

For the INDIVIDUAL.  
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UNDER GOD.

# VOICE

INTEGRITY  
FREEDOM  
RESPONSIBILITY

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## Man at Play

When Ruskin lectured to the cadets at Woolwich, he drew the distinction between the workers and the players among men, and J. Huizinga in *Home Ludens* runs through the surprisingly wide gamut of play in which man has part. *Voice* consists largely in showing what a varied range of activities take place outside the strictly "useful" sphere, and the book in fact demonstrates that the restriction of man to an "economic animal" is both inaccurate and ludicrous, for he might as well be called a laughing animal, although the definition playing animal would include a large number of the lower creation. The sub-title is, *A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, and the work abounds with references to cultures throughout the ages and at various levels. The author insists that play is undertaken for its own sake rather than as a recreation between severer activities, that it involves rules and a set time and place and involves a seriousness of its own. It is in fact a voluntary leisure activity, and its far flung ramifications show how much leisure man has enjoyed at all stages of civilisation.

He explores the terms used for play in a wide variety of languages, and says that it has its aim in itself and is anticipated. The importance of this volume for readers of *Voice* is accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is "different" from "ordinary life." The category of play, he says, is "one of the most fundamental in life." Its forms are contests and representations, and playmates may develop into a secret society. Sacred performances and rites include drama and ritual. He examines the theories of Leo Frobenius, mentioning in particular the conclusion that archaic man *plays* the order of nature, which is the starting point of social order and institutions. He complains that the scientists, in whose frigid grip is a good deal of our thought today, have overlooked man's feasts, festivals, holidays and play. Plato, he notes, considered that Religion was Play consecrated to the Deity, and he objected that war prevented both play and culture. The play concept in language, Huizinga shows, is more fundamental than its opposite, earnest: words for play being earlier and preciser than those for its opposite. We play first and turn Puritan afterwards, if we are poor losers perhaps!

### Play and Culture

The author then deals with the "civilising functions" of play, and holds that culture arises in the form of play, an element that recedes. The Greek contest or *agon* was still play, but gambling—this kind of play—is sterile and adds nothing to life or mind. He compares the words price, prize and praise, and we may well hesitate to accept his dictum that the mediaeval just price (*justum pretium*) roughly corresponded to "market value," for justice introduces an element additional to demand and supply or what an article will fetch.

Tribes were divided into two "phratræ" distinguished by a totem, and this competitive spirit brought its satisfactions to countless peoples, all of whom enjoyed the disciplined freedom of play. For, he says, "by this quality of freedom alone, play marks itself off from the course of the natural process." He refers to the work of Granet concerning the ancient Chinese division into female and male, *yin* and *yang*, moon and sun, which led to competing groups and to the social hierarchy of feudal times, and to the contests in civility and good manners. He refers to less exalted types of competition, such as the "potlash" or primitive giving and destroying contest, which left its mark in the praise of munificence, and which was fundamentally played for honour and glory. From these matches, he concludes, we recognise man's need "to live in beauty." Turning to the Greeks, he shows that the original meaning for the word virtue (*arete*) was rather excelling, excellence, while iambics probably derived from the old slanging matches. The sacred character of Greek contests appears at every angle, and culture there developed "in play-like contest." Even the achievements of Sophocles, we must concede, were at least stimulated by a sacred contest.

### Play, Law and War

The Professor looks for play in the most unlikely places, but on second thoughts we have to allow that a lawsuit is a contest under fixed rules of time and place. The Eskimos of Greenland used a "drumming match" as their only form of law, and may still do so, and the lawsuit generally was originally a trial of strength or chance. The Stoics purified justice against considerable opposition.

