

# The Higher Evolution of Man

## Tape 77: Art and the Spiritual Life

Our subject tonight is 'Art and the Spiritual Life', that is to say we are concerned on this occasion with art within the context of the Higher Evolution of Man. We can also say that we are concerned with that Higher Evolution of Man itself in terms specifically of art. And by 'art' one means not just painting, not just the visual arts. One means all the Fine Arts whatsoever. We shall also be considering the subject not just in terms of Art, as it were in the abstract, not even the Fine Arts, but also more concretely in terms of the artist.

### Recapitulation

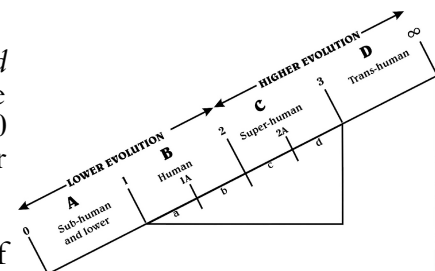
Now in order to make all this clear, let us just refer back to the two lectures which we have already had. That is, the lecture on *Evolution - Lower and Higher* and the lecture on *The Axial Age and the Emergence of the New Man*. There is no time for a detailed recapitulation of what was said on those two occasions, but it is important that we should see the subject matter of tonight's lecture in full and complete perspective and context. As, by this time, most of you will have gathered, we are concerned in this whole series with a subject of supreme, of far-reaching, of all-inclusive importance, that is to say the Higher Evolution of Man. And when we say 'Man' we mean not some other being, some other entity, we mean quite definitely ourselves; ourselves as living, growing, evolving beings, beings capable, we may say, of an infinite development, a development that culminates, in Buddhist terms, only with our awakening to the One True Mind.

Now in our first lecture we saw that evolution in general is the most important concept in the whole field of modern thought. It is a concept which enables us to understand the whole of existence, cosmic existence as one gigantic process of development, a process of development from lower to higher levels of existence and of organisation. And we tried in our first lecture to understand something at least of the nature of that development, tried to understand, to penetrate into what evolution really and truly and essentially is. We examined the mechanistic and the vitalist views. We found both of them unsatisfactory, especially the former, and we saw that one could best think of evolution, of this gigantic process of development, in terms of a progressive manifestation in time of an absolute reality; an absolute reality the presence of which [at the] back of the evolutionary process explains, and can alone account for, the emergence in the course of that evolutionary process of new and ever newer qualities. We saw, to use a poetic phrase or expression, that that reality back of the evolutionary process was like a great reservoir on which evolution, especially human evolution, increasingly and ever more abundantly draws.

We went on then to distinguish the lower evolution and the higher evolution. We saw to begin with that Man himself was included in this great evolutionary process and that we could study him in two different ways: in terms, first of all, of what he had developed out of; and this we saw was the Lower Evolution, dealt with by sciences such as physics, chemistry, biology. Secondly, that we could study Man in terms of what he will develop into in the future, what in fact he already is developing into here and now. And this future, this present evolution even, we saw constitutes the Higher Evolution and this is covered again by psychology, philosophy, religion in all its forms, and by the various Fine Arts.

On our chart, [which is reproduced in larger format on the second page of this volume] which we worked out in some detail, we saw the Lower Evolution corresponds to the section from 0 to 2 on the hypotenuse of that triangle, whereas the Higher Evolution corresponds to the section from 2 to infinity.

The Zero point we may say represents the starting point of the entire evolutionary process.



*Point 1* represents the point at which human consciousness emerges.

*Point 2*, the middle point, is the point at which self-consciousness or awareness emerges.

*Point 3* is the point at which transcendental awareness emerges, i.e. awareness of reality.

*Infinity*, at the top of the chart, is, of course, the point of Nirvana or Buddhahood in Buddhist terms.

These points, we saw, divide the whole evolutionary process from top to bottom into four great sections or stages:

- (a) representing the Infra-human, that is to say the mineral, the animal and the vegetable kingdoms.
- (b) representing the Human, both primitive and civilised.
- (c) representing what we called the Ultra-Human.
- (d) representing the Trans-Human or Supra-Human.

And in this way we saw, with the help of the chart, that the whole process of evolution was covered. And we could also see just where we ourselves stand. We saw that Man, at the best we usually know him, stands in the middle as it were of this whole great evolutionary process, stands at the watershed dividing the Lower from the Higher Evolution. In other words, stands at point 2; and most of us, we saw, we had to admit rather regrettably are considerably below point 2, and many unfortunately barely above point 1. And this gave rise of course to various reflections and considerations, the chief of which was that humanity was something yet to be achieved.

So much for the first lecture. In the second lecture, we studied *The Axial Age and the Emergence of the New Man*. We saw at once that we were dealing with a greatly reduced time-scale. In the first lecture we were concerned with the whole of the evolutionary process, that is to say with a period lasting hundreds of millions of years, something staggering, inconceivable, which we could hardly imagine. But in the second lecture we were concerned with only a mere, miserable, half-million or so years. That is the length of that period, the period of the history of Man. In terms of our chart, we were concerned with the whole section from point 1 onwards and upwards to point Infinity. And we saw that the whole history of Man falls into four segments of very unequal length:

Firstly, there is what has been called the Promethean Age or the Age of Primitive Man, the period during which human consciousness emerged, the period of the discovery of fire, the creation of language, the production of flint tools. The period which saw, also, the first crude beginning of art and of religion. And this period we further saw, and this was emphasised, has lasted for practically the whole period of human history, in fact for the whole period of human history minus the last 10,000 years or at most the last 15,000 to 20,000 years; which means that Man for the greater part of his history has been in fact simply primitive.

Secondly, we saw the Age of Divine Kingship or the River Valley Age or the Age of Agriculture. During this period, as its name suggests, agriculture developed, Man started settling in towns and in villages, the alphabet was invented, literature and so on, states and empires came into existence, and with them war and peace, and the whole fabric, the whole warp and woof of civilisation as we know it even today, minus modern technology. And during this period, art and religion further developed, and this period lasted just 10,000 years or so.

