

Opposition is True Friendship: William Blake on Individuality, Plurality, and Community*

DUANE WILLIAMS

If we wish to consider the meaning of Friendship on a reflective level, then a good place to look is C. S. Lewis's chapter, 'Friendship', in his work *The Four Loves*. This also provides an excellent basis for demonstrating how unusual William Blake's view of friendship is.

Lewis begins by telling us that we do not value Friendship anywhere near as highly as did the Ancients.¹ The reason for this is that Friendship is very different from two other loves that we tend to value more, which Lewis designates with the Greek terms, *Storge* and *Eros*. *Storge* is the affection between, for example, parents and their children, and in a wider sense affection for anything familiar.² Lewis gives the examples of a dog that barks at strangers that have never done it any harm, while wagging its tail at those it knows and who have never been nice to it; and of a child who loves the grumpy old gardener who has never paid it any attention, but who recoils from the visitor who is doing their best to get it to like them.³

Eros, on the other hand, is the desire for the beloved, or more exactly, the state of 'being in love.'⁴ This desire need not be sexual, for Lewis takes it for granted that sex can take place without *Eros*, while *Eros* includes more besides sex.⁵ The more carnal side of *Eros* Lewis calls *Venus*. He gives the stark example of the character Winston, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, who asks the character Julia: 'You like doing this? I don't mean simply me: I mean the thing in itself?'⁶ Julia replies: 'I adore it.' The narrator in the novel adds: 'That was above all what he wanted to hear. Not merely the love of one person, but the animal instinct, the simple undifferentiated desire.'⁷ Lewis comments:

* This is an extended version of a paper I gave as an invited speaker at a conference on Friendship, Aloneness, and Community, held at the American College of the Catholic University of Leuven, March 2019.

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1960), p. 69.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 39–41. 3. *Ibid.*, p. 41. 4. *Ibid.*, p. 111. 5. *Ibid.*

6. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 132.

7. *Ibid.*

'Sexual desire, without *Eros*, wants *it*, the *thing in itself*; *Eros* wants the Beloved.'⁸

So why does Lewis say that *Storge* and *Eros* are unlike Friendship, and why was this difference so important to people in ancient and even medieval times? 'Friendship is,' says Lewis, 'the least *natural* of loves; the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious, and necessary.'⁹ If it were not for the desire of *Eros* (or *Venus*) none of us would have been born, and if not for the affection of *Storge* none of us would have been raised. Furthermore, these more instinctive loves are shared with animals; whereas, in contrast, Lewis argues that Friendship is more virtuous in terms of belonging to that 'luminous, tranquil, rational world of relationships freely chosen.'¹⁰ Friendship is of the soul, while *Storge* and *Eros* in ancient and medieval times had a more obvious connection with what was considered the lower order of the emotions, the senses, the body, and the world of nature.

Lewis accepts that we can have erotic love and friendship for the same person, and yet these two loves remain very dissimilar. He notes that lovers are constantly telling each other about their love, whereas friends rarely talk about their friendship. Insightfully, Lewis says of this that: 'Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest.'¹¹

Friendship should not be confused with mere Companionship, which sees people merely co-operating. Lewis gives the example of occasions when our human ancestors would gather to hunt or fight. Friendship, however, can arise out of Companionship when members of the group realize they have something in common. Lewis imagines the typical words that cement a Friendship as being something like: 'What? You too? I thought I was the only one.'¹² Here, then, Friendship is marked by seeing or caring about the same truth. In sharing a vision people become kindred souls. Thus, in Friendship, it is possible that potentially divisive things such as age, gender, race, sexuality, profession, income, title, class, religion and politics do not matter.¹³ Admittedly this is an ideal, for often our friends are our friends precisely because they share those similarities that indeed make us kindred; but it is not inconceivable that a friendship might develop between, for example, an underprivileged black teenage male with a tainted past, and a law-abiding well-to-do elderly white woman, because they share a love for

8. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, p. 114. 9. *Ibid.*, p. 70. 10. *Ibid.*, p. 71. 11. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 78. 13. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

jazz. In this respect, the abovementioned divisions are not significant. Thus, Lewis tells us, Friendship 'is an affair of disentangled, or stripped minds. Eros will have naked bodies; Friendship naked personalities.'¹⁴ Being of the soul and not the body, or more spiritual than worldly is why, for Lewis, Friendship has something angelic about it.

Later in the same chapter, however, Lewis adds: 'Friendship (as the ancients saw) can be a school of virtue; but also (as they did not see) a school of vice. It is ambivalent. It makes good men better and bad men worse.'¹⁵ In short, there is a danger inherent in Friendship. The reason for this is that where Companionship produces clubs, Friendship produces circles. And if you are not inside a particular circle of friends you are an outsider. When this happens the Friendship becomes like a class or a coterie, in the form of a self-appointed aristocracy.¹⁶ Lewis points out that the Friendship may actually centre on and have no more to it than its sense of exclusivity, so that this becomes a 'degrading pleasure', and may end up supplanting the shared vision that first produced the Friendship.¹⁷ Such sets end up, says Lewis, 'basking in the moonshine of . . . collective self-approval.'¹⁸ An example that comes to mind is the snobbish salons that Marcel Proust discusses in his novel, *In Search of Lost Time*.

I think most of us will find some truth in Lewis's account of Friendship. In this view, because they stand side by side seeing the same truth as kindred souls, friends are essentially those who *agree* with one another. However, we must be careful not to oversimplify and misinterpret what Lewis means by agreement. He writes:

In this kind of love, as Emerson said, *Do you love me?* means *Do you see the same truth?* The man who agrees with us that some question, little regarded by others, is of great importance, can be our Friend. He need not agree with us about the answer.¹⁹

Hence, being a philosopher, many of my friends are philosophers too (although we come from very different backgrounds). And while

14. *Ibid.*, p. 85. 15. *Ibid.*, p. 97. 16. *Ibid.*, p. 99. 17. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–104. 18. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 79. For the following I am grateful to John Carey: 'With regard to Lewis himself, one of his most valued friends was Owen Barfield, with whom he had a sustained and intense disagreement regarding the thought of Rudolf Steiner, referred to as their "Great War". But throughout and following the "War" they remained friends; Barfield, indeed, went on to dedicate his book *Poetic Diction* to Lewis, actually quoting the words "Opposition is true friendship" in the dedication.'

the friendships were initially established by our love of philosophical discussion, our conclusions need not agree. We may even argue, which is an essential element of philosophy. Nevertheless, despite our differences, we still share a common vision and care about the same truth. This, then, is Lewis's point. Lewis also remarks that the common vision binding friendship need not be a nice one, like art or philosophy, for we could find delight in something evil, like 'torture, cannibalism, or human sacrifice'.²⁰ He also calls those people 'pathetic' who seek friendship for friendship's sake. Here they are not interested in the same truth: they simply want a friend. And yet, 'Friendship must be about something, even if it were only an enthusiasm for dominoes or white mice.'²¹

Whatever comprises the shared vision, it determines friendship by virtue of being acceptable and pleasing to those who hold it in common. It is precisely for this reason that friends agree with one another. There may be differences of interpretation within the shared view, but in Lewis's conception of friendship any opposition is situated within a wider framework of agreement, that is, a common vision and care for the same truth. And so we could say that for Lewis, essentially, Agreement is true Friendship.

