Supplement to
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Martin Buber and Davis McCaughey: celebration and criticism*

The subtitle may suggest that I am going to celebrate and to criticize Martin Buber and Davis McCaughey. I am, but intend it to have two other meanings also. We should see both men as themselves both celebrators and critics; and we may fruitfully pursue two questions concerning celebration and criticism in general, which may lead us to recognize that the two activities need to be related. The first is "What is there especially for human beings to celebrate?" and the second "What is criticism at its best, and how far should it go, especially in dealing with religion?"

In the first of six sections of this paper, after some biographical detail underlying Davis's relation to Buber, I give and explore one example of Davis's celebrating and offer three, all in relation to universities, of his criticising. Section 2 presents some of Buber's criticisms of Christianity, especially in its orthodox form so influenced by Paul. Christian scholars have, as I illustrate in the third section, given too little attention to such criticisms from within Judaism. In Section 4 I examine what Davis noted in an address he gave in 1999, Buber's emphasis on *Begegnung* (meeting? encounter?) in his treatment of what matters most in human life, and his linking of that to the theme of relationship to God. I propose that, rather than think and talk of people as meeting or encountering one another, we attend to various kinds of what I call responsive cooperation. One of those kinds is cooperative criticism, and I offer in Section 5 a general account of criticism at its best, drawing first on Sir Walter Moberly, whom both Davis and I knew and from whom we learnt much, and then on Plato, Kant, Mill and Green, before returning to Davis. Finally I offer a critical response to our question "What is there especially for human beings to celebrate?" with reference to both Buber and Davis.

1

In 1968, when I was editing *Crux*, the journal of the Australian Student Christian Movement, Davis telephoned me. He told me that his friend Ronnie Gregor Smith had died, and he said he would like to write about him in *Crux*. Of course I regarded it as a privilege to publish such an article.

The two men and their wives Jean and Käthe had been close friends in London when they were in their thirties, in the post-war years. Ronald Gregor Smith, after working on reconstruction in Germany, became Associate Editor and then Editor of SCM Press, to which he gave added dimensions, not least by inviting Christian and non-Christian writers to contribute books or articles to a new Library of Philosophy and Theology. Davis was Associate Study Secretary and then Study Secretary of the SCM of Great Britain and Ireland. In 1953 he and Jean and their children came to Melbourne: he had been appointed Professor of New Testament at Ormond College. It was therefore unsurprising that in 1955 Gregor Smith came to Melbourne to deliver a set of lectures, later published as *The New Man*. As a young student of Arts and

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Theology I listened with excitement to those lectures, given in College Church. I picked up from them the word 'heteronomous', which I had not yet learnt from Kant. Gregor Smith was seeking to explain in what sense our world had "come of age", so that we should no longer think of ourselves as living heteronomously, under the authority of some religious body (or Book) that would answer our questions for us. Soon he was to become Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, and Davis was to encourage Harry Wardlaw to do his doctoral work there.

What was Davis, in 1968 in his mid-fifties, to write about his friend who had suddenly died at about the same age? He began with a story he loved, and I have loved it ever since. He also told it thirty-one years later at the beginning (p.106f) of the latest of the addresses+ collected in *Fresh Words and Deeds*, one given to a group within the Council of Christians and Jews:

> It was from [Buber's *Ich und Du*] that Professor [John] Baillie quoted a section to his class in Edinburgh in 1936 or 1937. In a way that Professors do, he remarked in an aside 'Someone should translate this book into English. It would be a great service to us all.'
>
> At the end of the class a young man came forward and asked if he might borrow the book. … Imagine his surprise when a week later the student brought him some pages of English translation and asked Baillie if this would do. Professor Baillie told me 'I did not want to alter a single word.' So, in 1937, *Ich und Du* appeared in English, and was launched on its influential way.

How much his telling of that story tells us about Davis. He values the conveying of ideas from one language and tradition to another. He celebrates in his friend Ronnie, who went on to do much more translation from German, and he himself also possessed, a youthful spiritedness and readiness to do something *perisson* (Matthew 5.47), something far beyond what one was required by others to do, something extraordinary and spontaneous, in which, to use words quoted by E.R.Dodds in an inaugural lecture at Oxford in 1936, one invented one's own duties. He knew, as the beginning of the lecture "Theology and Imagination" shows, that it's the zestful and imaginative adventuring, the *studium*, the readiness to ask questions old and new, to find books for oneself, to want to talk about them with others, to meet and learn, not uncritically, from people one admired, that makes the best kind of student. I am sure he would agree with me, even though late in life he was saddened by the dearth of young students for the ministry of preaching and sacraments, that this approach to study, and to life, can be shared by people of any age, if they abandon embarrassment and crustiness and become as (intelligent and questioning) little children. In 1992 he said wryly and with a profound underlying criticism: "It would be regarded as dangerously elitist to say that you have enjoyed being at a university and enjoy going back there".[1] In celebratory mode he would tell of people he had been taught or influenced by, as he tells of being taught at Cambridge by Basil Willey and told me when I was young of T.W. ("Tommie") Manson.[2] As you read either of the collections of his addresses, you are likely to be astonished at the breadth of his reading. Indeed, when his addresses occasionally had a fault, it was sometimes, as in "Virtue in the World", of the kind that threatens all teachers and speakers who also read widely: not to have allowed ourselves enough time to digest what we have read and determine what to include and what to omit on a particular occasion.[3]

