

(170) THE DESIRE TO BE

&

THE RELATIONSHIP OF WOMEN AND MEN

1. Being and structure

1.1 Humans need that they know, subconsciously or consciously, that they are, that they are able to say; "I am.", "Me". To be and to have a place are closely interrelated. "To be" means to have a place amidst of all other humans, to have a very own place. Once this place was secured in different, interrelated manners. People lived in a certain place, the place their ancestors generally already lived. They were born there, died there, were buried there. That this wholly disappeared for so many people and is disappearing for (nearly) everybody is, according to Serres, probably the biggest change in human life since culture came into existence.

More generally, people lived in a complicated structure, consisting of many, interrelated sub-structures. They had their place in these structures. It gave them their rights and duties. It delineated their future, in a marriage or outside of it, in a profession. It regulated all relationships, on the same level and to levels above and below the own situation. Life had a great continuity. Everybody had a name which was known and recognised by everybody who was important. It was a life in external, vertical mediation. People knew, without thinking about it, about self-esteem, about their human dignity.

1.2 This cultural structure has gone. People's in many manners defined place is gone. More and more people wear names, which don't connect them with their ancestry, with any cultural tradition. They have fancy names, the names which were modish the moment they were born. In a deep sense even names are gone. Everybody now lives in internal mediation without transcendence.

2. Human life without structure

2.1 The consequence of the disappearance of structure is, that the possibility to say: "I am" is not any longer simply given to everybody. We have to find that possibility. How can I say: "I am"? It is obvious that I cannot say that I am, when I am a loser, the situation we normally now are in. When I am a loser, I am nobody. I am in the midst of all the losers, "simply" one of them. I even constantly run the risk to be clearly a scapegoat, in which case the ability to say: "I am", in a manner that is convincing for myself and for those around me, clearly is gone. When I am a scapegoat I am not any longer somebody. I simply am nobody. Thus I have to get out of the situation in which I am a loser. How to achieve that? It looks like that there are two possibilities:

2.1.1 The possibility to say “I am”, “Me”, is given to me. It can be given to me by a person who loves me in freedom, who accepts me in her or his life without any condition. She/he can do that by calling me by my name, making my name really personal, taking my name into her/his reality and thus making me myself real. It can be done with other words or means, if they only express the same reality. It is the manner in which God gives being, calling us by our name, Jesus gives us being, by asking us to follow him. It is the manner we, humans, can give each other being, if we are free, which consequently in the same time already means: willing, to do so.

2.1.2 We try to acquire it, by winning, over all the others. As long as we are “below” other people and we don’t accept that as structurally right, which in fact is because of the dwindling of culture less and less the case, we feel diminished. Parts, aspects of our being are taken away from us. Thus we are not really “me”. In order to be able to be “me”, nobody has the right to impinge on my being “me”. When we are “below”, structurally or incidentally, we are not wholly free to do what we wish. When we are not wholly free to do exactly what and as we wish we are, thus our conscious or sub-conscious conviction, not able to be really ourselves, to say with self-esteem: “I am”, “Me”.

Thus the only possibility to be ourselves, to be wholly free, is to be on top, above everybody else. As soon as we have lost our place in structure and are not wholly received in the life of a person who really loves us, it is an existential necessity to be on top. In that case we are driven by an existential necessity, by an existential desire.¹

Thus the constant fight for “being”, to be one-up, in order to be able to say “Me”, begins in the very moment that we fall out of structures, when structures swindle away. It is however an absolute hopeless fight. It is the fight of everybody against all. There are no steady points. Everything is relative. In fact there is not even a “top”. All “tops” are fictional, only existing in our own phantasy when we are striving for it.

It is, seen from another viewpoint, a fight to put human reality upside down. In human reality every single human never is first. He always is second. Only when he accepts that he is second, he can find a place. By trying to be first means that the very possibility to find and have a place is destroyed. Consequently as a result of this fight we constantly are threatened to become neurotic and to be scapegoated, to lose, both of which in fact time and again happen.