This being so, it will appear strange and even ironic that William Blake asserts: 'Opposition is true Friendship.'²² Based on all we have said, there is something about this assertion that appears to blatantly contradict what Friendship is. I have just likened Friendship to agreement, and the word 'opposition' is in fact the antonym of agreement.

The saying, 'Opposition is true Friendship', appears in only three of the nine remaining copies of Blake's book, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, having been painted over in the other six. Nevertheless, it encapsulates much of Blake's thought. But before we can begin to grasp what Blake means by this enigmatic assertion, we must first explore another crucial aspect of his thinking: the significance he gave to individuality.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 95. 21. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

22. William Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 20, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, newly revised edition, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), p. 42 (hereafter *Poetry and Prose*).

INDIVIDUALITY

For Blake, the universe is of the mind and not matter. Here Blake has an affinity with Bishop George Berkeley, whom he indeed read. Berkeley famously argued that all that we can ever know is what we experience as ideas in the mind. Consequently where, according to the view of René Descartes, we cannot ever really tell if our percepts exist as objects outside the mind that perceives them, for Berkeley, existence outside consciousness is meaningless. Thus, Berkeley famously argued that the existence of all things consists in their being perceived, more succinctly expressed as '*esse is percipi*' (to be is to be perceived).²³ Similarly, Blake writes:

Mental Things are alone Real; what is called Corporeal, Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, & its Existence an Imposture. Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought? Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool?²⁴

Northrop Frye tells us that Blake never refers to the unit of this mental existence as an idea, as Berkeley indeed does, but calls it either a form or an image. 'Forms or images,' Frye adds: 'exist only in perception.'²⁵ Blake, like Berkeley, was critical of John Locke's division of knowledge into either sensation or reflection. While Berkeley and Blake might agree with Locke (to a certain extent) that knowledge relies on sensation, for them reflection is a doctrine of abstraction, which both thinkers dismiss. However, it is through abstraction that Locke believes we can gain general ideas about things. For example, in book four, chapter seven, of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke argues that we can gain a general idea of the triangle. In his criticism of this, Berkeley questions whether it is possible to be aware of a general triangle, which is 'neither oblique nor rectangle, equilateral, equicrural nor scalenon, but *all and none* of these at once?'²⁶

23. See George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, part 1 section 3; cited from *The Works of George Berkeley, D.D.*, ed. A. C. Fraser, vol. 1: *Philosophical Works, 1705–21* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), pp. 258–9.

24. Blake, 'A Vision of the Last Judgment', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 565.

25. Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 15.

26. Berkeley, *Treatise*, introduction, section 13 (*Works*, i.246); my emphasis. For a more detailed discussion of abstract ideas, see sections 10–13.

Berkeley also questions Locke's further division of sensation into primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities are properties in our experience that must belong to the objects we are experiencing (an example would be the solidity, size, and shape of a table); whereas secondary qualities are the sensations produced in us by the qualities (for example, the colour and hardness of the table). These secondary qualities, argues Locke, are produced by the object; but they are only in us and not in it, as the primary qualities are. Hence scientists are fond of telling us that grass is not really green and the sky is not really blue. Or similarly, that the sun does not really rise in the morning. However, based on the particularities of my experience, which according to Berkeley and Blake is alone real, the sky is indeed blue and the sun rises in it. I will come back to this contentious point in due course. Taking abstraction to its extreme, an atom, as a 'non-mental and unperceived unit of the object-world',²⁷ does not exist for Blake because in such an instance to be is *not* to be perceived. Like Berkeley, then, Blake disagrees with the notion of abstracted general knowledge. In his typically uncompromising way, he writes:

What is General Nature? Is there such a Thing? What is General Knowledge? Is there such a Thing? Strictly speaking All Knowledge is Particular.

To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit. General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess.²⁸

Again, Blake means that the form or image given in our perception is the real content of knowledge. Frye, elucidating Blake's view, adds:

In short, things are real to the extent that they are sharply, clearly, particularly perceived by themselves and discriminated from one another. . . . The first point in Blake to get clear, then, is the infinite superiority of the distinct perception of things to the attempt of the memory to classify them into general principles.²⁹

I think we can also take Berkeley's and Blake's view as an implied criticism of Aristotle's *Analytics* as found in the *Organon*. Leaving

27. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 17.

28. Blake, 'Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 641.

29. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 16.

aside the deductive logic found in his *Prior Analytics*, that begins with the universal and leads to the particular, Aristotle argues in the *Posterior Analytics* that sense perception constitutes the raw materials and starting point for inductive knowledge. Here knowledge begins with particular instances of sense, and goes beyond them to arrive at general truths that reveal the universal in the particular. The process is conceived as follows. First, we retain a memory from repeating particular sense perceptions. This memory Aristotle calls experience. Based on our memory of the sense perceptions, the imagination is able to form images, or corporeal phantasms, and from these reason or the intellect abstracts its ideas to arrive at knowledge. This means that the images produced by the imagination are intermediaries between sense and thought. We will come to see that this view of imagination is very different from Blake's. It is from this mental experience that universal knowledge is established as the Form of the one and the same, distinct from the many instances. Through this process, Aristotle argues:

When one of the undifferentiated particular things 'stands fast', a primitive universal is in the mind; for although what one perceives is the particular thing, the perception is *of* a universal—for example of a *man*, not of Callias, the particular individual. Again, a stand is made in these primitive universals, and the process continues until the ultimate universal concepts stand (for example, such and such a species of animal is a step towards the general kind *animal*, and so on).³⁰

This tells us, for example, that we can move from the 'standing fast' of a particular sense perception, such as *a crow*, to another stand, *the crow*, and then to *bird* and then to *animal*, and so forth. Thinkers such as Aristotle, John Locke, Isaac Newton and Francis Bacon, then, wanted to replace subjective knowing based on actual perception with objective knowledge that starts with abstracted adumbrations in the form of memories, or what Blake called 'spectres', and results in general knowledge.³¹

30. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* [*Analytica Hystera*, c. 330 BC], extracts from Bk I, ch. 1 (71a1–4), ch. 2 (71b9–25), ch. 4 (73a21–5), ch. 8 (75b21–36); Bk II, ch. 19 (99b20–110b12), trans. J. Cottingham; quoted from *Western Philosophy: An Anthology*, second edition, ed. J. Cottingham (Malden MA, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 20–21.