Davis cared deeply about universities, and late in his life saw Australian ones departing from their traditional ideals. He noticed that few, even in the churches, seemed to be as disturbed about that as they ought to be.[4] (Is that, one might wonder, partly because secondary and tertiary education in Australian universities has seldom articulated and communicated those ideals as clearly, amply and effectively as was done for Davis as he studied in Belfast and at Cambridge and Edinburgh?) Here is just one sentence, an admirable example of the concise parallelism that is often so valuable in good prose, to convey something of the trenchancy and range of mind of Davis as a critic:

> Universities have been thrown into crises through demands that they should grow larger, that there should be more of them, that they should compete one with another, that they should be organised more like major business and industrial companies; they have been attacked from without, and too often betrayed from within.[5]

I recall the controlled scorn for blowing one's own trumpet with which he said on one occasion that **every** Victorian university now told him, in the literature it sent to him, that it was the best. What a critic he was, but also what a celebrator.

Martin Buber was born in 1878 and died in 1965. I know no better expression of his attitude to Christianity than an address he gave in Stuttgart in 1930. He had admirably accepted an admirable invitation to address a conference of "the Four Societies for Mission to the Jews in the German Language". In his first paragraph he said "I am against the cause for which you hold your conference". We are indebted to Greta Hort, who spent ten years in Melbourne as Principal of University Women's College, for translating this and others of Buber's essays and addresses under the title *Mamre: Essays in Religion*.[6] (Mamre is a place named at Genesis 18.1.) This 1930 address, which still deserves wide attention, is called "The Two Centres of the Jewish Soul". The first such "centre" is what Buber calls (p.20) "the fundamental experience that God is wholly raised above man … and that yet he is present with these human beings who are absolutely incommensurable with him in an immediate relationship". Lest we should think that he means some kind of unworldly mysticism, Buber adds "God speaks to man with the life which he gives him …. Therefore, man can only answer God with the whole of life ─ with the way in which he lives this life that is given him."

When he writes of the second centre, he does not name yet plainly refers to Christianity, the religion that claims that the Redeemer or Saviour of the world has come:

> The second centre of the Jewish soul is the deep consciousness that God's redeeming power is working everywhere and at all times, and that yet nowhere and at no time is there a state of redemption. … the Jew, as part of the world, experiences, perhaps more intensely than any other part, the world's lack of redemption. … he *cannot* concede that the redemption has taken place; he knows that it has not.
>
> (p.xxx)

Buber's two final paragraphs (p.31) contain first a recognition of alienation, and yet that is not his last word to his Christian audience:

> Until the Messiah comes, our destinies divide us. Until then the Jew is to the Christian the incomprehensibly obdurate man, who will not see what has happened; and the Christian is to the Jew the reckless man, who in an unredeemed world affirms that its redemption is accomplished. This is a gulf which no human power can bridge. But it does not prevent the common watch for a unity coming from God to us ….

Then there is a remarkable use of the phrase 'our own true faith':

> You and we [*sic*], each of us, it behoves to hold inviolably fast our own true faith, that is: our own deepest relationship to truth; and you and we, each of us, it behoves to show the religious respect for the true faith of the other.

What is "our own true faith", which is "our own deepest relationship to truth"? Buber obviously does not mean here that Jews and Christians should each hold tenaciously to their own partially incompatible sets of doctrines, which cannot both be entirely true. Our deepest relationship to truth is to want it, in relation to some crucial question, passionately and therefore to seek it, even though often we can do no more than recognize inadequacies and get nearer to truth than we were before, and to recognize that the search for it needs to include all three of these: the individual's sometimes lonely, sometimes agonized paths of thought, the exploration with others who share them of the traditions by which he or she has been influenced, **and** the kind of enquiry which studies, learns from and criticizes a wide range of the thought of **other** traditions, religious or non-religious. I shall return to that subject in Section 5.

A very important work is Buber's *Two Types of Faith*, completed in 1950 and translated shortly after by Norman P. Goldhawk. I discussed it in *Learningguild Letter* 2.2002, and in a supplement furnished a summary and analysis. Here I must be brief. The two types of faith are set out on pp. 9-11: a maintained trust in God, as in Judaism, and a life-determining belief, which has required conversion, as in Christianity, that certain crucial redemptive events have happened. Buber says on p.12 "From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother." He regards him as standing within Judaism, but as taken out of it in Paul's presentation of a Christian gospel that underlies the later orthodoxy according to which Jesus Christ is called not only Lord and Saviour but even God.

> The summons of Jesus to turn into the Kingship of God which has "come near" was transformed into the act of conversion. To the man needing salvation in the despondent hour, salvation is offered if only he will believe that it has happened and has happened in this way. …. To be sure the inner precinct of faith is not to be understood as a mere believing that something is true, but as a constitution of existence; but the fore-court is the holding true of that which has hitherto been considered not true, indeed quite absurd, and there is no other entrance.

Buber cannot accept the view of the Law that he finds in Paul, one that the Christian scholar D.E.H.Whitely, commenting on Romans 5.20f, puts into the words "God gave the law with the immediate intention of transforming unconscious wrong-

doing into conscious sin, and with the ultimate intention of overcoming that sin altogether".[7] He contrasts the Jesus of most of Mark, Matthew and Luke with the one presented by Paul and John:

> a heavenly being, who came down to the world, sojourned in it, left it, ascended to heaven and now enters upon the dominion of the world which originally belonged to him. …. Only one step had to be taken from this to deification.