Thirdly, we came to the Axial Age, and this we saw was the 600-year period centring roughly on the year 500 BC. And it's this Axial Age during which begins the Higher Evolution of Man, the period of the emergence of self-consciousness, of awareness, the period of the emergence

of individuality, of True Man, or individuality in the true sense, the period of the emergence of the New Man.

Fourthly and lastly, came the Age of Science and Technology, the age in which we are at present living, which began, we may say, from some 500 years ago.

Now in the last lecture we were concerned, out of these four Ages, mainly with the Axial Age, and we saw that this term 'axial' derives from Hegel through Jaspers, and denotes the idea of an axis running through the whole of human history. And for Jaspers this axis is the whole spiritual process which took place in the world between the years 800 and 200 BC. Jaspers, we saw, like many other scholars and students of history and human culture before him, was struck by the intense spiritual ferment which characterised this whole period, practically throughout the world:

In China, it was the period of Confucius and Lao-Tzu.

In India, of the Buddha, Mahavira, and the Upanishadic sages.

In Persia, the period of Zoroaster.

In Palestine, of the Hebrew prophets.

In Greece, of Socrates, Plato, and a whole galaxy of other great outstanding geniuses.

And we saw further that all these figures in different parts of the world, arising during this Axial Age, had something in common: all were individuals, all stood out and still stand out from the mass of humanity. All are New Men, all had started, to a greater or lesser degree or extent, on that process of the Higher Evolution of Man. So that the Axial Age is in fact the age of the Emergence of the New Man. And we closed by covering some of the characteristics of that New Man. We saw that he was distinguished from the Old Man, the man of the lower evolution, by five characteristics, principally:

By self-consciousness or awareness

By true individuality

By creativity

By aloneness

By frequent unpopularity.

And these characteristics we examined in some detail.

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Now we come tonight to the subject of *Art and the Spiritual Life*. And I must apologise for the length of this introduction which has hurried us through the contents of two whole lectures. But as I said at the beginning, it is important to get this subject, Art and the Spiritual Life, very much in perspective and context. But I hope nevertheless, as from next week, with people becoming increasingly familiar with this material week by week, that we shall be able to plunge straight into our subject for the week without too much recapitulation.

As I said at the beginning, by 'Art' we mean all the Fine Arts. We take the term to cover painting, sculpture, poetry, music, architecture, and so on. And by 'Spiritual Life', the other half of our title for this lecture, we mean the whole process of the Higher Evolution. Incidentally, I must confess that I am not very happy with this word 'spiritual'. When I was drawing up the list of the titles of these talks I hesitated very much before putting down this word 'spiritual' and speaking of 'Art and the Spiritual Life' because for some people, I know, this word 'spiritual' has all sorts of wrong connotations. When one speaks of spiritual life, they start thinking of spirits and spiritualism and table rapping and ghostly messages and ghostly voices and shapes and apparitions. So I couldn't help feeling the word 'spiritual' is best avoided. It's almost as bad, one might say, as the word 'religion', which has for many people similar unpleasant connotations. But unfortunately, there are really no generally current equivalents for this word 'spiritual'. I did start thinking that we might start popularising, perhaps, the term metabiological which I have used before. I know it is a bit long,

metabiological, but at least it has the merit of covering all the higher manifestations of the human spirit (you see, there's that word again, spirit), not only art but also religion and philosophy as well.

Now when we speak of Art and the Spiritual Life, or Art and the Higher Evolution, we are not suggesting that they are really two different things. Not that you have *Art* and *the Spiritual Life*, art here and spiritual life there, joined merely externally by that little word 'and'. It is not that Art and Religion are related in a manner merely external. One might even go so far as to say that Art is included in the spiritual life, that the Fine Arts are just one particular type of aspect or manifestation of the Higher Evolution itself. This does not, of course, mean that one cannot lead the spiritual life, cannot participate in the higher evolution of humanity, without being an artist. It doesn't mean that; but it does mean that one cannot be an artist without at the same time participating in the spiritual life, in the higher evolution. To the extent that one is an artist, a true artist, authentically an artist of any kind, one is participating in the Higher Evolution of Man.

Now this sort of idea, I am sure, is unfamiliar to most people. They would regard it perhaps as an unnecessary glorification of the artist and they might even strongly disagree. We know that most people's evaluation of art and of artists is usually a rather low one. They don't think very highly of them really, not in comparison with other really important things, other really important activities. Only too many people tend to look down upon the arts and the artist and to think of the artist as occupying himself with rather trivial things, not with a real man's work as it were. I remember in this connection a little story, I believe - as far as I recollect - from the autobiography of Sir Osbert Sitwell, which is a many-volumed work written at great length, great prolixity<sup>1</sup> but it contains some very good stories very well told. Perhaps you know that the Sitwells<sup>2</sup> belonged to one of those very very brilliant families in which everybody seems to be practically a genius; all your brothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, uncles and so on are geniuses - this must be a wonderful way of growing up. So you had apparently Osbert and Sacheverell and the famous Edith, all living together when they were young in this vast old rambling family mansion, and one of them used to live in one wing, and another in another wing, with half a mile of corridors in between, there were lots of servants (this was 60 years ago). So the story goes, as related by Osbert Sitwell, that one morning he wanted to communicate with sister Edith in her wing. So he rang the bell to call a maidservant and gave the maidservant a little note, and he said, 'Give this note to my sister, *if* she isn't busy. But if she is doing something, if she's busy, don't give it to her, don't disturb her. Just come straight back, bring the note and tell me.' So about 15 minutes later, having traversed all those corridors, in both directions, the maidservant returned. And Sir Osbert asked her, 'Have you delivered the note?' She said, 'Oh, yes.' 'Was my sister doing anything, then?' 'Oh no, she wasn't doing anything at all, she was just writing.' So this is the attitude only too often; if you are writing or painting, or if you are doing anything else of that sort, you're 'not doing anything really'.