31. Interestingly, Søren Kierkegaard arrives at a similar conclusion to Blake, albeit from the perspective of the observing subject, when he writes: 'The objective tendency, which proposes to make everyone an observer, and in its maximum to transform him

We can discern that perception is crucial to Blake, as it is in different ways to all the aforementioned thinkers; but it is important to note that perceiving, for Blake, is not something the senses do. Perceiving is a mental act. It is what the mind does *through* the senses.³² The senses, for Blake, are therefore understood to be akin to windows or doors through which we perceive. This line of thinking is not exclusive to Blake. Take, for example, the following thoughts found in Benjamin Jowett's introduction to Plato's *Timaeus*:

In Plato's explanation of sensation we are struck by the fact that he has not the same distinct conception of organs of sense which is familiar to ourselves. The senses are not instruments, but rather passages, through which external objects strike upon the mind.³³

Thus, Plato writes: 'And now we have to speak of hearing. . . . We may assume speech to be a blow which passes through the ears.'³⁴ And again: 'There is also a swifter motion and impact of another sort of fire which dilates the ray of sight and reaches the eyes, forcing a way through their passages.'³⁵ Adhering to this view of the senses as passages, Blake himself writes:

This Life's dim Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see with not through the Eye.³⁶

The important thing to note here is that some perceive *with* the senses, and others *through* them, which means we do not all perceive in the same manner. Hence Blake says: 'The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. . . . As a Man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its

into so objective an observer that he becomes almost a ghost . . . this tendency naturally refuses to know or listen to anything except that which stands in relation to itself.' Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 118.

32. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 19.

33. Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1875), III.585.

34. Plato, *Timaeus*, 67; trans. Benjamin Jowett, *ibid.*, p. 650. 35. *Ibid.*, p. 651.

36. Blake, 'The Everlasting Gospel', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 520.

37. Blake, 'Letter to Rev. Dr. Trusler, August 23, 1799', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 702.

Powers.³⁷ Those who see *with* the eye have what Blake calls 'Single Vision' or 'Newton's Sleep.'³⁸ Such people see only empirical facts with the physical eye.³⁹ This is the materialist view, which sees the world quantitatively rather than qualitatively. This kind of thinking is limited in Blake's view, and he spent his entire life questioning it. However, those with what Blake calls Poetic Genius do not simply see *with* the eye, but rather *through* it. Thus he writes: 'I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look through it & not with it.'⁴⁰

For Blake, when we see with and not through them, the eyes as windows are dim. Hence, he tells us elsewhere: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern.'⁴¹ Blake's point here is that by perceiving through the senses rather than just with them, one is able to perceive *more* of what is sensed. Thus Blake, referring perhaps to the method of his work that used acid to burn away unused portions of copper plate, and to the burning up of creation by the visionary imagination, speaks of: 'melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.'⁴²

As Frye states: 'If man perceived is a form or image, man perceiving is a former or imaginer, so that "imagination" is the regular term used by Blake to denote man as an acting and perceiving being. That is, a man's imagination is his life.'⁴³ This means that the more you imagine the more you perceive. And the more you perceive the more you know true reality. This is why the bedimmed windows and doors must be cleansed. For Blake: 'Ultimate reality is spiritual, and the imagination

38. Blake, 'Letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 722.

39. See S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*, rev. ed. (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1988), p. 436.

40. Blake, 'A Vision of the Last Judgment', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 566.

41. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 14, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 39. It is possible that the reference to being closed up in a cavern of the senses is influenced by the cave analogy in Plato's *Republic*; while the reference to cleansing might possibly stem from the following lines in the *Symposium*, spoken by Diotima to Socrates: 'But what if man had eyes to see the true beauty—the divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality, and all the colours and vanities of human life . . . ?' (*Symposium* 211–12; trans. Jowett, *Dialogues*, II.62). However, unlike Plato, or how Plato is typically read, Blake does not want to go beyond the senses, but to see through them more.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 19.

is the organ of its perception.⁴⁴ Thus he tells us that: 'To the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself',⁴⁵ going on to state that imagination is 'Spiritual Sensation'.⁴⁶ And so, in Blake's view, only the imagination 'can resolve the antinomy of material object and spiritual reality'.⁴⁷ The same is true of the gap between God and man; for, as Blake writes: 'Man is all imagination. God is Man & exists in us & we in him.'⁴⁸ And elsewhere: 'The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is, God himself.'⁴⁹

Crucially, then, if perceiving means imagining, it also means that both are always connected to the character and experience of a particular individual.⁵⁰ This again is why Blake denies abstraction that becomes general knowledge. Likewise, our own nature is to be understood on an individual level. Frye writes: "There is no "general nature", therefore nothing is real beyond the imaginative patterns men make of reality, and hence there are exactly as many kinds of reality as there are men."⁵¹ Thus Blake says: 'Every Man's Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individuality.'⁵²

Importantly, Frye adds that this does not deny the unity of what is being perceived by different individuals, like the farmer and the painter who look upon the same landscape. Blake is not advocating solipsism. He writes: 'All of us on earth are united in thought, for it is impossible to think without images of somewhat on earth.'⁵³ However, the point for Blake is that you cannot abstract an intrinsic reality from what individuals perceive by isolating the general elements in their perception so as to capture a common denominator.⁵⁴

We have seen that, for Blake, the distinct perception of ordinary things is superior to the reflective memory's attempt to abstract and classify them into general principles. But surpassing the ordinary perception of things is the spiritual sensation of imaginative vision that sees the infinite. We might therefore say that the visionary seer is

44. A. S. P. Woodhouse, 'Imagination', in *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. A. Preminger, enlarged ed. (Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 370–76 (p. 373).

45. Blake, 'Letter to Rev. Dr. Trusler, August 23, 1799', in *Poetry and Prose*, p. 702.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 703. 47. Woodhouse, 'Imagination', p. 374.

48. Blake, 'Annotations to Berkeley's Siris', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 664.

49. Blake, 'The Laocoön', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 273.

50. See Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 19. 51. *Ibid.*

52. Blake, 'Milton', Plate 4, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 98.

53. Blake, 'Annotations to Lavater', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 600.

54. See Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 20.

such precisely because nature has become imagination itself. And so Blake says:

What it will be questioned When the Sun rises do you not see a round
Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea? O no, no, I see an Innumerable
company of the Heavenly host crying Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord
God Almighty.⁵⁵

Here, through the power of visionary imagination, Blake goes beyond the Single Vision or Newton's Sleep of normal perception that sees the sun as a round disk of fire, and beyond the common denominator of abstract reflection, which will tell us the sun does not in fact rise because of Copernican Heliocentrism, to a greater reality revealed by an artistic individual's cleansed perception whereby the senses are opened up to the infinite that was hid. This means that, for Blake, infinite reality is simultaneously infinite perception. And so, as Frye perceptively adds: 'To visualize, therefore, is to realize.'⁵⁶ Furthermore, he tells us that there are thus, for Blake, three worlds:

The world of vision, the world of sight and the world of memory:
the world we create, the world we live in and the world we run away
to. . . . In the world of memory we see nothing; in the world of sight
we see what we have to see; in the world of vision we see what we
want to see.⁵⁷

Blake asserts: 'Everything possible to be believed is an image of truth.'⁵⁸ Hence, as we said earlier, the mind of the imaginer or former perceives through, not with, the senses; and the more you imagine the more you perceive. Frye writes: '[I]magination creates reality, and as desire is part of imagination, the world we desire is more real than the world we passively accept.'⁵⁹ This is why, for Blake, seeing the sun as an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty', is real. It is also why he saw the soul of his dead brother rise through the ceiling clapping its hands for joy, or why he saw the ghost of a flea holding a cup of blood, and why he claimed

55. Blake, 'A Vision of the Last Judgment', *Poetry and Prose*, pp. 565-6.

56. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 26. 57. *Ibid.*

58. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 8, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 37.

59. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 27.

to see a cortege of grasshoppers bury a fairy beneath a leaf.⁶⁰ But sadly, this is also in part why many think Blake was simply mad.⁶¹

PLURALITY

Now that we have established the significance of individuality in terms of perception, imagination, and reality, we can begin to explore why, for Blake, opposition is the key to friendship. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake says:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.⁶²

When Blake states here that good is the passive that obeys reason, he means that in order to be good we must submit to God's will just as the universe does. This is because God is good, and we in turn can become good by passively obeying Him. When, out of imaginative independence, we do not obey God it is 'because we are evil and have fallen'.⁶³ Frye says of God: 'He keeps a grim watch over everything men do, and will finally put most of them in hell to scream eternally in torment.'⁶⁴ He adds: 'It is easy to call this popular misunderstanding, but perhaps harder to deny that orthodox religion is founded on a compromise with it.'⁶⁵ In short, all 'good' is from God and all 'evil' from man. To overcome our evil humanity, we can seek salvation by following a passive life that is in these terms 'good'. To avoid the accusation of sin, humans are not to do what they *want* to do according to their own independent will, but are to do what they *must*

60. Here I am reminded of another visionary poet, namely, Arthur Rimbaud, who said: 'I accustomed myself to pure hallucination: I saw very clearly a mosque instead of a factory, a drummer's school consisting of angels, coaches on the roads of the sky, a drawing-room at the bottom of a lake' ('A Season in Hell', in *Arthur Rimbaud: Collected Poems*, trans. O. Bernard [London, New York, Victoria, Ontario, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1962], p. 329).

61. Throughout his lifetime he was often referred to as 'poor Blake.'

62. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 3, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 34.

63. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p. 63. 64. *Ibid.*, p. 62. 65. *Ibid.*

do according to God's will. This is why all men must adhere to impartial generalizing laws in the form of commands. To do so is 'good', but, for Blake, this is a negative interpretation that is more akin to death than life. Hence eight out of the Ten Commandments say, 'thou shalt not.' The heaven on earth that it produces is, for Blake, the place of fear where people abide when they follow conventional morality. However, in contrast to the passively 'good' that obeys reason, 'evil', for Blake, is the active springing from energy and is a more positive, liberated mode of life.

While Blake is referring to what he sees as a conventional rendering of what good and evil are, he implies in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that the obverse is true. Thus heaven embodies the negative, a quality usually attributed to evil, while hell embodies the positive, a quality usually attributed to the good. However, we would go too far if we interpreted this to mean that what is deemed 'good' here by Blake is 'evil', and what is 'evil' is 'good.' Blake is not simply switching meanings. Ultimately, for Blake, the terms 'good' and 'evil' are, as S. Foster Damon tells us: 'technical terms, denoting arbitrary and artificial qualities devoid of any real moral significance.'⁶⁶ This is why Blake *can* switch their meanings as a way of challenging established views. And, as we saw above, this is why Blake says: 'Everything possible to be believed is an image of truth.'⁶⁷ This suggests that all our beliefs are images formed by the human mind.

Discussing these contraries further, Blake says that all Bibles or sacred codes have made the error of separating the body from the soul. Energy, which is of the body, has in turn been identified with evil and hell, while reason, which is of the soul, has been identified with the good and heaven. Hence the body has been degraded and the soul exalted. Furthermore, we have been told that we will be punished by God for following our energies. However, Blake says that the contrary is true: that the body and the soul are not distinct, the body being a portion of the soul discerned by the five senses. He then says: 'Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the outward circumference of Energy.'⁶⁸ Where tradition has said that God will punish man in eternal damnation for following his energies, Blake says that, on the contrary, 'Energy is Eternal Delight.'⁶⁹

66. Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 262.

67. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 8, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 37.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 34. 69. *Ibid.*

Reason for Blake was represented by Urizen, one of the gods of his mythology. The name is said by many to be a pun for 'Your Reason', while others derive it from the Greek *ὀρίσειν* meaning 'to limit', which is the source of the English 'horizon'. Urizen could of course mean both 'reason' and 'horizon', for your reason, as the outward circumference of energy that sets bounds to that energy, is thus a horizon. For Blake, the typical depiction of Urizen is as an old man with a white beard, and we are perhaps meant to identify him with what Robert Ryan calls the 'isolated paternal deity of traditional Christian iconography'⁷⁰ (or what was accepted as traditional iconography in Blake's time). Setting bounds to our energies, he is the contrary to imagination, or Blake's god Urthona, which when manifest in poetry, as the expression of the creative imagination, becomes Blake's god Los. We should add that while Urthona represents the creative imagination in the individual, Jesus is, for Blake, the universal imagination.

Urizen is the avenging god of punitive law. He is also known as an architect, and uses a compass to draw his circumscribing lines and boundaries. One of Blake's most well-known paintings depicts Urizen with golden compasses. Blake might be influenced here by Milton, who says of the Creator that he: 'Took the Golden Compasses, prepared/ In God's eternal store, to circumscribe/ This Universe, and all created things.'⁷¹ In short, these compasses of reason set limits to our energy; and to such limits Blake is opposed. In his note-book of 1808–11, Blake writes in the following lines titled 'To God': 'If you have formed a Circle to go into/ Go into it yourself & see how you would do.'⁷²

We have, then, two opposing forces: reason and energy. The soul's reason has generally been interpreted as good, and the body's energy as evil. This means that a more orthodox interpretation of Christianity has repressed one side of our human nature in favour of the other, i.e. good reason must supplant evil energy, such as passions and desires. But Blake reevaluates this view in order to demonstrate the importance of bodily energy (physical and spiritual) as the only life.⁷³

70. Robert Ryan, 'Blake and Religion', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. M. Eaves (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 156.

71. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, VII.225–7, cited from *The Annotated Milton: Complete English Poems*, ed. B. Raffel (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), p. 351. Milton was drawing on older ideas here; the measuring Creator goes back to the Bible (e.g. Wisdom 11:20), and God was represented holding a compass in medieval art (as in the celebrated miniature in the copy of the *Bible moralisée* in Codex Vindobonensis 2554, fol. 1v).

72. Blake, 'To God', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 516.

73. I refer to bodily energy as both physical and spiritual, because as discussed, for Blake, the body is a portion of the soul discerned by the five senses. See Plate 4 of 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'.

It is important to stress that Blake does not want simply to invert the traditional view, so that energy now represses reason. As stated above, without these contraries there could be no progression. Both must be recognized and reconciled. Creative movement in human existence is generated by opposing forces such as these. But, for Blake, it has been a mistake committed by conventional moral codes to believe that reason alone is good.