This struggle to be can only be successful when we take the being of the others away. We envy their being. We have the phantasy that the other has the being we desire. We rival for their being, to take away their being for ourselves. We achieve in doing this by winning, by putting them down in our place, we ourselves acquiring their place. This means that in fact we are surrounded only by enemies.

The situation of the women is another than that of the men. The women are fascinated by the men because they have, or seem to have, power. The men are fascinated by the women, because they seem to have a relationship with life itself which the men are more and more missing. Striving for each other’s being they become more and more doubles, like each other and thus it becomes steadily more unsure if men really have power and if women really have a more direct contract with life.

¹ Until now I called this desire metaphysical desire. Although it clearly is very difficult to change a technical term which is already used for some time, it might be worth considering to change it. Metaphysical desire is used to indicate the desire to be. It sounds philosophic. Worse is probably, that metaphysics, the very heart of philosophy, is the result of this desire, not the origin. Thus I try, anyway in this paper, to use “existential desire”, the desire to exist, instead of “metaphysical desire”.

Striving to be finally means to strive to be the only one who has being, leaving all the other people beneath us. Only in that case we are sure you have being, to be able to say "Me". That again means that we in fact are striving to be a god. We are lonely, the loneliness of people nowadays. Nobody really is with us on an equal basis. Worse still: All people around us strive to take our "divinity" away, in order to take it for themselves. Trying to be a god, what we all more or less do, means that we constantly are in the neighbourhood of the sacred, of violence.

2.4 This is our (paradoxical) position and predicament: We all are, frantic or hopeless, looking for the person who really loves us, embraces us lovingly with her/his eyes and arms and gives us being, the possibility to say "me". We might be lucky, but very often we are looking for this person in vain. This is not only the case because generally they only come in our life when we are not looking for them. Much more important and worse is that we are systematically destroying this possibility, because we fight, in one manner or another, with everybody around, in order to be first and not any longer second. As long as this fight lasts we destroy the possibility of meeting in a human manner although, happily, time and again miracles occur.

3. The desire to be and the relationship between women and men

3.1 The fight to win and thus for being is raging around. Everybody partakes in this fight. We fight alone and very often we fight in alliances, together with others. These alliances are changing time and again. It is a reason why we don't any longer have friends and only acquaintances, who we can exchange when we need others, new ones.

3.2 The cultural difference between women and men is probably the oldest of all differences in culture. Probably stronger than any other difference it is based on "natural" differences, of the body and the task in the procreation. Being a woman, being a man probably was, after the distinction between the scapegoat ("him") and the scapegoaters ("us") the first aspect of cultural and thus personal, existential identity.

3.3 Consequently in the fight for being, the fight to take over the being of the other by winning over her/him, the boundary between women and men is the last barrier to overcome. If I cannot find, as a man, being amidst of men, by taking it away from men, winning over them, I seek elsewhere, amongst women. When a woman, when women cannot find being amongst them, they too are driven to that cultural boundary, wishing to overcome it and to get the being of men, thus to win over them. It is the last remaining possibility to acquire being amongst humans, when all other possibilities failed. The next one is to try to be straightaway god, with all the violence belonging to the sacred.

3.4 Both from the feminine and the masculine point of view it looks like that the women are fighting harder to get the being of men than the reverse. This is only too understandable. The changing of culture has generally been the work of men. In this change structure was destroyed and thus the structural place of both women and men had disappeared. The structural place is replaced by power games which must result in getting again what structure once gave: Then possibility to say "Me". Men had and have in this fight a better point of depart. They generally were in power in the old structure, although it was a structured power. Their world is destroyed as the women's world is, but the new, structureless world, in which both finally have to find a place is much more a men's world than a women's world. The general movement, from handwork and personal care into mechanisation and automatics, from personal to functional relationships, how much ever it

influenced and damaged men and their life, utterly destroyed the worth of women's work and life.