One might well recall here Dietrich Bonhoeffer's anguished question, part of his reacting in a Nazi prison against what seemed stifling Christian orthodoxy and religiosity, "what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today".[8]

3

In 1969 Buber's son Rafael asked Walter Kaufmann to do a new English translation of *Ich und Du*, which appeared, with a valuable Prologue, in 1970. He kept the title *I and Thou*, but (pp. 1 and 14f) would have preferred 'I and You' as a translation. Buber, he says, "had told [him] that he considered Ronald Gregor Smith … by far his best translator". Kaufmann, however, did not like Gregor Smith's translation, not only because of 'Thou', but because '*Umkehr*' had been rendered by 'reversal', instead of 'return', and '*Begegnung*' and '*Begegnen*' by 'meeting' and 'meet', instead of 'encounter' (pp. 1, 35-37 and 45). The return is one of radical repentance, seeking forgiveness. In his 1957 revision, Gregor Smith had made few changes, but turned for '*Umkehr*' to 'turning', admitting that the latter was "more in line with biblical usage" than his "rather obscure" word 'reversal'. We shall consider the word '*Begegnung*' in the next section.

In his Prologue Kaufmann says (p.21f):

> *I and Thou* survived [during the war years], mainly among Protestant theologians. That a book by a man who felt so strongly about being a Jew should have been acclaimed primarily by Protestants has struck many people as ironical. What is much more remarkable is that a sharp attack on all talk about God and all pretensions to knowledge about God ─ a sustained attempt to rescue the religious dimension of life from the theologians ─ should have been received so well by theologians. They generously acclaimed Buber as a Jewish theologian, and went right on doing what they had done. Only now their discourse was enriched with frequent references to the I-Thou and the I-It.

By contrast, however, in a review of *Two Types of Faith*, Gregor Smith said in his first paragraph that "Buber has delivered a series of shrewd and forceful blows against the Pauline version of Christianity", and in his second that "he is almost right about almost everything", and, after expressing some disagreement, has this final paragraph: "These remarks are intended simply to encourage readers to take up this new book of Buber's; in every chapter there is a wealth of insight which can force us beyond conventional attitudes."[9] Yet the book has since had almost no attention from Christian writers; it is not mentioned by Whitely or even by James D.G. Dunn in his

1998 book of 808 pages *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. How fruitful critical engagement can be is clear from Gregor Smith's main expression of dissent:

> The fact that the Christian belief that the Messiah has come, and the new age already broken in, is a belief *that* something is true does not exclude the fact that at the heart of this Christian belief there is also, and *in* this belief, a relation of trust, a turning to God. The two go together. Do they not always?

We could very valuably examine Paul's work to see whether, as Buber would say, believing and faith have become so focused on Jesus Christ that any prospect of an unmediated turning to God or trust in God is obscured. What did Paul mean, for example, when he told the Galatians "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (3.26)?

But Gregor Smith himself seems not to have followed up such matters, to judge from what he wrote in his short book *Martin Buber* (1966). How little close attention has been given generally by Christian writers to Jewish criticism of Christianity. When I read *The Founder of Christianity*, a much-praised book (1971) about Jesus by C.H.Dodd, by whom Davis was greatly influenced, I was struck, near the end of Chapter IV where he is seeking to explain the rejection Jesus incurred, by a quotation from the Jewish author, Joseph Klausner, of a vast book called, in its translation from the Hebrew, *Jesus of Nazareth* (1925). I found that Dodd had not preserved the emphasis Klausner had given (p.376) for the phrases '*civil life*' and '*present world*'. It was **there** that "the nation as a whole", not just the scribes and Pharisees, wanted "the moral teaching of the prophets" to be realized, and by contrast Jesus's teaching was seen as "an abnormal and even dangerous phantasy" (Dodd omits 'even'); its "extreme" version of Judaism meant that "it became, in a sense, non-Judaism". Dodd substantially accepts that explanation of the opposition to Jesus, but adds that there was something deeper, namely a suggestion in Jesus's words that led Jews to think of him as a blasphemer. But that is in Klausner too, in the short chapter beginning on the next page. How valuable it would have been if Dodd had invited his readers to study the second half of Klausner's book (from p.229), in which he discusses the life of Jesus with careful attention to the Synoptic Gospels, and concludes that most Jews could not and cannot but reject Jesus's over-emphasis on his own relation to God, his unpractical downgrading of the importance of family ties and what we call "ordinary life", and his unfounded expectation that civilization was soon to reach a dramatic end. It is valuable (but I have never known students to be asked to do any such thing) to compare that second half of Klausner with T.W. Manson's vivid book *The Sayings of Jesus*, and especially the two epilogues in it, of which the first has (at p.148) the admission that "It is clear from the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus expected the end of the existing order and the establishment of the new to come quickly, suddenly, and completely" and the second claims what to Judaism is incomprehensible, that "The ministry of Jesus … *is* the Kingdom [of God] at work in the world."

4

I turn now to Buber's treatment in *Ich und Du* of what he called *Begegnung*, and Davis's appreciative reference to it in that 1999 address from which I quoted in Section 1. Quite early in Part 1 Buber ends a section with a sentence, given a line to itself, that has become famous:

Alles wirkliche Leben ist Begegnung.