However, it is clear that Blake espouses energy over reason, evil over good, and hell over heaven in order to redress the balance. It is also clear that, while he accepts that reason is necessary as a contrary, he ostensibly identifies more with the active energy of imagination. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake refers to those who obey and are restricted by reason as angels or devourers, while in contrast it is devils or the prolific who follow their energies. The devourers, says Blake, force the prolific to live in chains on account of being able to resist their own energy. This, says Blake, is because they are weak in courage and strong in cunning.⁷⁴ In the same work, Blake says: 'Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling. And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire.'⁷⁵ This is why the devourers take just a portion of existence, says Blake, and think it to be the whole. Nevertheless, he adds, the prolific would not be the prolific unless they had the devourer to receive the excess of their delights. There is, it appears, a responsibility in both.⁷⁶

Energy (if it is strong) does not want to be restrained. And reason, as I have said, is more akin to death when compared to energy as the only life, because it restricts and curtails this energy. When this happens, the dull laws of rational morality are mechanically imposed upon and negate man's creative drive. This is especially the case when moral rules become general laws. These impositions are usually in the form of inherited systems that man must abide by, but which have not been created by the individual. This may be one of the reasons why in his work, *Jerusalem*, Blake says: 'I must Create a System or be enslaved by another Man's.'⁷⁷ A little further on, Blake refers to 'Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems.'⁷⁸ An example of

74. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 16, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 40. I am reminded of Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of 'slave morality' here.

75. *Ibid.*, Plate 5, p. 34. 76. *Ibid.*, Plate 16, p. 40.

77. Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 10, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 153. 78. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

a system being created and then imposed is given in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* when Blake writes:

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged and numerous senses could perceive.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity.

Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslaved the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects; thus began Priesthood.⁷⁹

Notice again how Blake is critical of generalizing abstraction. Following on from this passage, Blake then says that the priests (in what we can see is a cunningly self-fulfilling manner) pronounce that God has ordered such a thing, while as a result men come to forget that gods reside in the human breast. Hence, later in the same work Blake says: 'God only Acts and Is, in existing beings or Men.'⁸⁰

Opposition between contraries is essential to human nature and existence. Rather than one repressing the other, they should according to Blake's view be reconciled in a dynamic marriage where the two are united while nevertheless remaining two. The word 'contrary', from the Latin *contra*, means 'against', 'facing' or 'opposite.' *Contra* is made up of the old Latin element *com*, meaning 'together with', and *-tr* (zero degree of the comparative suffix *-ter*), which appears in the Latin *alter*, meaning, 'the other (of two).' *Contra*, then, originally denoted the being together of two things compared with each other.⁸¹ For Blake, there must

79. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 11, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 38.

80. *Ibid.*, Plate 16. For Blake, God is not in some unknown world elsewhere. Blake referred to God understood in this metaphysical way as 'Nobodaddy', which Damon translates as meaning 'nobody's daddy' (*A Blake Dictionary*, p. 301). I wonder, however, whether it might equally mean, 'no body daddy' in the sense of a god with no body, or 'nobody daddy'. Damon writes: "The abstract God of the Anglican Prayer Book, "without passion or parts", was for Blake a mere logical abstraction without significance' (*ibid.*, p. 159). Here Blake accords with Johann Kaspar Lavater, who in one of his *Aphorisms on Man* writes: 'He, who adores an impersonal God, has none; and, without guide or rudder, launches on an immense abyss that first absorbs his powers, and next himself' (Aphorism 552; see *Poetry and Prose*, p. 596).

81. Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, unabridged, one volume edition (Amsterdam, Oxford, New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1971), p. 163.

be a dialectical tension between them.⁸² As Frye helpfully elaborates: 'An antithesis of energy and order, desire and reason, is as fallacious as all the other antitheses with which timid mediocrity attempts to split the world. Imagination is energy incorporated in form.'⁸³

This tells us that, within the individual, opposition is true friendship because the recognition of contrary states allows for a more complete human. Plus, such a recognition prevents one part of our nature from usurping the other. But opposition is also true friendship because the recognition of contrary individuals in the form of plurality allows for a more complete society. What I mean here is that just as contraries exist and are essential to each other in the psychic structure of the individual, so they also exist and are essential to each other in the wider social structure comprising such individuals. This is why Blake refers to angels and devils.⁸⁴ Again, just as a recognition of contraries prevents one part of our nature from usurping the other, I argue that on a social level it similarly prevents one individual from usurping the other and thus leads to a sense of reconciliation.

One of the chief reasons why Blake despised both judicial and moral law was because they impose upon and deny our fundamental individuality. Blake loathed the notion of universal laws applicable to all. Such laws ignore what Blake took to be fundamentally true—that *we are all different*. This difference forms the plurality. With reference to universal law, Damon tells us that to Blake the Ten Commandments were 'negative generalizations drawn up regardless of the individual . . . Blake was emphatic that human happiness should not be sacrificed to the traditional rules, the individual should always be considered first.'⁸⁵ Hence Blake writes: 'One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression.'⁸⁶

82. In this respect, Blake's doctrine of contraries has similarities perhaps with Heraclitus' understanding of opposition or 'war' (πόλεμος). Heraclitus says: 'What is opposed brings together; the finest harmony is composed of things at variance, and everything comes to be in accordance with strife' (preserved in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.2 1155b4). He also says: 'They do not understand how, though at variance with itself, it agrees with itself. It is a backwards-turning attunement like that of the bow or lyre' (preserved in Hippolytus, *Refutation*, 9.9.2). Likewise, for Blake, what is opposed brings together, so that harmony and agreement in the form of wholeness come from variance.

83. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, pp. 26–7.

84. For a good example of this see plates 17–20 in Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.'

85. Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 90.

86. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 24, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 44.

This, I would argue, is not a challenge to equality, but is against the One Law that judges us to be equal before it, and that crushes individuality. As metaphors for types of people the lion and ox are indeed different, but their equality should stand in being *equally* free to be what it is they are. Where we do not have equal ways, we *should* have equal rights to those different ways. Blake advocated liberty, equality, and fraternity, but he did not advocate uniformity. Peter Marshall argues: 'He felt that no law could cover the multitude of individual acts and is thereby inherently unjust.'⁸⁷ Blake himself asserts:

All Penal Laws court Transgression & therefore are cruelty & Murder / The laws of the Jews were (both ceremonial & real) the basest & most oppressive of human codes & being like all other codes given under pretence of divine command were what Christ pronounced them The Abomination that maketh desolate, i.e. State Religion which is the Source of all Cruelty.⁸⁸

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake says: 'Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.'⁸⁹ This appears to argue that we only have prisons *because* of law, and we only have brothels *because* of religion. Or as Victor Paananen rather neatly puts it: 'For Blake the institutionalized moral prohibition in fact creates the vice that it condemns.'⁹⁰ Marshall likewise says that Blake understood that 'laws require prisons to enforce them as much as repressive morality creates the need for prostitutes.'⁹¹ But in Blake's time the law did more than build prisons. It also built the gallows that could even be used to hang children. Furthermore, children were often forced into prostitution.

