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## “*Adaequatio*”: I

What enables man to know anything at all about the world around him? “Knowing demands the organ fitted to the object,” said Plotinus (died A.D. 270). Nothing can be known without there being an appropriate “instrument” in the makeup of the knower. This is the Great Truth of “*adaequatio*” (adequateness), which defines knowledge as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*—the understanding of the knower must be *adequate* to the thing to be known.

From Plotinus, again, comes: “Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike, and never can the soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful.” John Smith the Platonist (1618–1652) said: “That which enables us to know and understand aright in the things of God, must be a living principle of holiness within us”; to which we might add the statement by Saint Thomas Aquinas that “Knowledge comes about insofar as the object known is within the knower.”

We have seen already that man, in a sense, *comprises* the four great Levels of Being; there is therefore some degree of correspondence or “connaturality” between the structure of man and the structure of the world. This is a very ancient idea and has usually been expressed by calling man a “microcosm”

which somehow "corresponds" with the "macrocosm" which is the world. He is a physicochemical system, like the rest of the world, and he also possesses the invisible and mysterious powers of life, consciousness, and self-awareness, some or all of which he can detect in many beings around him.

Our five bodily senses make us *adequate* to the lowest Level of Being—inanimate matter. But they can supply nothing more than masses of sense data, to "make sense" of which we require abilities or capabilities of a different order. We may call them "intellectual senses." Without them we should be unable to recognize form, pattern, regularity, harmony, rhythm, and meaning, not to mention life, consciousness, and self-awareness. While the bodily senses may be described as relatively passive, mere receivers of whatever happens to come along and to a large extent controlled by the mind, the intellectual senses are the *mind-in-action*, and their keenness and reach are qualities of the mind itself. As regards the bodily senses, all healthy people possess a very similar endowment, but no one could possibly overlook the fact that there are significant differences in the power and reach of people's minds.

It is therefore quite unrealistic to try to define and delimit the intellectual capabilities of "man" as such—as if all human beings were much the same, like animals of the same species. Beethoven's musical abilities, even in deafness, were incomparably greater than mine, and the difference did not lie in the sense of hearing; it lay in the mind. Some people are incapable of grasping and appreciating a given piece of music, not because they are deaf but because of a lack of *adaequatio* in the mind. The music is grasped by intellectual powers which some people possess to such a degree that they can grasp, and retain in their memory, an entire symphony on one hearing or one reading of the score; while others are so weakly endowed that they cannot get it at all, no matter how often and how attentively they listen to it. For the former, the symphony is as *real* as it was to the composer; for the latter, there is no symphony: there is nothing but a succession of more or less agreeable but altogether meaningless noises. The former's mind is *adequate*

to the symphony; the latter's mind is *inadequate*, and thus *incapable of recognizing the existence of the symphony*.

The same applies throughout the whole range of possible and actual human experiences. For every one of us only those facts and phenomena "exist" for which we possess *adaequatio*, and as we are not entitled to assume that we are necessarily adequate to everything, at all times, and in whatever condition we may find ourselves, so we are not entitled to insist that something inaccessible to us has no existence at all and is nothing but a phantom of other people's imaginations.

There are physical facts which the bodily senses pick up, but there are also nonphysical facts which remain unnoticed *unless* the work of the senses is controlled and completed by certain "higher" faculties of the mind. Some of these nonphysical facts represent "grades of significance," to use a term coined by G. N. M. Tyrrell, who gives the following illustration:

Take a book, for example. To an animal a book is merely a coloured shape. Any higher significance a book may hold lies above the level of its thought. And the book *is* a coloured shape; the animal is not wrong. To go a step higher, an uneducated savage may regard a book as a series of marks on paper. This is the book as seen on a higher level of significance than the animal's, and one which corresponds to the savage's level of thought. Again it is not wrong, only the book *can* mean more. It may mean a series of letters arranged according to certain rules. This is the book on a higher level of significance than the savage's. . . . Or finally, on a still higher level, the book may be an expression of meaning. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In all these cases the "sense data" are the same; the facts given to the eye are identical. Not the eye, only the mind, can determine the "grade of significance." People say: "Let the facts speak for themselves"; they forget that the speech of facts is real only if it is heard and understood. It is thought to be an easy matter to distinguish between fact and theory, between perception and interpretation. In truth, it is extremely difficult. You see the full moon just above the horizon behind the silhouettes of some trees or buildings, and it appears to you as a