Davis gives it as 'Real life is Meeting'; Gregor Smith has 'All real living is meeting', and Kaufmann 'All actual life is encounter'.

Before we try to make clear something of what Buber had in mind, we should note two remarks in Kaufmann's Prologue (p.24f), one by him and one quoted by him and made by Buber in about 1963. The first is "[The style of *Ich und Du*] represents a late flowering of romanticism and tends to blur all contours in the twilight of suggestive but extremely unclear language." Buber, looking back more than forty years, says "At that time I wrote what I wrote under the spell of an irresistible enthusiasm." Poets, thought Plato, should be seen as *entheoi* and *enthousiazontes*, with a god within them and in that sense inspired.[10] No wonder he said that "there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry".[11] I do not think that the philosopher and the poet must be unappreciative of one another; but the cast of mind is certainly different. Buber was primarily a kind of poet, at least when he wrote *Ich und Du*; Davis's mind was formed by poetry rather than by philosophy, and he was, I think, uncomfortable with philosophy; I am certainly moved by some poetry, as Plato was, but my basic orientation is, like his, certainly philosophical.

Two obvious objections might be made to Buber's famous remark: there is much more to "real" or "actual" life, even to a good life, than meeting or encountering others, and many meetings or encounters of ours have nothing special or satisfying about them. (Often we should be glad if they did; often we are content that they should not.) Buber knew that, of course: his book is *Ich und Du* because he wanted to celebrate what was truly interpersonal, and attached such importance, as Kant did, to **not** treating others as *Es*, It, without the respect and acknowledgement due to them as persons. Let us find in Buber's book a clue to what he wanted us to recognize as subhuman, and then consider a striking illustration of it which Gregor Smith provides from a double disappointment of his own.

There is a section in Part Two (pp. 58-62 of the text published in Berlin in 1936), one where I think Kaufmann's translation (pp. 96-100) is at most of the points at which I shall draw from it preferable to Gregor Smith's (pp. 55-58), and one which should remind us of Davis's concern that economics, or just greed, often rules the roost.[12] Buber, more than eighty years ago, imagines some "realist", as we may call him, asking "But isn't the communal life [*das Gemeinleben*] of modern man bound to be submerged in the It-world?" and saying "modern developments have expunged almost every trace of a life in which human beings confront each other [*Gegenüberleben*] and have meaningful relationships [*sinnvolle Beziehung*]. Buber adds that the situation is even worse: the momentum of an impersonal existence is stronger than the leaders who think they control it. However, he also says that even the will to profit and the will to power [*Nutzwille*, *Machtwille*] "are natural and legitimate as long as they are tied to the will to human relations [*Beziehungswille*] and carried by it".

Pamela Vermes, in her book *Buber*, quotes at p.42 Buber's explanation to Gabriel Marcel of why he had to use the word '*Beziehung*' ('relation(ship)'), as in fact he does very often, as well as '*Begegnung*' in order to cover the continuing relationship and not just the encounter with the other. I find it striking that, in a talk of 1958, "Man in his Wholeness", Gregor Smith should, in this order, (i) say that "The loss of the

personal realm and with it the loss of true community" [of which he has just said of Buber's *Ich und Du* that it is "perhaps … the best known and most useful analysis"] is the point which is most relevant to our immediate problems"; (ii) decline to say much more about it, having found when he had tried that "unless there is already a passionate concern present, whether dormant or outspoken, for the reality of what is meant here, you cannot really hope for a response"; (iii) nevertheless offer to his listeners a striking double example of a lack of concern for interpersonal and in this case international relationships. As Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, he had spoken in 1958 with officials of the German Democratic Republic ("East Germany"), urging the development of a student exchange programme between the Universities of Jena and Glasgow. Though "there was a kind of tolerant applause", Gregor Smith found that "there was in effect no personal dialogue, no openness, no trust, no expectation that possibly we might really understand one another". Then he adds: "when I put forward similar proposals back home in my Faculty meetings in Glasgow, I met with fundamentally the same polite unconcern".[13]

Attending closely to all that Gregor Smith here says, we can describe both his audiences as **unresponsive**. How much disappointment and frustration, even alienation and despair, is caused in schools and universities, in workplaces, in families and marriages by unresponsiveness. At worst, a person is treated as a thing, as "part of the furniture"; but someone who believes that he or she is far from treating the other in that way may succumb, not just temporarily, to a kind of bitterness or selfishness or remoteness or just "pressure" and be far from responsive to the other's needs, hopes or words. Surely one of the greatest goods in human life, perhaps the greatest, is **responsive cooperation**, which can take many forms. To take just two, it is, in many respects, **the** condition (in both senses of that word, and of 'happy') of a happy marriage and a happy family. Shall we change Buber's aphorism to "Central to a fully human life is responsive cooperation"?

I have long loved some words of Kant that express much of what I have in mind here. He uses three times the noun '*Zweck*' in saying "… the ends of a subject who is an end in himself must … be also, as far as possible, *my* ends."[14] One may illustrate that from the best kind of marriage, or even relationship of teacher and pupil. Near the end of his Afterword of 1957 Buber said that "the specifically educational relationship is incompatible with complete mutuality", i.e., that of the "*Ich und Du*" relation. I think he fails there to recognize the possibility that the student, especially in a one-with-one relation, but also in a good seminar, may be so responsive to a good teacher's aims and methods that they may both eagerly engage in responsive cooperation with equal effort, satisfaction and even concern for the other. But that, like so much in education, needs to be exemplified and then celebrated, if it is not to be thought a mere dream.