Damon notes that Blake's proverb must have been inspired by Paul's words: 'By the law is the knowledge of sin.'⁹² If so, Blake is, it would seem, applying his own twist to Paul. For when Paul writes: 'Therefore

87. Peter Marshall, *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* (London: Freedom Press, 1988), p. 42.

88. Blake, 'Annotations to *An Apology for the Bible* by R. Watson, Bishop of Landaff. London, 1797', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 618. The term 'abomination that maketh desolate' is found in Daniel 9: 27, 11: 31 and 12: 11; see also, Ezekiel 11: 18, 21. It is also referred to explicitly by Jesus: Matthew 24: 15, Mark 13: 14.

89. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 8, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 36.

90. Victor Paananen, *William Blake* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), p. 51.

91. Marshall, *William Blake*, p. 42.

92. Romans 3: 20 (KJV). Damon adds that this passage was the basis of one of the Gnostic heresies: 'Epiphanes . . . wrote a book *On Justice* . . . asserting . . . that the law, by

by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin',⁹³ he means that our obedience to the law may justify us in the eyes of ourselves and other people, but not in the eyes of God before whom we are always guilty owing to the universal corruption in our nature. We are thus unlike Adam in his innocence or Christ whose works were perfect, because we are sinful. And so our obedience to the law is always imperfect in God's eyes, despite any justification by our own works. And so to say, 'by the law is the knowledge of sin', means for Paul that the very existence of the law lets us know we are sinners.

If Blake was inspired by Paul's line, his aim may have been to take its conclusion and apply to it an opposite logic, so as to say *no law, no sin*.⁹⁴ This is because for Blake it is *only* the law itself that makes us sinners. Thus, Marshall argues: 'It is law which alone defines a crime, invites people to commit it, and promises dire punishment.'⁹⁵ The gist here is that for Blake, law is not the cure for social and moral problems, but the main reason behind those problems.⁹⁶ Moralizing law based on a conventional or orthodox interpretation of good and evil was, in Blake's view, an error. He writes: 'And Man himself Become a Fiend, wrapped in an endless curse, Consuming and consumed for-ever in flames of Moral Justice. . . . Under pretence of Moral Virtue, filled with Revenge and Law.'⁹⁷

For Blake, our sense of moral justice is not something with which we measure and judge sin; rather, it actually *is* Original Sin. When referring to God, Blake distinguished between the names Elohim and Jehovah. Damon (drawing on the rabbinical tradition) writes: 'Elohim (an honorific plural) is the Creator in *Genesis* [1]. It represents God in his aspect of Justice, as contrasted with Jehovah, the aspect of Mercy. Sometimes the word 'Elohim' should have been translated simply "judges".'⁹⁸ For this reason commentators like Moses Maimonides

introducing the distinction of meum and tuum, was the real author of the sin of theft and adultery' (*William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* [London: Constable & Co., 1924], p. 320).

93. Romans 3: 20 (KJV).

94. Similarly, Nietzsche writes: 'No morality has any value in itself' (*Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1968], p. 100); cf. 'There are no moral phenomena at all, only a moral interpretation of phenomena' (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1973], p. 96).

95. Marshall, *William Blake*, p. 42. 96. *Ibid.*

97. Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 36, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 182.

98. Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 119. In his poetry and art, Blake often equates Elohim with one of the gods from his own mythology, namely, Urizen. As discussed above, Urizen symbolizes (among other things) reason and law-making.

understand Genesis 3:5 as: 'Ye shall be as gods [judges], knowing good and evil.' And the reading that therefore refers to Adam and Eve becoming as 'gods' or 'judges' by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden, reinforces what Blake takes to be Original Sin: namely, humans establishing *themselves* as judges by dividing human realities into good and evil. The first sign of this is that immediately after eating the fruit from the tree, Adam and Eve see they are naked and in shame cover themselves—whereas before this they are both naked and not ashamed.⁹⁹ In this respect, we might say that Adam and Eve can now see and *judge* their own and one another's nakedness. Blake, however, would no doubt see their nakedness in a positive light. The *Blake Records* provide the following account of Blake's liberalism in the form of his and his wife Catherine's nudity:

At the end of the little garden in Hercules Buildings there was a summer-house. Mr Butts calling one day found Mr. and Mrs. Blake sitting in this summer-house, freed from 'those troublesome disguises' which have prevailed since the Fall. 'Come in!' cried Blake; 'it's only Adam and Eve, you know!' Husband and wife had been reciting passages from *Paradise Lost*, in character, and the garden of Hercules Buildings had to represent the Garden of Eden; a little to the scandal of wondering neighbours, on more than one occasion.¹⁰⁰

And in *Paradise Lost* itself, John Milton wrote of Adam and Eve's nakedness:

Nor those mysterious parts were then concealed.
 Then was not guilty shame, dishonest shame
 Of Nature's works. Honor dishonourable,
 Sin-bred, how have ye troubled all mankind
 With shows instead, mere shows of seeming pure,
 And banished from man's life his happiest life,
 Simplicity and spotless innocence!¹⁰¹

99. Incidentally, the English word 'shame' is argued to stem from the Indo-European root **skam-* or **skem-*, which is perhaps an enlargement of **kam-* or **kem-* meaning, 'to dress' or 'cover oneself.' See, for example, Klein, *Etymological Dictionary*, pp. 677–8.

100. *Blake Records*, ed. G. E. Bentley Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 53–4.

101. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, IV.313–18, pp. 248–9.

We can see here how sin-bred shame (owing to moral judgement) produces dishonourable honour, and how as a result covering genitalia suddenly becomes a sign of pseudo-purity at the expense of innocence. Is it not the puritanical who with disgust typically condemn nudity on behalf of moral values? For Milton and Blake, Original Sin is the moment when we know good and evil, and so judge ourselves and others by moral values. And it is precisely this moral knowledge that banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden that had constituted their happiest life. This is a revolutionary reading in itself, owing to the fact that the distinction between good and evil is typically used to judge those who are deemed to have sinned, whereas clearly for Blake, *this judging* based on the knowledge of good and evil *is the actual sin*. Thus, in the spirit of Jesus who crucially preached, 'Judge not',¹⁰² Blake writes: 'Who dare to Judge but God alone?'¹⁰³

Interestingly, Blake associated the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with the gallows at Tyburn, which he called 'Albion's fatal tree'.¹⁰⁴ The fatal fruit of this tree, which Blake also calls 'a Tree deadly and poisonous',¹⁰⁵ is what allows humankind to establish itself as Elohim (gods or judges). Alfred Kazin writes: 'To him the tree in Eden is the gallows on which freedom-seeking man is hanged by dead-souled priests';¹⁰⁶ while Jon Mee says that the gallows at Tyburn are: 'The place where the unity of the nation is built upon the judicial murder of some of its members. The gallows for Blake are a place where difference is suppressed so that the bogus integrity of the nation may be preserved.'¹⁰⁷ Damon writes that, for Blake: 'It is the system of Morality, the false church of Mystery, the whore of Babylon. On this tree Jesus was crucified.'¹⁰⁸ For Blake, then, Christ is crucified on the tree of the

102. Matthew 7:1.

103. Blake, 'Annotations to *An Apology for the Bible*', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 619.

104. Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 82, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 240. Damon writes: 'Tyburn was the site of the famous gallows in London. It was situated about the lower corner of Edgware Road, just to the north of Hyde Park, which was adjoined by Kensington Gardens. As the name indicates, Tyburn was near a brook, which crossed Oxford Street a little to the east of the present Marble Arch, and flowed through St. James's Park, then plunged underground at the intersection of Stratford Place and South Molton Street, which is "Calvary's foot." Elsewhere, Blake thrice associated Tyburn and Golgotha' (*A Blake Dictionary*, p. 413).

105. Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 38, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 185.

106. Alfred Kazin, *The Portable Blake* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946), p. 11.

107. Jon Mee, 'Blake's Politics in History', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. M. Eaves (Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 146.

108. Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, p. 410.

knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden, i.e. crucified by law and judgment.

We cannot overlook that in the Old Testament, Jehovah is responsible for a long list of deeds that can appear evil to our eyes. Thus, as Damon notes, Jesus' understanding of Jehovah as 'the loving Father of all was a revolutionary concept. He was no longer the God of vengeful Justice but the God of Mercy.'¹⁰⁹ Elsewhere, Damon says: 'The universal paternity of the all-loving Father signifies the Brotherhood of Man, the only basis for a peaceful society. But this must rest upon the freedom and development of the Individual.'¹¹⁰ Blake himself writes: 'What is Liberty without Universal Toleration.'¹¹¹ We can only each be free as individuals if we tolerate one another's individuality (and therefore difference) in the form of plurality. Moreover, for Blake, toleration points to the 'forgiveness of sins', which he understood to be Jesus' revolutionary abrogation of the system of justice and punishment.¹¹² And so where I have stated that the knowledge of good and evil is what banishes humankind from Eden, it is Jesus' gospel of the forgiveness of sins that serves to reverse this. Thus Blake asserts: 'The Gospel is Forgiveness of Sins & has No Moral Precepts.'¹¹³ Hence Blake's view of forgiveness went far beyond the conventional 'Hate the sin but love the sinner.'

Consequently, as mentioned earlier, rather than advocating that any should establish themselves as judges and divide human reality into good and evil, Jesus instead asserts: 'Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.'¹¹⁴ I would understand Blake to interpret this as meaning that our judging or not judging others is simultaneously God's judging or not judging us. Before the words just quoted, Jesus questions the *lex talionis*, saying: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth

109. *Ibid.*, p. 205. This is arguably something of a simplification on Damon's part. Although the Old Testament is full of God's wrath, it is also full of his mercy: Psalms and Isaiah come to mind.

110. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

111. Blake, 'Annotations to Boyd's *Historical Notes on Dante*, Dublin, 1785', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 635.

112. For Blake this was the unique insight of Jesus, which according to Damon was completely overlooked by the classical Pagan philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle (*A Blake Dictionary*, p. 141).

113. Blake, 'Annotations to *An Apology for the Bible*, by R. Watson, Bishop of Landaff. London, 1797', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 619.

114. Matthew 7:1-2 (KJV).

for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.¹¹⁵ And following this he says: 'Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies.'¹¹⁶

In his poem, *Jerusalem*, Blake writes: 'If you forgive one-another, so shall Jehovah Forgive You: That he Himself may Dwell among You.'¹¹⁷ Akin to the judging or not judging just discussed, it seems here that for Blake the very act of our forgiving one another is God's act of forgiving us. This puts a completely different emphasis on the petition in the Lord's Prayer: 'And forgive us our debts, *as* we forgive our debtors.'¹¹⁸ This is to say that God forgives us our debts *in our very act* of forgiving our debtors. They are not distinct acts. Hence, Blake saying, as was quoted earlier: 'God only Acts and Is, in existing beings or Men.'¹¹⁹ Thus, immediately after the Lord's Prayer we read: 'For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'¹²⁰ Elsewhere Blake writes: 'Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell,/ There God is dwelling too.'¹²¹ Interpreting these lines, Christopher Z. Hobson argues: 'God and Jesus, for Blake, are humanity, when and where it can live by these virtues.'¹²²

In Blake's view, the only basis for a peaceful society is the freedom and thus development of the individual within a plurality of difference. Here we can begin to see how 'Opposition is true Friendship'. Blake writes: 'The worship of God is Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius. And loving the greatest men best, those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God.'¹²³ I would argue, then, that Blake's assertion: 'Opposition is true Friendship',

115. Matthew 5:38–9 (KJV). 116. *Ibid.*, verses 43–4.

117. Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 60, *Poetry and Prose*, pp. 211–12.

118. Matthew 6:12 (KJV); italics mine.

119. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 16. 120. Matthew, 6: 14–15 (KJV).

121. Blake, 'The Divine Image', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 13.

122. Christopher Z. Hobson, 'Anarchism and William Blake's Idea of Jesus', *The Utopian* 1 (2000) 43–58 (p. 49). Hobson writes further (p. 50): 'In *Jerusalem* . . . the "Divine Vision" sings a song of oppression and endurance; the poem's narrator closes by saying, "This is the Song of the Lamb, sung by Slaves in evening time" (*Jerusalem*, 60:5, 38). We must be careful not to assume that Blake means slaves' songs are like the divine vision; he is saying slaves' songs *are* the divine vision and the song of the Lamb (that is, Jesus); Jesus *is* slaves singing of freedom.'

123. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 22, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 43.

is very much akin to Jesus' command 'Love your enemies.'¹²⁴ This is not to my mind a simple call to 'live and let live', but something more subtle and profound: 'let live and live.' For as Blake affirms: 'Mutual Forgiveness of each Vice/Such are the Gates of Paradise.'¹²⁵ This is to say that through the mutual forgiveness of those that trespass against one another, liberty is granted to each. Consequently, all life is increased in recognition that 'Everything that lives is Holy.'¹²⁶ Furthermore, it seems that tolerated difference through forgiveness not only brings about liberation for all, but also allows for a more genuine harmony, which, for Blake, is the same thing as Eden—the land of life. It can also be equated with Jerusalem, which as the Holy City of Peace always represents 'liberty' for Blake. This perhaps discloses the true meaning, giving them a renewed emphasis, of Blake's famous lines:

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green & pleasant Land.¹²⁷

COMMUNITY

While I have emphasised the importance of the individual for Blake, we must be careful here to stress that Blake's view of individuality and the plurality it engenders is more of a means to an end, that end being the creation of a better community or society. Blake's vision is not simply about the individual self, and he certainly does not advocate what we might call a subjective or private take on religion. Blake's focus on individual vision is radically social. The love between people is a love made 'in the Perpetual Mutual Sacrifice in Great Eternity!'¹²⁸ E. P. Thompson says of Blake: 'In shedding the prohibitives of the Moral Law, Blake held fast to the affirmative: Thou Shalt Love. It is because this affirmative remains an essential need and quest of our own times that William Blake still speaks with such power to us.'¹²⁹ Accordingly Blake himself asserts:

124. See Matthew 5:44.

125. Blake, 'For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 259.

126. Blake, 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', Plate 27, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 45.