disc as large as that of the sun; but the full moon straight above your head looks quite small. What are the true sizes of the moon images actually received by the eye? They are exactly the same in both cases. And yet, even when you know this to be so, your mind will not easily let you see the two discs as of equal size. "Perception is not determined simply by the stimulus pattern," writes R. L. Gregory in *Eye and Brain*; "rather it is a dynamic searching for the best interpretation of the available data."<sup>2</sup> This searching uses not only the sensory information but also *other knowledge and experience*, although just how far experience affects perception, according to Gregory, is a difficult question to answer. In short, we "see" not simply with our eyes but with a great part of our mental equipment as well, and since this mental equipment varies greatly from person to person, there are inevitably many things which some people can "see" but which others cannot, or, to put it differently, for which some people are *adequate* while others are not.

When the level of the knower is not adequate to the level (or grade of significance) of the object of knowledge, the result is not factual error but something much more serious: an inadequate and impoverished view of reality. Tyrrell pursues his illustration further, as follows:

A book, we will suppose, has fallen into the hands of intelligent beings who know nothing of what writing and printing mean, but they are accustomed to dealing with the external relationships of things. They try to find out the "laws" of the book, which for them mean the principles governing the order in which the letters are arranged. . . . They will think they have discovered the laws of the book when they have formulated certain rules governing the external relationships of the letters. That each word and each sentence expresses a meaning will never dawn on them because their background of thought is made up of concepts which deal only with external relationships, and explanation to them means solving the puzzle of these external relationships. . . . Their methods will never reach the grade [of significance] which contains the idea of meanings.<sup>3</sup>

Just as the world is a hierarchic structure with regard to which it is meaningful to speak of "higher" and "lower," so the

senses, organs, powers, and other "instruments" by which the human being perceives and gains knowledge of the world form a hierarchic structure of "higher" and "lower." "As above, so below," the Ancients used to say: to the world outside us there corresponds, in some fashion, a world inside us. And just as the higher levels in the world are rarer, more exceptional, than the lower levels—mineral matter is ubiquitous; life only a thin film on the Earth; consciousness, relatively rare; and self-awareness, the great exception—so it is with the abilities of people. The lowest abilities, such as seeing and counting, belong to every normal person, while the higher abilities, such as those needed for the perceiving and grasping of the more subtle aspects of reality, are less and less common as we move up the scale.

There are inequalities in the human endowment, but they are probably of much less importance than are differences in interests and in what Tyrrell calls the "background of thought." The intelligent beings of Tyrrell's allegory lacked *adaequatio* with regard to the book because they based themselves on the assumption that the "external relationships of the letters" were all that mattered. They were what we should call scientific materialists, whose faith is that objective reality is limited to that which can be actually observed and who are ruled by a *methodical aversion to the recognition of higher levels or grades of significance*.

The level of significance to which an observer or investigator tries to attune himself is chosen, not by his intelligence, but by his faith. The facts themselves which he observes do not carry labels indicating the appropriate level at which they *ought to be* considered. Nor does the choice of an inadequate level lead the intelligence into factual error or logical contradiction. All levels of significance *up to* the adequate level—i.e., up to the level of *meaning* in the example of the book—are equally factual, equally logical, equally objective, but not equally *real*.

It is by an act of faith that I choose the level of my investigation; hence the saying "*Credo ut intelligam*"—I have faith so as to be able to understand. If I lack faith, and consequently choose an inadequate level of significance for my investigation, no degree of "objectivity" will save me from missing the point

of the whole operation, and I rob myself of the very possibility of understanding. I shall then be one of those of whom it has been said: "They, seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."<sup>4</sup>

In short, when dealing with something representing a higher grade of significance or Level of Being than inanimate matter, the observer depends not only on the adequateness of his own higher qualities, perhaps "developed" through learning and training; he depends also on the adequateness of his "faith" or, to put it more conventionally, of his fundamental presuppositions and basic assumptions. In this respect he tends to be very much a child of his time and of the civilization in which he has spent his formative years; for the human mind, generally speaking, does not just think: it thinks with ideas, most of which it simply adopts and takes over from its surrounding society.