I turn now to the idea that we may speak of *Begegnung* in relation to human beings and God. Davis quotes from Gregor Smith's translation of that 1957 Afterword (or Postscript):

> God's speech to men penetrates what happens in the life of each one of us, and all that happens in the world around us, biographical and historical, and makes it for you and me into instruction, message, demand.[15]

It is important, as so often, to appreciate the context. The preceding sentence warns that we must not think of the "conversation with God" as "something happening solely

alongside or above the everyday". Gregor Smith followed Buber here in emphasizing, concerning "the Church", that it "needs … to be able far more thoroughly to identify itself, without reserve, with the studies and work of the world".[16] The four sentences after the one quoted by Davis run as follows, and close the Postscript:

> Happening upon happening, situation upon situation, are enabled and empowered by the personal speech of God to demand of the human person that he take his stand and make his decision. Often enough we think there is nothing to hear, but long before we have put wax in our ears.
>
> The existence of mutuality between God and man cannot be proved, just as God's existence cannot be proved. Yet he who dares to speak of it, bears witness, and calls to witness him to whom he speaks ─ whether that witness be now or in the future.

First we may say that Buber does not recognize that the 'God's speech …' sentence offers an **interpretation** of human life.[17] Some people take what they experience as being (or better, as implying?) instructions or messages from God, and many do not. Maimonides writes of the influence on us of habituation: how important that is in understanding the lives both of those who are called "the faithful" and of the rest of us.[18] Gregor Smith tells us that Buber in early life had been habituated to a vivid Hasidist form of Judaism, just as, he says in another place, his own teacher John Baillie's talk of a sense of the presence of God springs from "his earliest days in the Scottish Highland manse where he grew up" and tends toward being a substitute for faith.[19] Secondly, the image of putting wax into one's ears, though sometimes appropriate, is often not, and is therefore inimical to understanding the situation of many who have never or not for a long time had any religious faith. It is likely to be a barrier to any responsive cooperation with them in considering whether any such faith, however comforting, is or is not incoherent and groundless.

Thirdly, however, we may welcome a (Kantian) emphasis here on the centrality in human life of taking a stand and making a decision, and a (somewhat Platonic) one on inviting the other to consider whether he or she has had already or might yet have certain reactions or experiences (for Buber, especially those of an I-thou kind).[20] Fourthly, we need to keep in mind Buber's actual insights into experiences that have such a quality. Two may be given here, the first in Kaufmann's translation and the second in Gregor Smith's.[21] Buber writes of "the central actuality of an everyday hour on earth, with a streak of sunshine on a maple twig and an intimation of the eternal You", and also says "he who loves a woman, and brings her life to present realisation in his own, is able to look in the Thou of her eyes into a beam of the eternal Thou". (Just before, and so as to fill out, his use of the simple word '*liebt*' ('loves') Buber has the rare word '*vergegenwärtigend*', 'making present': we might say in English "making her life a present reality in his own". That is love indeed.

5

One kind of responsive cooperation, as my last use of the phrase indicated, is that in which people engage together in **criticism**: together they consider whether there are sufficient grounds for regarding something as true or valuable. There is so much to be learnt about criticism, whether practised with others or alone (at best, in either case,

with a lively sympathy). It is not of course properly understood as the pointing out of actual or supposed faults, though that is often involved. I define it as active consideration of what has been said or written or made or done with a view to representing it accurately and fairly and identifying what in it is or may be true and/or valuable, and/or what is neither. (A genuinely tertiary education is largely a training in that activity; and what we used to call "Clear Thinking" is one prerequisite.) Davis, with his liking for Mill's distinction between Bentham's approach and that of Coleridge, would have stressed 'valuable' rather than 'true'; I should stress them equally.[22] Serious philosophy is a certain kind and range of analysis accompanied by criticism, and preferably includes and is deepened by an acquaintance with some of one's notable predecessors gained by studying them both analytically and critically.

My good friend Doug Fullerton once spoke, in my presence, of "John and his philosophers", with perhaps a gentle suggestion that the relationship was not as far as it should be from idolatry. I have no desire to present any of them as infallible; but I shall show here that our appreciation of the nature and range of criticism at its best is greatly enhanced by attention to some philosophers to whom I commonly resort with a not uncritical gratitude.

I begin with one for whose friendship and writing both Davis and I were grateful. Sir Walter Moberly's book *The Crisis in the University* (1949) reflected and amplified much thinking in Britain during the Second World War about what was needed in the post-war university. He writes (p.124f) of the judicial temper as fundamental to a university. (I should prefer that we thought more widely of **any** person or group undertaking serious enquiry, for which universities are not, of course, the only locus, nor at present very well disposed.)

> It is the fruit of a passion for the whole truth as against half-truths, for proportion as against onesidedness. …. We are only fully entitled to reject [particular views] finally when we have first understood why they seem plausible to those who hold them and then have seen further. A merely combative attitude is untrue to the university spirit. That spirit is expressed by Henry Sidgwick when, writing … of … his friendship with the Anglo-Catholic, Edward Talbot, he says, "We agree in two characteristics which are quite independent of formal creeds ─ a belief that we *can* learn, and a determination that we *will* learn, from people of the most opposite opinions."