So in view of this sort of popular misunderstanding of the subject of the arts in general, let's just try to go a little more deeply into this whole subject and try to see in what way, or in what sense, art is part of the spiritual life, part of the Higher Evolution of Man. And how also, the artist is, in fact, himself the New Man. Now this will involve a consideration of a question of what is Art. But we'll put that aside for a moment and we will first consider the artist as New Man, consider the artist as sharing the characteristics of the New Man.

In the last lecture we saw that the New Man is distinguished by five characteristics. Undoubtedly there are lots of others, but these seem to stand out. Characteristics of self-consciousness or awareness, true individuality, creativity, aloneness, and frequent unpopularity. So let us just pause for a moment before going into the question of what is Art and just see, briefly, how these five characteristics of the New Man apply to the artist, whether poet, painter, sculptor or musician and so on.

First of all, *the artist is more self-conscious or more aware*. The artist, we may even say the true artist, is more alive than other people. And this is very often revealed by the fact that he is more

sensitive in the full sense of the term, in the best sense of the term, than people usually are. We know that the painter is much more vividly, much more keenly, aware of differences of shape, of contour, of colour, etc., much more alive to, more aware of these things than other people. I think I have mentioned before in previous lectures that if you happen to go out with an artist friend, say, into the country, whether it is in the Spring or the Autumn or some other time of year, you will notice, you will observe, you can't help noticing, that he sees more than you do. He'll call your attention to something: maybe the outline of a tree against the sky or the colours of a fallen leaf or a withered flower, or shadows cast by something, blue shadows cast by trees on the grass; and he'll point out to you that those shadows are blue and you almost certainly haven't noticed that. The painter has a much keener eye, he is much more aware of what is going on in the outside world, in the world of shapes and forms and colours.

And in the same way with the musician, the musician has a much keener ear, he can detect differences of notes which we perhaps can't detect. I remember that when I was in India I was astonished by the subtleties sometimes of the drumming in Indian music, the subtleties of their drum playing. These were difficult to detect, difficult to follow sometimes, even by an Indian who was comparatively experienced, comparatively trained in these things. There were sometimes unbelievable refinements and delicacies in the playing of that particular instrument. Sometimes the drum would be made to whisper, almost like a voice whispering; sometimes it would be very staccato, sometimes sort of soft, sometimes as it were grumbling. One could get the drums almost to speak. And sometimes such subtle difference as that only the trained ear of the musician could possibly detect and know that there was either something right or something wrong.

Then again we find that the poet is equally sensitive to the meaning and the value and the rhythm of words. We use words most of the time but use them in a very careless, a very coarse sort of way, not fully aware or not fully sensitive to the value and the meaning and even the texture of the words. I have already mentioned this evening the name of Edith Sitwell and in this connection some of her comments on words and their different values are of very great interest. She is not satisfied with speaking just of the meaning of words and the length or shortness of the syllable and so on. She speaks in terms of the tone of words, of the texture of words: some words are rough and others are smooth, some words are even hairy, she says. And then again there is the weight of words: some words are light, some words are heavy. She, being a poet, is sensitive to all this, whereas usually we are not.

And in the same way, the artist, of whatsoever kind, is much more aware of his own response to all these things, his own mental and emotional states. Not just in the sense of reflecting upon them more than we do but in the sense of experiencing these states much more intensely and in a much more concentrated manner than other people. And then again we may say that the artist usually is more aware of other people than is usually the case. We see this especially in a very highly developed form in the work of the great portrait painters, of the great dramatists, of the great novelists. We see that in their works, other people, people of past ages and distant countries, *live*. I remember some time ago I saw in an art gallery a portrait painted I think early in the Renaissance<sup>3</sup> period, I forget by whom it was painted, and it was a portrait of a pope. And you saw by looking at him that he must have been a very wicked pope. You could see all in his face, every bit of it, you could see everything he had ever done practically in that portrait, in that face. You could see it in his eyes, in the texture of the skin, the shape of the mouth, and his rather grim, fixed expression. You could see that he must have come to the papacy by corruption, it was written all over his face; and much more than that, you could see all sorts of things, you could almost reconstruct his biography just from that portrait. The artist, the painter, whoever he was, had seen it all and had not only seen it but he had put it all down there on the canvas, in pigment.

And as I said, we see the same sort of thing in the dramatist, especially a dramatist like Shakespeare. We see the same sort of thing in the great novelists. We can see how clearly, how intensely these great artists do see other people. I remember again, to take an example from painting, that I used to think when I was much younger, that Hogarth's<sup>4</sup> paintings of people were caricatures. But after being acquainted with people a bit more, for a few more years, and

maybe observing them more closely, I came to realise that Hogarth was simply being deadly accurate. People were actually like that. He wasn't exaggerating anything, wasn't laying anything on thick, he wasn't a caricaturist, he just saw them as they were and as they were he depicted them in his paintings and in his engravings. He saw them with that almost terrifying, almost clairvoyant honesty and directness. But above all, we may say the artist is aware not just of the external world, not just of himself, not just of other people; the artist is aware in some sort of incomprehensible way of reality. Not in the sense that he is aware of or knows the concept, the word with a capital 'R', but in the sense that he is deeply and resonantly sensitive to the meaning and mystery of existence itself. It is this that he feels, this mystery of existence, whether cosmic or human.

And then again, *the artist has true individuality*. The artist is an individualist or at least an individual in the positive and not in the negative sense of the term. The true artist never hesitates to go his own way, doesn't hesitate to be himself. In fact we may say that nowadays and for many a long day past, the artist is notorious for this, for going his own way, for being, or endeavouring to be, himself. And very often we find the artist flouts convention and refuses to conform, refuses to be just part of the mass. And in so doing, he is not just being eccentric. He is not just being perverse or difficult. He is simply trying to lead his own life and to be himself.