Limits and rules have in the past marked war off from criminal violence, but "total war" has banished the play element and culture with it. In Chinese feudalism, the victor proved his heroic virtue by his moderation, and civilisation achieved a summit indeed when two kings made elaborate preparatons for a single combat "to avoid shedding Christian blood," and then even the duel never took place. Civilisation, says Huizinga, is impossible in the absence of the play spirit, and chivalry and tournament can only flourish in a feudal society "where no free man is required to work." The elaborate mediaeval apparatus evidently has its uses when formalism took the place of bloodshed and good manners excluded the equivalent of the trigger happy hero of the modern screen.

### Play and Poetry

Poesis, he says, is a play function "beyond seriousness," and he quotes Bacon's phrase that it is "like a dream of philosophical love," while maintaining its vital social and liturgical function. The social functions of the *vates* or seer, indeed, gradually divided into those of the prophet and the poet and others. Ceremonial antiphony was another

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POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FREEDOM.

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one thing at a time."

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element reminiscent of play, and poetry continued as the medium of Empedocles and Lucretius, verse only being abandoned slowly. The riddle game dates from remotest times, but has issued in the examination. The state documents of Japan were still partly poetic until 1868, and one wonders what monster of utilitarianism laid his deathly hand on the secretaries of the land of the Rising Sun at that date. Myth, poetry and play are interwoven, he says, and the whole work implies that culture and civilisation form part of the pattern, and that when this is destroyed, the gates of hell gape indeed. "The play mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action, mirth and relaxation follow. . . . To call poetry, as Paul Valery has done, a playing with words and language is no metaphor." The creative function we call poetry, he adds, is rooted in play.

### Myth and Philosophy

Personification, further, is a playing of the mind, and he instances the Roman custom of personifying various feelings, such as alarm (Pavor) and turning them into a divinity, and the relation of St. Francis and Poverty. Holiness and Play, in fact, Faith and poetic imagination overlap, the play element constantly bearing fruit in man's most notable activities. He asks how far those who dress as animals in theriomorphic or beast-form rituals believe that they are animals without a little smiling reserve, and says that the ceremonies are best understood in terms of a play attitude, while Aristophanes blended the serious and comic, the ritualistic and the grotesque, in his comedies which yet contained radical criticism of society. Lyric, epic and drama, song and dance are all "comprehended in play," as are the qualities of poetry.

Turning to philosophy, Huizinga examines the sophist, who displays knowledge and defeats his rival and who in fact resembles a professional sportsman. Yet the sophist was responsible for the milieu "which gave rise to the Hellenic idea of education and culture. . . . For the Greek, the treasures of the mind were the fruit of his leisure—SCHOLE—and for the free man any time that was not claimed by State service, war or ritual, counted as free time, so that he had ample leisure indeed. The word 'school' . . . meaning originally leisure has now acquired precisely the opposite sense of systematic work and training, as civilisation restricted the free disposal of the young man's time more and more and herded larger and larger classes of the young to a daily life of severe application from childhood onwards."

The play element remains in the dialogues of Plato, in the violent rivalry of the twelfth century schools, and in the pen contests of the eighteenth century. And, we might add, how dreary philosophy becomes when art and play withdraw, whether from the note books of Aristotle or from the latest learned treatise.

### Play and Art

The Arabs and Western languages speak of "playing" in music, and the German word *Musee* meaning idleness is not without significance. In Greece, he repeats, the free man had no need to work, in our sense of paid industrial employment. He mentions the educational value of the modes of music, about which Plato and Aristotle wrote in detail, but Aristotle said that the enjoyment of music is sought for its own sake. Musical contests, such as that between Handel and Scarlatti in 1709, reintroduce or re-emphasise the play element, and the dance is clearly an "integral part of play." The process of the plastic arts is outside the play sphere, but the objects once had a place in ritual or might be produced by competitors in a contest.

### Western Civilisation

Huizinga maintains that civilisation arises as play "and never leaves it," recalling that the eighteenth century, recently enough, was full of play elements. The Romans called their rites *ludi*, games, and they were as necessary to Rome as bread, for as the Emperor multiplied cities he always gave the new city an amphitheatre. The Spanish bull fight continues the Roman *ludi*, and he compares Roman munificence with the primitive "potlash" mentioned earlier, and gives some details of the hippodrome or race track of Byzantium.