Plato considered that the supreme philosophical activity was uncovering our and others' presuppositions or assumptions (*hupotheseis*), which we or others are liable to take for granted, and exposing them to a process of testing (an *elenchos*) to see what they mean and whether they are consistent with the full range of other propositions which we are willing or ought to be willing to affirm; if they are not, we ought to discard them; only those which are deserve to be regarded as reliable starting-points (*archai*) for our thought.[23] In Section 6 I shall ask whether Christianity has not been vitiated by the assumption, not shared by Judaism, that the human being in his or her present state is fundamentally to be regarded as a sinner in need of salvation.

Kant gave to respect (*Achtung*) a very prominent place in his thought, but he distrusted those who expected it for their occupations and doctrines and thought them

beyond criticism. So he wrote, in a note in the original Preface (1781) to the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

> Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism everything must submit. Religion through its sanctity, and lawgiving through its majesty, may seek to exempt themselves from it. But they then awaken just suspicion, and cannot claim the sincere respect which reason accords only to that which has been able to sustain the test of free and open examination.

We can hear in those last words an echo of Plato's insistence that what we hold should be able to stand up to an *elenchos*. How much harm is done by habituated uncritical reliance on such long traditions as those that keep women from the full range of positions of ministry in church or synagogue.

Chapter 2 of Mill's *Liberty* is not merely about why a state should permit wide liberty of thought and expression: it is a charter for honest and fruitful thinking and discussion. To summarize its 44 paragraphs, we may say that Mill declares that we should not only tolerate but seek out (para. 7) and endeavour to learn from those who disagree with us, for (1A) they might turn out to be right and ourselves wrong; or (1B) they may be mistaken but have got onto a portion of the truth that we have neglected; or (2) even though we may be entirely right in our opinion about something, we shall not adequately understand (A) the grounds, or (B) the significance, of our opinion unless it is "vigorously and earnestly contested" (para. 43) by those who do not accept it. One must if possible hear contrary arguments from those who actually present or accept them, "who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them" (para. 23). How little that kind of discussion has been practised or sought in theological halls, or indeed, in connection with religion, in church-connected residential colleges.

T.H.Green is an excellent practitioner of criticism rather than a theorist of it. An example is his partly favourable and partly unfavourable evaluation of Benthamite utilitarianism.[24] He also knew how hard it could be to turn from systems of thought and practice to which one had been habituated. Mrs Humphrey Ward, who had known Green and who venerated him, and as "Mr Grey" portrayed him in her perceptive novel *Robert Elsmere* (1888), has him say in Chapter XXVII to Robert, who had been his pupil at Oxford and now finds that he must in conscience give up his position as a priest of the Church of England:

> I know ─ oh! I know very well ─ the man of the world scoffs, but to him who has once been a Christian of the old sort, the parting with the Christian mythology is the rending asunder of bones and marrow. It means parting with half the confidence, half the joy of life! But take heart. … It is the education of God! Do not imagine it will put you farther from Him! He is in criticism, in science, in doubt, so long as the doubt is a pure and honest doubt, as yours is. He is in all life, in all thought.

We may recall, on reading those last words, the first of Buber's two "centres".

Criticism may, then, be extremely disturbing. Robert Anderson, who has been a Uniting Church Professor of Old Testament and is deeply committed both to the study of Jewish scriptures and other literature and to the Council for Christians and Jews, has spoken of his "major inner theological turmoil" and "intellectual conversion", whereby he now regards Jesus not as a predicted Messiah but as "one who emerges from the

Jewish people", one through whom access is given to the Gentiles to faith in "the God of Israel".[25] His paper putting that view is not, I think, widely known or discussed. How much is missed by such neglect both in churches generally and in theological education in particular.

Davis was an exceedingly busy man in many areas. How hard it is to combine reading, writing, teaching, organizing **and** serious discussion I know for myself. I wish, however, that he had made more time, set up more occasions, for critical discussion in which people of different views were brought together for that form of responsive cooperation. There is a quadruple sadness about the end of his lecture "Theology and Imagination". Talking to Christian scholars, he first raises "the doubt about ourselves … our internal problem":

> Can we really insert into the living fabric of our lives anything more than a small, and arbitrarily chosen, selection from the great Christian literary tradition? The problem, we know, is not simply one of size, or of time or linguistic competence to master it. The problem is one of sympathy.

But then he speaks of "the external problem":

> How is it that between us and so many of our contemporaries there is such a rift on this matter? We … would not wish to be separated from our contemporaries, especially our younger contemporaries, to whom our Christian language and literature are unintelligible.

He rightly says that "it will require a gigantic imaginative effort", but concludes, I think one has to say weakly, "with an instance [Jesus's telling of a parable, as described in Mark 4] which may or may not be either illuminating or comforting". The parables of a non-exclusive love (that of the Samaritan or the father of the prodigal son), told in Luke, have since been widely attended to; but about those at Mark 4 the author himself suggests, as do the authors of Matthew (13) and Luke (8), that Jesus expected only a few, and those mainly already his disciples, to "have ears to hear" their significance. The final sadness about the end of the lecture is that nothing is said to suggest that much could be gained by discussion to which people (teachers and students) who were not Christians would be invited. I remember Davis saying long ago something like this: that one should not expect to get anywhere with the atheist unless one was willing to think until one's brain hurt. But, as Moberly and our other exponents of criticism would insist, in that case one had better listen to him or her. The value of doing so is illlustrated by one sentence in Ronald Hepburn's *Christianity and Paradox* (1958):

> Although I approach the New Testament with a most sympathetic mind, my believing perspective may gradually and imperceptibly change to uncertainty and agnosticism through a great many intermediate positions, as I come to realize, say, the unanswered problems of meaning in religious concepts, the strength of psychoanalytic accounts of religious experience, and the tenuousness of historical evidence on which the religious system is raised.