And then again, *the artist is creative*. This of course goes without saying. Not just productive - though of course creation includes production - but creative in the sense of producing new values, values which did not exist or which were not experienced or perceived before. And it is interesting to note that the greatest, the very greatest artist, in most cases is often immensely productive, not just one or two masterpieces but ten, fifteen, twenty, even a hundred masterpieces. In the field of poetry, we think of Shakespeare,<sup>5</sup> Goethe,<sup>6</sup> Lope de Vega,<sup>7</sup> of all the ancient Greek dramatists who produced at least one hundred dramas each, of which only a few unfortunately survive. In the world of music, we think of Bach,<sup>8</sup> Handel,<sup>9</sup> Haydn,<sup>10</sup> Mozart,<sup>11</sup> in the field of painting we think of Titian,<sup>12</sup> Rubens,<sup>13</sup> Rembrandt,<sup>14</sup> and these are all amongst the very greatest names. We find that all are immensely productive, immensely creative. When we read the lives of these great artists of all kinds, we are struck, sometimes with wonder, at the spectacle of this uninterrupted flow of creativity. You wonder how on earth they managed to do it all, how for instance Bach managed to create that great mass of music. He must have been working at it morning, noon and night, uninterruptedly; and finding time, at the same time, to bring up nearly 20 children, I believe. Nowadays, you would find it difficult with just 2 or 3. And there was Bach, pouring out this great mass of music in what would seem to be rather unfavourable domestic conditions. And all this immense creativity and productivity of these artists implies a great deal of hard work. No dilettantism<sup>15</sup> for them; they were up early in the morning, at their desks or easels, and they carried on all day until late at night, and this was their life, in some cases every day of their lives, for years on end, right into old age.

And then again, of course, and this is not surprising, the artist is alone, you won't find many companions in that sort of life. Like all New Men, the artist, too, is isolated from the masses on account of his greater awareness, his greater individuality, and even on account of his greater creativity. The ordinary man only too often cannot understand why the artist should take endless pains with words, with sounds, with colours. The ordinary man might think that one will do as well as another - why bother, does it really matter - a bit more or a little less shade, or this comma going in or that full-stop being taken out, what difference does it really make? But to the artist, to the creator, all these things are of the first importance. And we may say that the artist often feels his aloneness more even than the religious genius or the mystic, and as we shall see shortly, he occupies a sort of intermediate position, sort of half-way up the Higher Evolution of Man.

And lastly, *the artist is unpopular*, or rather not popular. Only too often, the really great artist is in advance of his time, in advance even of other comparatively ordinary artists. And sometimes it takes the rest of humanity even centuries to catch up. In many cases, they are still trying to catch up, or maybe they are not even trying. Only too often we find that the artist, the great

creator, is condemned in his own generation only to be praised in others. It is as though the voice of the ordinary people said that the only good artist is a dead artist. This is all so well known that it is not necessary to insist upon it. But I hope I have said enough to show that the artist does share, in great measure, the characteristics of the New Man, and that the true artist, the really great artist, is in fact the New Man and participates as such in the higher evolution of humanity.

Well now, let us turn to the question of art. Let us try to answer the question: What is art? This is surely one of the most vexed, much debated and discussed questions in the whole history of thought, especially western thought; though it is discussed also in the East, especially in India, but the discussion which has gone on in India has followed such different lines that one cannot even begin to compare it with western discussions on the subject.

Now some years ago, when I had more time than I have nowadays, I devoted quite a lot of time and energy to the study of this question of what is art. And I found that there are numberless definitions of art, and some of them are in a way quite extraordinary. There is one definition that goes: 'Art is an attempt to create pleasing forms.' This is Herbert Read's definition. Then there is another one, very famous indeed in its own day: 'Art is significant form'. A whole book has been written about that phrase. This is Clive Bell's definition. And then we find someone else saying: 'Art is intuition'. This is Croce<sup>16</sup>. This seems rather vague, that art is intuition. And all of these definitions, and all the other definitions that I came across, I found very very unsatisfactory. I found them either too broad or too narrow, or just incomplete. So I eventually decided that I would have to formulate my own definition of art, at least to my own satisfaction. And I did this in a little work that I wrote, I have forgotten exactly when but either in 1953 or 1954, when I was in Kalimpong, and I called it *The Religion of Art*. I am sorry to say it was never published, because it was too long for a magazine article, being about 40,000 words, and too short for a book. So it has remained in manuscript or typescript ever since, but I am still hoping to be able to bring it out in some form or other some day<sup>17</sup>.

Now in this little work I have defined art as follows:

*Art is the organisation of sense impressions [into pleasurable formal relations] that expresses the artist's sensibility and communicates to his audience a sense of values that can transform their lives.*

Now I believe, and this is my honest opinion, that this is the most complete definition of art that has ever been suggested. I have not seen any other since then in any way as complete, covering all aspects of the subject. So let us examine it in a little greater detail. There is no time for a full discussion, that would take us too far afield, but we will deal mainly with those aspects of the definition that have some bearing on the subject with which we are at present concerned: art and the spiritual life, or art and the Higher Evolution of Man.

First of all, 'Art is the organisation of sensuous impressions'. I remember reading some time ago a book on poetry, and this book started off by saying that we must never forget that poetry consists of words. You might think it difficult to forget this, but apparently, according to the author of this book, lots of people did forget this, that poetry consisted of words. We can go even further than that, and say that, yes, poetry consists of words, but of what do words consist? Words consist of sounds, vibrations in the air. So we find that all the arts have as their raw material, their basic stuff, sensuous impressions. This is where the arts begin, with the impressions coming in to us through our five physical senses. The raw material of painting is after all simply visual impressions; impressions of shape and colour, light and shade, etc. And in the same way, the raw material, the stuff of music is auditory impressions, sounds of various kinds: loud, soft, harmonious, discordant, etc. And poetry, what is the raw material of poetry? Again sounds, but sounds associated in varying degrees, and not always completely associated, with conceptual meaning. So we have these sensuous impressions through the ear, the eye and so on, pouring in upon us all the time, things that we see and hear, shapes, colours, sounds, etc. and these impressions the artist organises into a pattern. At first there is a chaos, a chaos

of sensuous impressions. The artist, being a creator, organises these sensuous impressions into a pattern, a world, a whole, so that there is no longer just a chaos of impressions but this shape, this whole, this work of art.