There is nothing more difficult than to become critically aware of the presuppositions of one's thought. Everything can be seen directly except the eye through which we see. Every thought can be scrutinized directly except the thought by which we scrutinize. A special effort, an effort of self-awareness, is needed: that almost impossible feat of thought recoiling upon itself—almost impossible but not quite. In fact, this is the power that makes man human and also capable of transcending his humanity. It lies in what the Bible calls man's "inward parts." As already mentioned, "inward" corresponds with "higher" and "outward" corresponds with "lower." The senses are man's most outward instruments; when it is a case of "they, seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not," the fault lies not with the senses but with the inward parts—"for this people's *heart* is waxed gross"; they fail to "*understand with their heart.*"<sup>5</sup> Only through the "heart" can contact be made with the higher grades of significance and Levels of Being.

For anyone wedded to the materialistic Scientism of the modern age it will be impossible to understand what this means. He has no belief in anything higher than man, and he sees in man nothing but a highly evolved animal. He insists that truth can be discovered only by means of the brain, which is situated in



the head and not in the heart. All this means that "understanding with one's heart" is to him a meaningless collection of words. From his point of view, he is quite right: The brain, situated in the head and supplied with data by the bodily senses, is fully adequate for dealing with inanimate matter, the lowest of the four great Levels of Being. Indeed, its working would be only disturbed, and possibly distorted, if the "heart" interfered in any way. As a materialistic scientist, he believes that life, consciousness, and self-awareness are nothing but manifestations of complex arrangements of inanimate particles—a "faith" which makes it perfectly rational for him to place exclusive reliance on the bodily senses, to "stay in the head," and to reject any interference from the "powers" situated in the heart. For him, in other words, higher levels of Reality simply do not exist, *because his faith excludes the possibility of their existence*. He is like a man who, although in possession of a radio receiver, refuses to use it because he has made up his mind that nothing can be obtained from it but atmospheric noises.

Faith is not in conflict with reason, nor is it a substitute for reason. Faith chooses the grade of significance or Level of Being at which the search for knowledge and understanding is to aim. There is reasonable faith and there is unreasonable faith. To look for meaning and purpose at the level of inanimate matter would be as unreasonable an act of faith as an attempt to "explain" the masterpieces of human genius as nothing but the outcome of economic interests or sexual frustrations. The faith of the agnostic is perhaps the most unreasonable of all, because, unless it is mere camouflage, it is a decision to treat the question of significance as insignificant, like saying: "I am not willing to decide whether [reverting to Tyrrell's example] a book is merely a colored shape, a series of marks on paper, a series of letters arranged according to certain rules, or an expression of meaning." Not surprisingly, traditional wisdom has always treated the agnostic with withering contempt: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."<sup>6</sup>

It can hardly be taken as an unreasonable act of faith when people accept the testimony of prophets, sages, and saints who, in different languages but with virtually one voice, declare that the book of this world is not merely a colored shape but an expression of meaning; that there are Levels of Being above that of humanity; and that man can reach these higher levels provided he allows his reason to be guided by faith. No one has described man's possible journey to the truth more clearly than the Bishop of Hippo, Saint Augustine (354-430):

The first step forward . . . will be to see that the attention is fastened on truth. Of course faith does not see truth clearly, but it has an eye for it, so to speak, which enables it to see that a thing is true even when it does not see the reason for it. It does not yet see the thing it believes, but at least it knows for certain that it does not see it and that it is true none the less. This possession through faith of a hidden but certain truth is the very thing which will impel the mind to penetrate its content, and to give the formula, "Believe that you may understand" (*Crede ut intelligas*), its full meaning.<sup>7</sup>

With the light of the intellect we can see things which are invisible to our bodily senses. No one denies that mathematical and geometrical truths are "seen" in this way. To *prove* a proposition means to give it a form, by analysis, simplification, transformation, or dissection, through which the truth can be *seen*; beyond this seeing there is neither the possibility of nor the need for any further proof.

Can we see, with the light of the intellect, things which go beyond mathematics and geometry? Again, no one denies that we can *see* what another person means, sometimes even when he does not express himself accurately. Our everyday language is a constant witness to this power of *seeing*, of grasping ideas, which is quite different from the processes of thinking and forming opinions. It produces flashes of understanding.