Mediaeval life was full of play, and he calls the Renaissance "culture at play," and instances Ariosto, the witty Erasmus and Rabelais. In the seventeenth century, "Baroque" became the fashion and showed the play spirit in its fantastic dress and particularly in the periwig with its powder, curls and lace. The next or "Rococo" era appeared still more playful, and he gives Watteau as an example of the times. I have some reserves on accepting his strictures on the eighteenth century "playing at politics," as something of civilisation survived it, and his remark that ornament never attacked the line of a building suggests that soundness has not given way to sham. The eighteenth century music, he adds, balanced playful and aesthetic elements, and Pope's *Rape of the Lock* displayed the "ambitious emulation" of those days. I recall that in politics a code survived which might appear artificial but which retained the notions of honour and of preserving what civilisation they had.

But one may agree about the sublimity of the music, and apparently the setting for the musicians allowed them leisure enough to compose. Huizinga says, "Even Bach and Mozart could hardly have been aware that they were pursuing anything more than the noblest of pastimes—*diagoge* in the Aristotelian sense, pure recreation. And was it not just this sublime naiveté that enabled them to soar to the heights of perfection?"

The new Classicism of the middle of the century showed its "light and playful touch" in the work of Adam,

Wedgwood and Flaxman, while Horace Walpole, "the father of Romanticism if ever it had one," remained classicist in his convictions and treated Romanticism as "only a hobby."

In the nineteenth century "work and production became the ideal, and then the idol, of the age" . . . the shameful misconception of Marxism could be put about and even believed that economic forces and material interests determine the course of the world. . . . Man seemed only fit to mould the world after the pattern of his own banality. . . . Never had an age taken itself with more portentous seriousness."

### Contemporary Civilisation and Play

This intense seriousness, however, did not prevent the spread of what we now call sport, although Huizinga remarks that "with the increasing systematisation and regimentation of sport, something of the purely play-quality is inevitably lost," and the translator adds in a note that "sport has become a business or, to put it bluntly, a commercial racket." Clearly sport now "occupies a place alongside and apart from the cultural process," and despite all efforts of advertisement remains "sterile," for the old play-factor has almost completely atrophied, nor could it be claimed that bridge enriches the soul. In fact the modern bleak sporting scene, replete with statistics and records—and breaking a record can be expressed in Chinese—has practically expelled the play motif, for "really to play, a man must play like a child," and the machines of today who clip a tenth of a second off last year's record retains little but calculation and not much joy.

On the other hand, the competitive spirit thrives, notably in commerce where trading customs arise, but Huizinga probably overstresses a play-element here, for the competition often originates from our curious system of book keeping rather than from genuine need: for instance, men compete most fiercely to *export* the real wealth or even capital of their country rather than to enrich her, and these activities have more affinity with rape at the revolver point than with the gentler arts of love play or competitive games.

### Beyond Marx and Freud

The artist has of course risen in status since the days when Haydn wore his master's livery, and Henry James and others have elevated the practise of the arts to a valued profession. Our author considers that publicity "heightens the play character of art." Science differs, needless to say, although he asks whether "the new schools of psychology are not being led astray by the frivolous and facile use of Freudian terminology?"

He warns that "false play" may be used to cover up some social or political design, and party politics leaps to your reviewer's mind. He designates as "Puerilism" what he describes as "that blend of adolescence and barbarity which has been rampant all over the world for the last two or three decades." He wrote in 1944. He instances gregariousness, including "the whole rigmarole of collective voodoo," and the desire for crude sensationalism, which many newspapers, we might add, have not been slow to foster. He says, "Fair play is nothing less than good faith expressed in play terms. . . . True play knows no propaganda."