There are of course various ways of organising sensuous impressions. Some ways are very simple, others are highly sophisticated. These different ways involve the principles of, for instance, repetition, contrast, etc. Now this organisation of sensuous impressions, which the work of art essentially is, does not hang suspended in mid-air. It does not exist apart from or dissociated from the artist. The work of art, the artist's organisation of sensuous impressions into a pattern, into a whole, into a work of art, in fact, expresses the artist's sensibility. That is to say, the pattern, the work of art, which organises the sensuous impressions, expresses or embodies the awareness of the artist, the experience of the artist, his experience of life as a whole, his experience of himself, of other people, even of reality. And this we may say is the aspect of our definition of art which concerns us most in our present context: that the work of art expresses the artist's sensibility or awareness or experience. Now this is generally understood, but it is not generally understood that this sensibility, this awareness of the artist has many different degrees corresponding to the level of being and consciousness of the individual artist. And this brings us directly back to the subject of Higher Evolution. We may say that the Lower Evolution consists in the development of a higher and ever higher degree of life, whereas the Higher Evolution consists in the attainment of higher and ever higher degrees of consciousness and awareness. Now the true artist has access to higher levels of consciousness, awareness, understanding even, than the ordinary man, and this is one of the reasons why he is an artist; because of this greater, more advanced, more extensive, higher awareness and experience.

Now let us, at this stage, see how this works out in terms of our chart. Let us see where the artist stands. We are concerned today with the two middle sections of the chart, from point 1 to point 2, and from point 2 to point 3, the higher section of the Lower Evolution, and the lower section of the Higher Evolution. For the sake of clarity, let us transfer this particular section, from point 1 to point 3, to a separate chart. On this separate chart, our line 1 to 3 represents the scale of what we may describe, not very satisfactorily, as the scale of artistic development. Like the other line of the other triangle, it is divided by point 2 which is the point of the emergence of self-consciousness. That still remains in the middle, as it were. Now each of the sections, lower and upper, can be subdivided. Point 1(A), dividing the lower section, represents the average human consciousness, the consciousness of the average or ordinary man, half-way between the lowest possible human consciousness and self-consciousness or awareness. Point 2(A), in the middle of the higher section, represents what we may describe as the highly artistic consciousness, the consciousness of the true, the real artist. So in this way, we see the line is divided by these points into 4 sections:

- (a) is the stage or section where there is no art;
- (b) is the stage of folk or tribal art. Formerly the majority of people were at this level, when one produced things oneself, like pots, knives, even one's own house, but now, unfortunately, in most areas of the world, folk art, tribal art has been replaced by mass-produced goods, which are not to be classified as art at all;
- (c) is the level of the fine arts;
- (d) is the level of supreme artistic achievement.

Now the true artist, the real artist, comes in that higher section, 2 to 3; the majority of them in the third section of the whole scale, (c), and just a very few of them in the highest section, (d). The latter, of course, are only a handful, and of these we may say that a few perhaps penetrate, at least at moments, beyond even point 3, the Point of No Return, right up into the transcendental, but there is no need to go into this now. From this chart, I think it should be sufficiently obvious that the true artist has access to higher levels of consciousness, of being,



than ordinary people, that he is further advanced in the evolutionary process, that he has in fact entered upon the Higher Evolution, that he is the New Man.

It is time now we returned to our definition of art. But first I want to consider a possible objection. Some people, I think, might be a bit shocked by the bold claim that the true artist represents a higher type of humanity than the ordinary, decent citizen. Some people might even be tempted to point out, very nicely of course, that only too often the artist unfortunately, most regrettably, is wicked and immoral and selfish. So it is worth perhaps looking into this a little. One can readily admit that the artist, whether painter, poet or musician, can be rather difficult to live with, but this I think is usually due to the fact that very often the artist is concerned, rightly concerned, to safeguard from intrusion his own privacy and his own conditions of work. We know, too, that there are well-meaning people who try to make the artist conform, try to make him like other people, to make him live, dress, look, write, paint like other people, etc. and it is only natural perhaps that the artist tends to rebel against these well-meaning attempts, sometimes even violently. And rather ungratefully, he insists upon being himself.

We also often find that the artist is in revolt against conventional morality. Now this is especially conspicuous in the case of a poet like Shelley,<sup>18</sup> who flouted all the conventional moral canons of his day, and was ostracised for so doing. But one might say, is the artist's flouting 'conventional morality' wrong? Only too often we have to recognise that it is conventional morality itself which is at fault, and the artist's rejection of it is in fact, in many cases if not most cases, simply an expression of his own more healthy and more normal mental attitude.

We must not also forget, this is very, very important, that the artist of whatsoever kind is only too often a deeply divided person; that is to say, divided within himself. And sometimes, the greater the artist, the more deeply divided he is within himself. And this deep division, this cleft, sometimes in the depths of his own being, is productive of tension and of lack of balance, bordering even, sometimes, on madness. The artist, by very definition perhaps, has access to higher states of consciousness, higher states of being than most other people, or than almost all other people, but this does not mean that he has access to them all the time. To quote Shelley, whom I have just mentioned, he says or sings in one of his poems: 'Rarely, rarely, comest thou, spirit of delight'. And this is only too often the experience of the artist, the creator, poet, musician; that this spirit of delight, this higher experience, this experience of a higher mode of being and consciousness, comes only rarely, only sometimes. The artist does not live in these higher states all the time, and in this the artist differs from the true mystic who tends to dwell in these states much of the time. And in the case of the artist, sometimes in these higher states of consciousness and experience, sometimes in more ordinary states, it is only too often as though the artist were two people. When he creates, he is one person. When he is not creating, he is another person. We all know that sometimes you read a book by somebody, you think, what a wonderful book, what a wonderful person the author must be, how you would like to meet him, and when you go along, full of gratitude and willing to be full of admiration for this wonderful book which has uplifted you so much, you find some dry, withered, mean little man and you are sorry that you ever set eyes upon him, you are so disappointed. And this is because of this sort of split, division, between the higher experience of the artist and his more ordinary, more normal experience. It's as though the artist is two people, as though he has an artistic self and an ordinary self, and a division between them.