In the same lecture (p.5) Davis questions the value of some of the articles in theological journals. As one looks at the current list of titles of theses completed or being completed for the Melbourne College of Divinity (and I should say the same about many university theses), one might well wish that their writers were instead

engaged in long and brain-taxing discussion (with wide reading and reporting) on a range of important matters with teachers and students some of whom did not share their presuppositions, and had to write up those discussions and add something further on their own account. Alec Vidler was wiser than Davis in calling for the establishment, in universities where there was as yet no attention to theology, of departments of religious studies rather than of ecumenical Christian theology.[26]

6

I invited at the outset the recognition that the question about criticism needed to be conjoined with the question "What is there for human beings to celebrate?" I turn now, with that combination in mind, to Davis's address to the Second Assembly of the Uniting Church, in 1980. Rightly he says (p.83) that the previous night he could not sing the verse (of Charles Wesley) that begins "Even now we think and speak the same, |And cordially agree", but he speaks only of "disagreement on public issues, definition of areas of agreement and disagreement, and continuing creative tension within our fellowship", and not, as Moberly would have done, of learning from one another. In his last section he does not sufficiently enquire whether those who worried that the newly-formed church needed "a greater sense of identity" were onto something important. We can hear his tone, challenging, rather imperiously and impatiently, anything he would think narrow, when we read (p.84):

> In an important sense, we in the Uniting Church have no identity, no distinctive marks ─ other than belonging with the people of God brought into being by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on their way to the consummation of all things in him. … We are embarked on a course in which we ask men and women to forget who they are, and chiefly to remember whose they are.

It is noteworthy that the word 'God' does not occur in this lecture except there, in a context that suggests that Christians especially can be called 'the people of God'. By contrast, including quotations, the name 'Christ' or 'Jesus Christ' occurs ten times, and 'its [the Church's] Lord' and 'the Lamb', with the same reference, once each. One might ask whether Davis realized that for many of even those who came to the services of the Uniting Church it was a big question whether they or their children had reason to believe in God at all.

There is a great emphasis in this address on preaching and the sacraments, though these are rightly not seen as ends in themselves. Davis says in Section 1:

> The Councils of the Church exist primarily to serve that basic unit, the congregation: to make sure that Word and Sacrament are available for Christ's people, so that they can worship, witness and serve.

At the end he adapts a sentence from the Roman Catholic priest (and philosopher) Herbert McCabe to express his and others' belief that one can remain in and invite others to join the Uniting Church, in spite of its endless time-wasting committees, because

> [its] conciliar structure … still links us by Word preached and Sacrament received through the operations of a duly ordained and pastorally caring ministry, to areas of Christian truth and to a

> fellowship in Christ beyond our own experience, and ultimately beyond any experience ….

Buber (and Green) would find that too ecclesiastical, and question the doctrines that much Christian preaching and those sacraments express.

Davis was fond of quoting a remark that I think he may have found in F.D. Maurice: that Christians are those who know the name of the world's Redeemer. We have noticed Buber's resistance to such talk, even if the word 'know' is prefaced, as it ought to be, by 'believe they', which removes from the use of 'know' the implication that there is no room for doubt. He might ask whether the remark, like most Christian liturgies for the Eucharist or Holy Communion, or even Baptism, does not presuppose that to be a Christian is first and foremost to see oneself and everyone else as primarily a sinner in need of redemption, and then to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Redeemer or Saviour, the one without whom there would be no salvation.[27]

Judaism, as Rabbi Epstein tells us in his book of that title (p.142), does not have a doctrine of original sin, which we may take here to be the doctrine that a human being is inevitably self-centred and thus sinful and rebellious against the will of God. It holds rather that there are two "impulses", the good and the evil, and that even the second can be harnessed towards good (compare Buber, at p.7 above, on the will to profit and the will to power). I think that many a Jew would readily join, not with Jeremiah when he seems to imply (17.9) that the hearts of **all** men are "deceitful … and desperately corrupt", but with Kant in saying "We have reason to have but a low opinion of ourselves as individuals, but as representatives of mankind we ought to hold ourselves in high esteem."[28] To that I would certainly add Paul's words (2 Cor. 10.12); "let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

The experience so stressed in Methodist and much other Christianity that through faith in Christ one's sin is "cancelled" and its power broken, so that one is liberated from a kind of prison, is not to be denied.[29] But more important for our general view of humanity is the readiness of so many people, religious or not, to devote their energies to the care of others. Green is remarkable among philosophers not only in his emphasis on that, or even on what I have called responsive cooperation: he thinks of a man as having "an ideal of a perfect life for himself and other men, as attainable for him only through them, for them only through him".[30] He was also down-to-earth. He knew how, in conditions where destitution threatened, many men and women gave themselves unstintingly to "the work of keeping a family comfortably alive".[31] To think of people as primarily sinners, even redeemed sinners, is a damaging error.[32]