But his conclusion lies beyond play, and is directed to "the fixed, unmoving point that logic denies us," in the sphere of ethics. "Springing as it does from a belief in justice and divine grace, conscience, which is moral awareness, will always whelm the question that eludes and deludes us to the end, in a lasting silence." H.S.

### The Individual

Kierkegaard died at the age of 42, on 11th November, 1855, in Frederick's Hospital in his native city of Copenhagen. . . .

He had long felt dissatisfied with the emasculated form of Christianity he felt the Danish Church was presenting. He shrank too from the general shoddiness, as it seemed to him, of contemporary society. Faust-like, he doubted the validity of it all. Yet he loved people and earthly existence, and would fain have "realised the Universal," as his phrase goes, by marrying and becoming a law-abiding, respectable citizen. Had not the great Hegel recently been teaching that the State was the guardian and arbiter of morality? Kierkegaard was *persona gratissima* among the intelligentsia, where he was the soul of wit and gaiety. Moreover, as his niece Henriette Lund puts it in her *Memoirs*, "the streets of Copenhagen were a large reception room, where he wandered early and late and talked with whomsoever he would." Kierkegaard ranks among the world's deepest psychologists, and the streets were in no small measure his school and training ground. A famous actress, Julie Sodrings tells us how her father loved to walk abroad with Soren Kierkegaard and share his psychological experiments, as *e.g.*, one day when he gave a beggar not a copper but a bank-note, to watch the reactions. It is the greatest injustice to speak of Kierkegaard as "the melancholy Dane," idly repeating the title of a book by Martin. Kierkegaard constantly calls himself *tungsindig*, which gets translated "melancholy." To be *tungsindig* is characteristic of the Jutland stock from which he came. It implies constant introspection and rumination rather than mere gloom. I argued all this out in *The Times Literary Supplement* a year or so ago. No, Kierkegaard was a gay companion to all, and moreover took their troubles to heart too. He *could* not attack the Society he loved, nor the Church he so faithfully attended till the last year of his life. But he did use (though with a kindlier motive, he hints, than a Voltaire or Aristophanes) the Socratic method of irony to "draw attention" and inculcate reform. . . .

. . . It is now a century since Kierkegaard died. Our age has new emphasis, but there is hardly a psychological, religious, or philosophical problem we have to face, which Kierkegaard does not deal with somewhere. That is why he is so worth the pains of study. We to-day have reached a stage which Kierkegaard saw coming, when democracy pays lip service to the individual, but paradoxically enough submerges him in the group, the—ism, the party. Already Kierkegaard deplored the tyranny of the press. What would he now say to radio and television, which may even be more baneful; or if he saw the drab smoke-ridden ram-parts of industrialism, the flag-flying race for armaments, the cold-war propaganda, the deadening hand of mechanisation, all of which catches people up in their swirl, so that the individual gets lost in the crowds? Kierkegaard set up

his Individual against the cold intellectualism of his day. Are we not still suffering from the effects of neo-Hegelianism? Never was Kierkegaard's cry "choose yourself" more needed than to-day. Crowds and majorities, as he said, are not the criterion of Truth. *Vox populi* is not *vox Dei*; for fallible human judgment, multiplied quantitatively, can never take on the infallible quality of Divinity.

It is sometimes said that Kierkegaard's emphasis on the Individual is impossible for a shrunken world which is more and more interdependent. We must unite or perish, men say. But unite what for? Many unities which oppress us to-day are the very massifications which Kierkegaard dubs "the lie." And where is truth but subjectivity? Who can appropriate truth *for me* but myself? Kierkegaard, I repeat, is not a subjectivist in the sense of having no objective criterion or standard. His standard is Christianity. His individual is not "the measure of all things" as Protagoras said. He does not proudly claim self-sufficiency, like Max Stirner's *Einzig*, Aristotle's 'megalopsychos' or like the Pharisees. Kierkegaard's Individual is to live humbly before God, like the publican in the parable. How can you convert these crowds into intelligent and noble communities except *via* the Individual in Kierkegaard's sense? If we took Kierkegaard seriously, and asked ourselves some of the exacting questions he puts to us, then we might be better equipped to face the invading and expanding tides of materialism and despair. . . .