This is why, today, we often speak in terms of inspiration. The artist's inspiration comes to him from on high, as it were, comes from above, it is not him. There is a well-known story in connection with Handel; when he finished the manuscript of the *Messiah*, when he read it over, he was astonished himself that he had written anything so good, and he was so astonished, we are told, that he put down his pen, looked up, and said, 'It came from above, it is not me.' Now he is back in his ordinary state of consciousness, 'It is not me, I did not produce this, it came from above.' It came, that is to say, from the artist himself when he was in this higher, this supra-normal state of consciousness. This is also one of the reasons why traditionally we refer to the artist as a genius. We speak of a poetic genius, of an artistic genius

in general, or a mystical genius, and so on. What does this word 'genius' mean? Genius meant originally one's guardian deity, like one's guardian angel, one's good angel. It represented the higher powers overshadowing a man, guiding him and directing him; representing, we may say, one's own higher self, conceived of as an independent, or quasi-independent, personality that was one's source, i.e. the ordinary self's source, of direction and inspiration and guidance. We get the same sort of idea behind the classical concept of the Muses<sup>19</sup>. When you read, say, Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey*<sup>20</sup>, what does he do at the beginning? He invokes the muses, he says, 'Goddess, or goddesses, inspire me'. And all the classical poets did this. Milton<sup>21</sup> does it at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, except that he invokes the heavenly muse and not the profane muse. The idea is the same. You are invoking some higher source, some higher power, which seems outside you but which at the same time is really and truly your own highest self. And it is from there that the creation comes.

Incidentally, it is interesting to notice an observation on the use of the word 'genius' by that well-known modern writer, Nabokov,<sup>22</sup> and he makes this observation in the course of an interview in the Listener. It is rather interesting, even though incidental, so I am going to quote it. He is being interviewed by one of those rather pertinacious people who ask all sorts of questions and one wonders how people sometimes have the patience to answer the questions. The particular question was whether Nabokov sees himself as a genius. He says, in reply:

*The word genius is passed around rather generously isn't it, at least in English, because its Russian counterpart, geni, is a term brimming with a sort of throaty awe, and is used only in the case of a very small number of writers: Shakespeare, Milton, Pushkin,<sup>23</sup> Tolstoy<sup>24</sup>. To such deeply beloved authors as Turgenev<sup>25</sup> and Chekhov,<sup>26</sup> Russians assign the thinner term 'talent', not 'genius'. It is a bizarre example of semantic discrepancy, the same word being more substantial in one language than in another. Although my Russian and my English are practically coeval,<sup>27</sup> I still feel appalled and puzzled at seeing 'genius' applied to any important story-teller, such as Maupassant<sup>28</sup> or Maugham<sup>29</sup>. Genius still means to me, in my Russian fastidiousness and pride of phrase, a unique dazzling gift. The genius of James Joyce,<sup>30</sup> not the talent of Henry James.<sup>31</sup>*

Now one might not agree with his estimation of Henry James, but I would think the force of the distinction is clear. He is using the word 'genius'<sup>32</sup> very much as I have been using it in the course of these lectures, in the sense of the true artist. In fact, when I read this first, I almost thought that he had been attending these lectures - perhaps he has. But there is something else I would like to draw your attention to while we are at it. And this is the interviewer's first question; and it is rather extraordinary. I don't know where he got his questions from, but the first question was: 'What distinguishes us from the animals?', and what do you think Nabokov says? I am going to quote this also, because it has a great bearing on the subject-matter of the whole course. He says:

*Being aware of being aware of being. In other words, if I not only know that I am, but also know that I know it, then I belong to the human species. All the rest follows, the glorious thought, poetry, a vision of the universe. In that respect, the gap between ape and man is immeasurably greater than the one between amoeba and ape. The difference between an ape's memory and a human memory is the difference between an ampersand and the British Museum Library.*

I think you will agree that this is very much the sort of thing we have been saying in the course of these lectures and in previous lectures on similar topics. But we really must now get back to our definition of art, which has got lost on the way, as it were.

We have seen that art is the *organisation* of sensuous impressions that express the artist's sensibility, whether higher or lower. And now for the second half of the definition: 'communicate to his audience a sense of values that can transform their lives.' Now very much could be said on art as communication but this had better wait for the time being. It is not directly concerned with our main topic. I want to deal with the concluding part of the

definition, that is with 'a sense of values that can transform our lives'. What does one mean by this? We have seen that the artist experiences a higher level of awareness than ordinary people. And out of this level of awareness, this higher insight, this experience, this more comprehensive, more powerful experience, he expresses in the form of the work of art, not only expresses but communicates. This word 'communicate' means that when we enjoy the work of art, we experience for the time being, even though in a lesser degree, the state of consciousness in which the artist produced it. And this is what we mean by communication. He experiences, he expresses, in the work of art. We enjoy the work of art, and we too experience what he experienced when he produced the work. Temporarily at least, we are raised to his level. Temporarily we become, as it were, artist, New Man; share his sense of values, his insight, his experience, and this transforms our lives. Transformation is evolution. It is not a change of place but a change of level. So we see that the artist is not only himself more highly evolved but through works of art, in which he expresses, through which he communicates to other people, his own experience of himself, he contributes to the higher evolution of other people, of the human race.

Enjoyment of great works of art, we may say, enlarges our own consciousness. When we listen to a great piece of music or when we see a great painting, read a great poem, really experience it, really allow it to soak into us, we go beyond our ordinary or normal consciousness, we become bigger, greater, our whole life is modified, our whole experience is transformed and, if we persist in interests of this sort, this gradually affects the whole of our being, and eventually, as I have said, even our lives may be transformed.