Green loved the word 'tilth', and would gladly have sung the words, both celebratory and humble, "We plough the fields, and scatter |the good seed on the land, |but it is fed and watered |by God's almighty hand".[33] Two activities that call for responsive cooperation, peacemaking and agriculture, were longed for by the Jewish writer of Isaiah 2, and are celebrated in anticipation, without any Christology, in the Christian hymn sung to the tune *Glasgow*: "No strife shall rage, nor hostile feuds |disturb those peaceful years; |to ploughshares men shall beat their swords, |to pruning-hooks their spears."[34] Those of us with spades rather than ploughshares can rejoice in cultivating our own garden; but not for or by ourselves only, nor without the kind of wonder with which we may also celebrate and explore the potentialities of human life, and which keeps open the question whether we are, all of us, children of God.

NOTES

1. *Tradition and Dissent* (1997), p.17.
2. *Ibid.*., n.2 on p.255.
3. "Virtue in the World" is in *Fresh Words and Deeds* (2004).
4. *Tradition and Dissent*, p.81.
5. *Ibid.*, p.6.
6. Published in 1946 by Melbourne University Press. It is at 296 B917 in the Baillieu Library.
7. *The Theology of St. Paul* (1964), p.80.
8. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edition (1971), p.279.
9. *Theology*, Jan.1952.
10. *Ion* 533e and *Apology* 22c: G.M.A.Grube quotes from both in *Plato's Thought*, p.180f.
11. *Republic* 607b.
12. *Fresh Words and Deeds*, p.151.
13. *The Free Man* (1969), p.37f.
14. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (in H.J.Paton's translation), Chapter II, 69.
15. P.125 (the second-last) of the Scribner edition; *Fresh Words and Deeds*, p.110.
16. *The Free Man*, p.77 (from one of the lectures given in Melbourne).
17. Cf. Ian Crombie's phrase 'theistic interpretations of our experience' at p.112 of his essay in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. Flew and MacIntyre (1955).
18. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.31, (tr.S.Pines). I quote and discuss what Maimonides says here about habituation in *Learningguild Letter* 2.2004, p.3.
19. *Martin Buber* (1966), p.12; *The Doctrine of God*, p.127f.
20. For Kant, see "the story of an honest man" in the Methodology section of Part Two of the *Critique of Practical Reason*; for Plato's approach to an interlocutor (Polus), *Gorgias* 470-474b.
21. Kaufmann p.135f; Gregor Smith p.101.
22. "In Search of a Theme", *Tradition and Dissent*, p.2, and *Fresh Words and Deeds*, p.18f. Some words have been omitted at the foot of p.18, where the word 'destinations' has wrongly been included and we need the following or something like it to end a sentence before one to begin with 'John Stuart Mill': 'two other critical distinctions, one made between philosophers and the other between interpreters of law'.
23. *Republic* 511b-d, 533b-d.
24. *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 213f.
25. "The Hebrew Scriptures: possession and dispossession", pp. 15 and 23f, in *The Way We See Things Now* (1993), which contains addresses, occasioned by their retirement, by Robert Anderson, Harry Wardlaw, and Nigel Watson.

26. Compare Vidler's essay "The Future in Divinity", in *Crisis in the Humanities*, ed. J.H.Plumb, especially pp. 89-95, with Davis's "Tradition and Freedom in Education", in *Tradition and Dissent*, pp.62-66.

27. On p.37 of his *Commentary on the Basis of Union* (1980) Davis quotes from the service of baptism of infants in the French Reformed Church: 'Little child, for you Jesus Christ has come, has fought, has suffered; for you he passed through the agony of Gethsemane and the darkness of Calvary; for you he has cried, "It is accomplished!"' I think most fathers and mothers wanting to bring infants for baptism would prefer a service that mainly gave thanks for the joys associated with the birth and development of a child and affirmed the responsibilities of being a parent. Would churches be right to say that they are wrong?

28. *Lectures on Ethics*, tr. Louis Infield, p.126.

29. See the hymn "O for a thousand tongues to sing |my great Redeemer's praise". It was the first hymn in the *Methodist Hymn–Book* (London 1933). The word 'God' occurs in it three times, in verses 1 and 2 referring to Jesus and in the last verse in the phrase 'the Lamb of God'.

30. *Op. cit.*, 375. Compare a sentence quoted (in his original translation) by Gregor Smith in *Martin Buber*, p.28, from the collection of some of Buber's writings *The Knowledge of Man*, p.75: "It is the unfolding function between men, the help given for man's growth as a self, the support given to one another for the self-realisation of humanity in accordance with its creation, which leads the interhuman to its height."

31. *Ibid.*,, 239.

32. An excellent discussion of the tendency in many forms of Christianity to concentrate unduly on human sinfulness is in Ch. 2 of Alec Vidler's book about F.D.Maurice, *Witness to the Light* (1948).

33. For Green and 'tilth', see R.L. Nettleship's memoir, in *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, Vol.III, p. xviii.

34. The opening lines are "Behold! the mountain of the Lord |in latter days shall rise".

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CRITICISM: ITS NATURE AND HISTORY

This sheet contains the first two-thirds of Section 5 of a paper of mine called “Martin Buber and Davis McCaughey: Celebration and Criticism”, published as a supplement to *Learningguild Letter* 2.2005.

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