. . . We owe the Apostles and prophets of Christianity all down the ages, a debt of gratitude for their witness to the truth. Among these glorious witnesses, stands Soren Kierkegaard.

[From an article in *Church Quarterly Review*, July-September, 1956, "The Death of Kierkegaard" by T. H. Croxhall (formerly Anglican Chaplain at Copenhagen).]

### 'The Fall of Public Credit'

The saying that 'Poetry to the yokels means the idiot fringe, it does not mean Homer, Dante and Marlowe,' and that commercial advertising and publishers and some "popular professors" encourage such an attitude, receives some support from a quotation in *The Times*. This venerable journal (July 26, 1956) was reviewing *The Wicked Lord* by Oliver Edwards, the subject of which turns out not to be Lord Byron but Lord Lytton, who also had a taste for making verses. In 1780, his lordship composed a *Letter* from an American traveller, written in the year 2199 to a friend in Boston (Mass., doubtless) "the Metropolis of the Western Empire," dated from the ruinous portico of St. Paul's, London.

The reviewer complains that the poem "is no great shakes," but quotes a few lines in which an "emaciated Briton" conducts the tripper round what had been the City, and explains,

"The fall of public credit, that had long  
Tottered upon her airy base, involved  
In sudden and promiscuous ruin all  
The great commercial world . . ."

A phantom then appears with a broken spear in one hand and a mouldered Magna Carta in the other.

### "Thank God for Automation"

Under this stirring headline, which would almost qualify for the epithet "banner," *The Catholic Herald* of July 27, 1956, described how Mgr. Dell'Acqua, Assistant Papal Secretary of State, "writing in the name of the Holy Father," renders his thanks for the gift of power to achieve "automation, other technical progress and rapid economic expansion." We quote the article:

"Is not growth a normal indication of the economic well-being of a people and would it be reasonable—would it be Christian—to face the future while retreating?" asks Mgr. Dell'Acqua.

"If the machine which yesterday was but a tool can today replace the feeling and guiding hand, the observing and controlling eye, and even for certain purposes the over-seeing attention and the retaining memory, well, we have to thank God who has given man this power to achieve such things."

Turning to more detailed questions, Mgr. Dell'Acqua underlines the problem of redundancy which often seems to be the necessary consequence of the rationalisation of a country's economic resources.

"Let it be enough," he says, "to draw the attention of all those responsible to the consequences—family, social, religious—of an uprooting forced on thousands of men.

"Has everything been done to make sure that even the least important among our brothers has been considered so that everything possible has been done to put him to the least possible inconvenience?"

He warns too about the problems which arise when the education and training of youth is more and more exclusively directed to an advancing science and developing technology.

"In this respect there are serious human and religious needs to be protected, and it is not surprising that those who have at heart the moral health of tomorrow's society are worried about a youth formed for the future in 'a technical spirit.'"

### Western Gains

The society to which we belong and whose achievements we seek to preserve often appears to waver in its self confidence. Yet in some respects it is more compact than it has been since the days of Rome, and particularly in the cultural sense. There are, for instance, no longer many international figures, above the sporting level, and such contemporaries as Messrs. Eliot, Lewis, Pound would hardly be welcome too far from home, and may be called Western figures; the same would apply to Cicero, Dante and Sophocles, I imagine, and we may go further; for the Chinese have rejected at least the *Analects* of Confucius, which has been translated into French, English, etc., and may readily be claimed as more Western than Eastern today. We await their throwing other cultural treasures overboard, and shall be the sole gainers from the process as long as we are not seduced into grubbing about in Marx, Freud and other garbage of the mind: they may keep these.