Now this is very much the case at the present time, especially in the West, this sort of recourse to art, great works of art, whether paintings, musical compositions, or works of literature. Because in the West, traditional religion, conventional religion - that is to say Christianity - has lost its hold. As someone once remarked, we are already living in the 'post-Christian' age. The monuments to Christianity, some of them very great and glorious, are still around us but they are dead and they are empty, they are only shells. Orthodox traditional religion, for the vast majority of people, for the unchurched, is no longer a means of grace. We don't get anything from it. It means nothing to us. It doesn't uplift us, doesn't move us, doesn't transform us, much less still transfigure us any more. Maybe ages ago, maybe hundreds of years ago, maybe in the last century, but not now. It is done with, it is finished, it is often completely irrelevant. People aren't even against it any more. So what has happened? For many people, the place of religion has been taken by art, and this was the point of the title of my little work which I quoted from, *The Religion of Art*. The place of religion, the function of religion, has been taken over by art, by the Fine Arts.

This is one of the reasons, I think, for the immense popularity today of all the fine arts. We sometimes grumble and complain of the decay of culture and that sort of thing, but actually we find there has been a great improvement. Formerly, the enjoyment of works of art was the privilege of a few. Five hundred years ago, if you lived in this country, you would be living in a miserable hovel, probably, of wattle and daub, and you would not have seen any pictures, or paintings, except, maybe, one or two in the church. You would not have heard much music. You certainly would not have read very much, if anything at all. These things, enjoyment of culture, works of art, were the privilege of the few, of the wealthy, of the noble, of the high and mighty in the world. But nowadays, we find that all the artistic heritage of the ages even is within the reach of practically all people. If you think of the past, if you think in terms of the great classical musicians of the 18th century, how many people heard their works performed in their own day? While Mozart was alive, how many people heard his symphonies and so on? Maybe a few tens of thousands at the very most. Sometimes only hundreds of people heard them. But now, over the air, through radio, we find these same works are being enjoyed over and over again, by tens and even hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. So one finds a great dissemination of culture going on at present which we should not overlook, and these great works of art made more and more available to more and more people, with the result that they are exerting a slow and steady influence and gradually refining and raising the level of consciousness and awareness, practically we may say, if not of the whole population, of a very considerable and influential section of it; and in this way, are contributing to the

whole process of the Higher Evolution, contributing through these cultural, artistic channels, to the production of the New Man. And this is why art, all the arts, need to be encouraged. This is why they form, they constitute, an integral part not of religion in the narrow sense but of the spiritual life, as I hope I have been able to show tonight. And this is why in our movement, in our own group, the FWBO, we have as one of our sort of subsidiaries, an arts group. This is why there have been poetry readings and even sometimes musical performances and so on, because all the Fine Arts are really an integral part of the spiritual life and the Higher Evolution.

Before closing for tonight, I want to say a few words about the psychology of art, or of artistic creation. How and why is it, we may ask, that for the artist, the production of works of art should be a means, even the means, of higher evolution? What happens when the artist creates? Much could be said on this topic. Koestler,<sup>33</sup> we know, has written a very thick book on this subject, *The Act of Creation*. But tonight we have to be brief, there is not very much time left. Briefly, then, when the artist creates, he objectifies. And when he objectifies, he can assimilate, and this is not unlike what happens in the process of traditional Buddhist visualisation exercises.

When, for instance, in meditation, we visualise the Buddha, what happens? First of all, we close our eyes and we see - not just think about - a great expanse of green, above that a great expanse of blue sky, in between a great Bodhi tree; at the foot of the Bodhi tree we see the figure of the Buddha in the orange robe, then we see the very peaceful features, the golden complexion, the compassionate smile. We see the curly black hair, the aura, the five colours of the aura. We see all of these things and we see them as clearly and vividly as though the Buddha himself sat before us. We not only visualise like this, but we recognise also the great spiritual qualities of the Buddha, we see expressed in the Buddha's face wisdom, compassion, love, peace, tranquillity, assurance, strength, fearlessness, and so on. And gradually we draw near to these qualities, we feel as if we were drawing near to this visualised image, we feel as if this visualised image is drawing near to us. We feel that we are absorbing within ourselves the Buddha's own qualities of love and wisdom and compassion, etc. And if we persevere in this exercise, if we keep it up, not just for a few days, but for months and maybe even for years, eventually a time comes when we fully assimilate all these qualities of the Buddha, and become one with the Buddha in that meditation experience. And when that happens, the unenlightened being, we may say, becomes transformed into the Enlightened Being and we realise our own Buddha nature.

But in the course of this practice, in the course of this process, in the course of this exercise, what has happened? What was potential in us, that is to say Buddhahood - what was there all the time, unknown and unrecognised, in the depths of our own being, in the depths of our own nature - has become actual, has become realised by us, by being first objectified, by being seen out there, even though it is in here; and then, having been seen out there, gradually assimilated more and more until we become one with it.

And the same sort of thing happens in the case of artistic creation. We have spoken of the artist as having experienced something, some higher level of being and consciousness, and then creating out of that experience. But it is not really quite so simple and straightforward. It is not that the artist has the experience itself fully and perfectly and completely first, before creating. If he had it in that way, fully and perfectly, he would not be an artist, he would be a mystic, which is something higher or at least potentially higher. No, what the artist has is at first a sort of vague sense, an indeterminate experience of something, and this is his starting point. He clarifies this, he intensifies this, in the process of actual creation of the work of art. And we may say that the original experience of the artist, the creative experience, is like a sort of seed which is pulsing with life but the nature of which is fully revealed only when the flower, that is to say the work of art itself, stands complete and stands perfect.

Now I hope that I have been able to say enough tonight to show the nature of the relationship between art, I won't say on the one hand because that would suggest separateness, but between art and spiritual life. And I hope it has been made clear that art, true art, art in the real sense

of the term is an integral part of the Higher Evolution and that the true artist is himself one form of the New Man.