127. Blake, 'Milton', *Poetry and Prose*, pp. 95-6.

128. Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 61, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 212.

129. E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 128.

Mutual in one another's love and wrath all renewing
 We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
 We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one,
 As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
 We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him,
 Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life,
 Giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses.¹³⁰

While I have argued that Blake denied general, abstracted knowledge, we can see here that he affirmed the universal. Through the forgiveness of sins we become a Universal Humanity or Divine Body living as One Man—Jesus Christ. As Blake says: 'General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus.'¹³¹ And elsewhere: 'The Eternal Body of Man is THE IMAGINATION. God himself / that is / The Divine Body . . . JESUS we are his Members.'¹³² These citations almost certainly appear to echo Paul when he says: 'Now ye are the Body of Christ, and members in particular.'¹³³ There also appears to be a trace of Paul's reference to God being 'all in all';¹³⁴ likewise of Paul's description of the true Christ who 'is before all things, and by him all things consist'.¹³⁵ And there are clearly parallels with Jesus when he says: 'Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them.'¹³⁶ More especially, it is through mutual forgiveness that Jesus is among us *as us*, that is 'he in us, and we in him'.¹³⁷ Thus mutual forgiveness mirrors Paul's call for unity indicating: 'One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.'¹³⁸

Another figure who was greatly influenced by Paul was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and his notion of the Cosmic Christ is arguably akin to Blake's Divine Body of Christ consisting of particular members. Teilhard writes: 'In any domain—whether it be the cells of a body, the members of a society or the elements of a spiritual synthesis—*union differentiates*. In every organised whole, the parts perfect themselves

130. Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 34, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 180. 131. *Ibid.*, Plate 91, p. 251.

132. Blake, 'Laocoön', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 273. 133. 1 Corinthians 12:27 (KJV).

134. 1 Corinthians 15:28 (KJV). 135. Colossians 1:17 (KJV).

136. Matthew 18:19–20 (KJV). For some of the thoughts in this paragraph I am indebted to Christopher Rowland, 'William Blake and Life in the Divine Body', in *Paul, Grace, and Freedom: Essays in Honour of John K. Riches*, ed. P. Middleton, A. Paddison and K. Wenell (London and New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2009), pp. 119–30.

137. Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 34, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 180. 138. Ephesians 4:6 (KJV).

and fulfil themselves.¹³⁹ Here, the parts become more autonomous not less so, and form a harmonized complexity rather than becoming absorbed and lost in the great whole. The granular whole, then, is a Centre consisting of centres. This is akin, I believe, to the plurality of individuals I have emphasised. The more autonomous these centres become in themselves, the more service and power they bring to the Centre as a whole. However, if one distinct centre endeavoured to become *the* Centre per se, then it would inevitably do harm to itself in that the whole is what allows its distinction to be at all. This would be like the heart deciding it was no longer going to be a part of the body, but the body itself. There are again echoes of Paul here, where he also refers to the significance of the hand, foot, ear, and eye as members of the body. The chapter is too long to quote in full, but wholly relevant to what I am arguing here are the following lines:

. . . there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.¹⁴⁰

Returning to where we began, Lewis says that a scarcity of kindred souls plus practical considerations makes it difficult to enlarge a circle of friends. However, he adds: 'But within those limits we possess each friend not less but more as the number of those with whom we share him increases.'¹⁴¹ This is because other lights bring out different facets of those friends for us to enjoy that we could not bring out by ourselves. However, no matter what size the circle becomes, it is still based on an insider perspective. Friendship as Blake understood it, however, actually includes outsiders. It essentially celebrates difference. Lewis's view produces exclusive centres that revolve around a shared vision. This is why in Friendship, for Lewis, such divisive things as age, gender, race, sexuality, profession, income, title, class, religion, and politics do not always matter. That shared vision which forges the Friendship supplants all else. Now on the surface this is of course positive, but it refers only to those within the circle. And that shared vision might not be something as harmless as stamp collecting or train spotting. For example, divisive elements might disappear

139. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. B. Wall (London: Collins, 1955), p. 40.

140. 1 Corinthians 12:25–26 (KJV). 141. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, p. 74.

because we are kindred souls when it comes to the shared vision that is our nationality. Consequently, we may have a contempt for those who do not belong to this circle. It might seem daft if we consider all the different things that are overlooked, like race, sexuality, and class, while we are united in our nationalistic vision, but still the difference of the outsider, the foreigner, comes to the fore and is excluded. And such an exclusiveness, as we all know too well, very soon becomes the 'degrading pleasure' we spoke of earlier.

In contrast to this, it appears that Blake's view produces exclusive centres that form a whole Centre; and *this* becomes a greater shared vision. With Lewis's view, as I indicated earlier, Agreement is true Friendship in that Friendship is found inside a circle and Opposition outside it; whereas, for Blake, in a Centre of centres, namely, the divine body of Christ consisting of divine members, Opposition is true Friendship. In Friendship, for Blake, it might be argued that typically divisive things such as age, gender, race, sexuality, profession, income, title, class, religion, and politics *do* matter. They are not stripped away by the shared vision of kindred souls. They remain and comprise a complex plurality of difference, and allowing for this difference in us all constitutes the shared vision. Here, then, tolerance transforms divisiveness. However, we might argue that being based on the divine body of Christ, excludes on religious grounds, for example, the Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. In response to this, it should be stressed that Blake is speaking in absolute terms. Hence, one of his earliest works is called *All Religions Are One*, in which he argues: "The religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius, which is everywhere called the Spirit of Prophecy."¹⁴² Recall, also, that Blake is speaking of One Man as a universal family that is equivalent to God Himself.

In the spirit of the kind of Friendship we have been discussing, I would like to include a quotation from Lewis that might have a kinship with what Blake is saying:

Friendship exhibits a glorious 'nearness by resemblance' to Heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the

142. Blake, 'All Religions Are One', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 1.

Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy' *to one another* (Isaiah 6:3).¹⁴³

To close, it is worth noting that while Blake indeed had friends in the sense we usually understand it, there were spells in his life when he felt friendless and when opposition seemed oppressive and dispiriting, leading to paranoia and depression. The following lines convey a heartbreaking sense of sadness and serve to illustrate this:

O why was I born with a different face
 Why was I not born like the rest of my race
 When I look each one starts! When I speak I offend
 Then I'm silent and passive and lose every friend.¹⁴⁴

There are too many references to friends and friendship in Blake's work to mention, but let us end with some selected lines that corroborate our arguments about the saying: 'Opposition is true Friendship.' One poem in his notebook has him say: 'False Friends fie fie our Friendship you shant sever/In spite we will be greater friends than ever.'¹⁴⁵ And to close, Los says in the poem *Jerusalem*: 'I have tried to make friends by corporeal gifts but have only/made enemies: I never made friends but by spiritual gifts,/By severe contentions of friendship & the burning fire of thought.'¹⁴⁶

143. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, pp. 74-5.

144. Blake, 'Letters, [To] Mr Butts, August 16, 1803', *Poetry and Prose*, p. 731.

145. Blake, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 502.

146. Blake, 'Jerusalem', plate 91, 15-18, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 251.