaine*, Pt 2, 3944. [2] *De Coelo* III, 298 b.

the same',[1] *physically* means 'in its own nature'. When Hooker says that sacraments 'are not physical but moral instruments of salvation' (v, lvii, 4) I do not think he means 'corporeal' by *physical* any more than 'ethical' by 'moral'. He probably means 'Their efficacy is of the sort that would be studied by moral, not by *natural*, philosophy'.

XIV. THE 'NATURAL' AS THE EXCUSABLE

Coleridge once entitled a piece of verse 'Something childish but very natural'. In Rider Haggard's *She*, when the young native unwisely avows her passion for Leo in the presence of the Queen, Holly pleads 'Be pitiful. . . it is but Nature working' (ch. XVIII). 'It's only natural' is used daily in the same deprecatory way. One extenuates one's peccadillo as *natural*, I suspect, in more than one sense. It is *natural*, ordinary, a thing in the common course, I'm no worse than others. It is at least not *unnatural*, I have been foolish or faulty at least in human, not in bestial or diabolical, fashion. What I did was *natural*, spontaneous, I have not gone out of my way to invent new vices. Sometimes a higher plea, less of a defence than a counter-attack, is urged, as in Pope's

> Can sins of moment(s) claim the rod
> Of everlasting fires,
> And that offend great Nature's God
> Which Nature's self inspires?[2]

A medieval poet would have been surprised to find Great Mother Nature inspiring sins, for he would have supposed that her 'inspiration', so far as concerned man, lay in

[1] *Saints' Everlasting Rest* III, xi. [2] *Universal Prayer.*

the *nature* (*animal rationale*) appointed by her for man. Pope is closer to Dryden's Abdalla; the 'voice' of *Nature* here is the less rational, less specifically human, element in us.

XV. 'NATURE' IN EIGHTEENTH- AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY POETRY

Nature (*d.s.*) and hardly even demoted, appears in Pope's couplet

> All are but parts of one stupendous whole
> Whose body Nature is and God the soul.[1]

When Thomson, on the other hand, describes the colour green as 'Nature's universal robe'[2] an enormous shrinkage has occurred. Most of *nature* (*d.s.*), as anyone can see on a fine night, is not green but black, and the better the visibility the blacker. Even terrestrial *nature* is by no means all green. Thomson is actually thinking of British landscapes when he says *Nature*.

Wordsworth's doctrine of *Nature* does not here concern us; his contrasts make it clear how he (and others, and presently thousands of others) used the word. In the *Prelude* Coleridge is congratulated on the fact that, though 'reared in the great city', he had 'long desired to serve in Nature's temple' (II, 452–63). *Nature*, in fact, or anyway her 'temple', excludes towns. 'Science' and 'arts' are contrasted with *Nature* in III, 371–78; books and *Nature* in V, 166–73; Man and *Nature* in IV, 352, and of course in the sub-title of Book VIII. Whatever his doctrine may have been, he does not in fact use *nature* in the *d.s.*; for *nature* (*d.s.*) of course includes towns, arts, sciences, books, and

[1] *Essay on Man* I, 267. [2] *Seasons* I, 83.

men. The antithesis of *Nature* and man, and again of *nature* and the man-made, underlie his usages, and those of most '*nature* poets'.

For most purposes, then, *Nature* in them means the country as opposed to the town, though it may in particular passages be extended to cover the sun, moon, and stars. It may also, despite its frequent opposition to 'man', sometimes cover the rustic way of (human) life. It is the country conceived as something not 'man-made'; Cowper's (or Varro's)[1] maxim that God made the country and man made the town is always more or less present. That the landscape in most civilised countries is through and through modified by human skill and toil, or that the effect of most 'town-scapes' is enormously indebted to atmospheric conditions, is overlooked.

This does not at all mean that the poets are talking nonsense. They are expressing a way of looking at things which must arise when towns become very large and the urban way of life very different from the rural. When this happens most people (not all) feel a sense of relief and restoration on getting out into the country; it is a serious emotion and a recurrent one, a proper theme for high poetry. Philosophically, no doubt, it is superficial to say we have escaped from the works of man to those of *Nature* when in fact, smoking a man-made pipe and swinging a man-made stick, wearing our man-made boots and clothes, we pause on a man-made bridge to

[1] *Task* I, 749, *Rerum Rusticarum* III, i. '*Divina natura* gave the land (*agros*), but human art built cities'. Does *divina natura* mean 'the divine nature' (*to theion*, God) or the divine species (the gods) or *nature* (*d.s.*) (the goddess)? Or could Varro have told us?

look down on the banked, narrowed, and deepened river which man has made out of the original wide, shallow, and swampy mess, and across it, at a landscape which has only its larger geological features in common with that which would have existed if man had never interfered. But we are expressing something we really feel. The wider range of vision has something to do with it; we are seeing *more* of *nature* (in a good many senses) than we could in a street. Again, the *natural* forces which keep the buildings of a town together (all the stresses) are only inferred; the *natural* action of weather and vegetation is visible. And there are fewer men about; therefore, by one of our habitual contrasts, more *nature*. We also feel (most of us) that we are, for the moment, in conditions more suited to our own *nature*—to our lungs, nostrils, ears and eyes.

But I need not labour the point. Romantic *nature*, like the popular use of *supernatural*, is not an idle term because it seems at first to stand up badly to logical criticism. People know pretty well what they mean by it and sometimes use it to communicate what would not easily be communicable in other ways. To be sure, they may also use it to say vaguely and flatly (or even ridiculously) what might have been said precisely and freshly if they had had no such tool ready. I once saw a railway poster which advertised Kent as 'Nature's home'; and we have all heard of the lady who liked walking on a road 'untouched by the hand of man'.