Revised May 2002

**NOTES - to Tape 77**  
**(taken from Collins English Dictionary)**

1. **Prolix:** *adjective* 1. (of a speech, book, etc.) so long as to be boring, verbose. 2. indulging in prolix speech or writing, long-winded.

2. **Sitwell:** Dame **Edith**, 1887-1964, English poet and critic, noted especially for her collection *Façade* (1922).

Her brother, Sir **Osbert**, 1892-1969, English writer, best known for his five autobiographical books (1944-1950).

His Brother, **Sacheverell**, 1897-19??, English poet and writer of books on art, architecture, music and travel.

3. **Renaissance:** 1. noun, *The*, the period of European history marking the waning of the Middle Ages and the rise of the modern world: usually considered as beginning in Italy in the 14th century. 2. the spirit, culture, art, science and thought of this period. Characteristics of the Renaissance are usually considered to include intensified classical scholarship, scientific and geographical discovery, a sense of individual human potentialities, and the assertion of the active and secular over the religious and contemplative life.

4. **Hogarth**, William, 1697-1764, English engraver and painter. He is noted particularly for his series of engravings satirising the vices and affectations of his age, such as *A Rake's Progress* (1735) and *Marriage à la Mode* (1745).

5. **Shakespeare**, William, 1564-1616, English dramatist and poet.

6. **Goethe**, Johann Wolfgang von, 1749-1832, German poet, novelist and dramatist, who settled in Weimar in 1775. His early works of the *Sturm und Drang* period include the play *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) and the novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). After a journey to Italy (1786-88) his writings, such as the epic play *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1787) and the epic idyll *Hermann und Dorothea* (1797), showed the influence of classicism. Other works include the *Wilhelm Meister* novels (1796-1829) and his greatest masterpiece *Faust* (1808; 1832).

7. **Lope De Vega:** full name Lope Felix de Vega Carpio, 1562-1635, Spanish dramatist, novelist and poet. He established the classic form of Spanish drama and was a major influence on European, especially French, literature. Some 500 of his 1800 plays are extant.

8. **Bach**, Johann Sebastian, 1685-1750, German composer.

9. **Handel**, George Frederic, 1685-1759, German composer, resident in England, noted particularly for his oratorios including *The Messiah* (1741).

10. **Haydn**, (Franz) Joseph, 1732-1809, Austrian composer who played a major part in establishing the classical forms of the symphony and the string quartet.

11. **Mozart**, Wolfgang Amadeus, 1756-1791, Austrian composer, a child prodigy and prolific genius.

12. **Titian:** original name Tiziano Vecellio, ?1490-1576, Italian painter of the Venetian school, noted for his religious and mythological works, and for his portraits.

13. **Rubens**, Sir Peter Paul, 1577-1640, Flemish painter, regarded as the greatest exponent of the Baroque.

14. **Rembrandt**: full name Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, 1606-1669, Dutch painter noted for his handling of shade and light, especially in his portraits.
15. **Dilettante**: 1. person whose interest in a subject is superficial rather than professional; 2. a person who loves the arts.
16. **Croce**, Benedetto, 1866-1952, Italian philosopher, critic and statesman; an opponent of fascism, he helped re-establish liberalism in post-war Italy.
17. Published by Windhorse Publications 1988
18. **Shelley**, Percy Bysshe, 1792-1822, English Romantic poet.
19. **Muses**: *Greek mythology*: any of nine sister goddesses, each of whom was regarded as the protectress of a different art or science. Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the nine are: Calliope - epic poetry, Clio - history, Erato - love poetry, Euterpe - lyric poetry and music, Melpomene - tragedy, Polyhymnia - singing, mime and sacred Dance, Terpsichore - the dance and choral song, Thalia - comedy and pastoral poetry, and Urania - astronomy.
20. **Homer**: circa 800 BC. Greek poet to whom are attributed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Almost nothing is known of him, but it is thought that he was born on the island of Chios and was blind.
21. **Milton**, John, 1608-1674, English poet. His early works show the influence of his Christian humanist education and his love of Italian Renaissance poetry. A staunch parliamentarian and opponent of episcopacy.
22. **Nabokov**, Vladimir Vladimirovich, 1899-1977, U.S. novelist, born in Russia.
23. **Pushkin**, Aleksander Sergeyeovich, 1799-1837, Russian poet, novelist and dramatist.
24. **Tolstoy**, Leo, 1828-1910, Russian novelist, short-story writer and philosopher, author of *War and Peace* (1865-69) and *Anna Karenina* (1875-77). Following a spiritual crisis in 1879, he adopted a form of Christianity based on a doctrine of non-resistance to evil.
25. **Turgenev**, Ivan Sergeyeovich, 1818-1883, Russian novelist and dramatist. In one novel he pleaded for the abolition of serfdom.
26. **Chekhov**, Anton Pavlovich, 1860-1904, Russian dramatist and short-story writer.
27. **Coeval**: of or belonging to the same age or generation.
28. **Maupassant**, (Henri René Albert) Guy de, 1850-1893, French writer, noted especially for his short stories.
29. **Maugham**, William Somerset, 1874-1965, English writer of novels, short stories and comedies.
30. **Joyce**, James, 1882-1941, Irish novelist and short-story writer. He profoundly influenced the development of the modern novel by his use of complex narrative techniques, especially stream of consciousness and parody, and of compound and coined words.
31. **James**, Henry, 1843-1916, British novelist, short-story writer and critic, born in the US.
32. **Genius**: 1. a person with exceptional ability, especially of a highly original kind; 2. such ability or capacity; 3. the distinctive spirit or creative nature of a nation, era, language, etc.; 4. a person considered as exerting great influence of a certain sort; 5. in Roman mythology, (a) the guiding spirit who attends a person from birth to death, (b) the guardian spirit of a place, group of people or institution; 6. in Arabic mythology, a demon, jinn.

33. **Koestler**, Arthur, born 1905, British writer born in Hungary. Early anti-totalitarian novels; later novels reflect his interest in science, philosophy and psychology.