As far as St Augustine is concerned, faith is the heart of the matter. *Faith tells us what there is to understand*; it purifies the heart, and so allows reason to profit from discussion; it enables reason to arrive at an understanding of God's revelation. In short, when Augustine



speaks of understanding, he always has in mind the product of a rational activity for which faith prepares the way.<sup>8</sup>

As the Buddhists say, faith opens "the eye of truth," also called "the Eye of the Heart" or "the Eye of the Soul." Saint Augustine insisted that "our whole business in this life is to restore to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen." Persia's greatest Sufi poet, Rumi (1207-1273), speaks of "the eye of the heart, which is seventy-fold and of which these two sensible eyes are only the gleaners";<sup>9</sup> while John Smith the Platonist advises: "We must shut the eyes of sense, and open that brighter eye of our understandings, that other eye of the soul, as the philosopher calls our intellectual faculty, 'which indeed all have, but few make use of.'"<sup>10</sup> The Scottish theologian, Richard of Saint-Victor (d. 1173), says: "For the outer sense alone perceives visible things and the eye of the heart alone sees the invisible."<sup>11</sup>

The power of "the Eye of the Heart," which produces *insight*, is vastly superior to the power of thought, which produces *opinions*. "Recognising the poverty of philosophical opinions," says the Buddha, "not adhering to any of them, seeking the truth, *I saw*."<sup>12</sup> The process of mobilizing the various powers possessed by man, gradually and, as it were, organically, is described in a Buddhist text:

One can not, I say, attain supreme knowledge all at once; only by a gradual training, a gradual action, a gradual unfolding, does one attain perfect knowledge. In what manner? A man comes, moved by confidence; having come, he joins; having joined, he listens; listening, he receives the doctrine; having received the doctrine, he remembers it; he examines the sense of the things remembered; from examining the sense, the things are approved of; having approved, desire is born; he ponders; pondering, he eagerly trains himself; and eagerly training himself, he mentally realises the highest truth itself and, penetrating it by means of wisdom, *he sees*.<sup>13</sup>

This is the process of gaining *adaequatio*, of developing the instrument capable of seeing and thus understanding the truth that does not merely inform the mind but liberates the soul.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."<sup>14</sup>

As these matters have become unfamiliar in the modern world, it may be of value if I quote a contemporary author, Maurice Nicoll:

A world of *inward* perception then begins to open out, distinct from that of outer perception. Inner space appears. *The creation of the world begins in man himself.* At first all is darkness: then light appears and is separated from the darkness. By this light we understand a form of consciousness to which our ordinary consciousness is, by comparison, darkness. This light has constantly been equated with truth and freedom. Inner perception of oneself, of one's invisibility, is the beginning of light. This perception of truth is not a matter of sense-perception, but of the perception of the truth of "ideas"—through which, certainly, the perception of our senses is greatly increased. The path of self-knowledge has this aim in view, for no one can know himself unless he turns inwards. . . . This struggle marks the commencement of that inner development of man which has been written about in many different ways (yet really always in the same way) throughout that small part of Time whose literature belongs to us, and which we think of as the entire history of the world.<sup>15</sup>

We shall take a closer look at the process of "turning inward" in a later chapter. Here it is necessary simply to recognize that sense data alone do not produce insight or understanding of any kind. *Ideas* produce insight and understanding, and the world of ideas lies within us. The truth of ideas cannot be seen by the senses but only by that special instrument sometimes referred to as "the Eye of the Heart," which, in a mysterious way, has the power of recognizing truth when confronted with it. If we describe the results of this power as illumination, and the results of the senses as experience, we can say that

1. Experience, and not illumination, tells us about the existence, appearance, and changes of sensible things, such as stones, plants, animals, and people.
2. Illumination, and not experience, tells us what such things

mean, what they could be, and what they perhaps ought to be.

Our bodily senses, yielding experience, do not put us into touch with the higher grades of significance and the higher Levels of Being existing in the world around us: they are not *adequate* for such a purpose, having been designed solely for registering the *outer* differences between various existing things and not their *inner* meanings.

There is a story of two monks who were passionate smokers and who tried to settle between themselves the question of whether it was permissible to smoke while praying. As they could come to no conclusion, they decided to ask their respective superiors. One of them got into deep trouble with his abbot; the other received a pat of encouragement. When they met again, the first one, slightly suspicious, inquired of the second: "What did you actually ask?" and received the answer "I asked whether it was permissible to pray while smoking." While our inner senses infallibly see the profound difference between "praying while smoking" and "smoking while praying," to our outer senses there is no difference at all.

Higher grades of significance and Levels of Being cannot be recognized without faith and the help of the higher abilities of the inner man. When these higher abilities are not brought into action, either because they are lacking or because an absence of faith leaves them unutilized, there is a lack of *adaequatio* on the part of the knower, with the consequence that nothing of higher significance or Level of Being can be known by him.