3.5 Thus as a consequence for this fighting for being there are two currents going on in the same time: Women try desperately to penetrate into the men's world, because there is "being", which can be experienced as self esteem, as personal dignity, the impression to be able to say in an existential manner "Me". In the same time there is an undercurrent, which maybe slowly becomes stronger, in which men try to penetrate the women's world, housekeeping, caring for the children, cooking, doing this with, consciously or subconsciously, exactly the same goal.

3.6 In the ongoing battle of women against men and men against women, in order to acquire being by winning over the other, the Other, there are many strategies, which very often go together:

3.6.1 We just behave as if we are the other. We are only in the company of the other sex, do feel us only at home with them, behave as they do. We wear the clothes of the other sex, become transvestites, we let operate ourselves into the other sex. This movement is so massive that culture became, compared with earlier times, very tolerant with respect to this movement, especially that of women in the direction of men. Women finally were listed in the armed forces, a development culturally unheard of.

3.6.2 We make endlessly different and varied alliances, in which women ally together with women (and me) against men, men ally with men (and women) against women. The old cultural differences are used to make allies. In this manner we try to win and thus, finally, to get hold of the being of the other(s), the Other.

3.6.3 These two very general movements, of allying with and fighting together against the others to acquire being, this movement of doubles, for by taking it from the other, is going on in endless many forms and strategies.

3.6.3.1 There is of course always and again the open power fight on the macro-scale, the political scene and its derivatives, a fight in which all means to win over the other, either to acquire "rights" or to keep them, are used. This fight is raging all over the "first" and "second" world and will soon be a world-wide one.

3.6.2 There further is the fight on the micro-scale, in the families, in all the relationships in which women and personally men meet each other. There again there are endless many possibilities to put each other down, to make strategical alliances etc. Many marriage and family difficulties, difficulties in the workplace (sexual harassment, e.g. always is a strategy to put down and win) are the result. But there are too all these other consequences which we abhor: Battering of wives and husbands, of old people, of children, sexual abuse, the many various addictions etc. Pornography in its many, more and more vile, expressions is first of all an expression of the battlefield between men and women, in the fight to acquire being at the cost of the other. In the same time it shows that we really use all available means, however despising, to reach our goals

4. Are there ways out?

4.1 It is clear that all fighting destroys differences. All fighting of women against men, of men against women, is totally counterproductive, because the very goat of the fighting, to be able to say "Me", is destroyed in the growing indifferenciation of fighting. In the end nobody has anything like "Me", to take it away.

Of course fighting has many forms and possibilities. We fight when we, as women or men, try to secure that a woman gets a certain job. We fight for political and social rights for women and, eventually, for men. We fight when we slander, generally, men or women. But it is clear that if we really wish to reach our goal, to be able to say "Me" in freedom and without any anxiety, we only can stop all this fighting. In this fighting, in which we try to take the "Me" of the others away in order to acquire a "Me" for myself, we automatically destroy every possibility to be able to say "Me" at all. Only if we are looking for total chaos, in the sub-conscious hope that out of this chaos a new world will be born, we can go on fighting.

4.2 Just because the structural cultural differences between women and men are gone, it probably is already scapegoating and in any case not helpful to speak generally about women and men. We cannot do that any longer. When we still do it, we always mean a certain type of women or men. By doing so we put them already in a certain place and because there are no real places in the old sense, this place generally is below us. But even is the place above us (E.g. a man says that women generally are better than men), than this is only "the plus of the minus". It is scapegoating as well. In the cultural situation we are in, we cannot any longer meet "women", or "a woman", "men", "a man", because finally it is not any longer a valid difference. We only can meet persons who, but is secondary in the meeting, are women, are men.

4.3 The fighting for the possibility to be able to say "Me" is a classic example of the general cultural fact that things are not desired because they are scarce but that, the other way round, they become scarce just because they are desired. When we would stop desiring to be able to say "Me", we all could easily say "Me" without any difficulty and without any rivalry. The space for people to be, to be able to say "Me", is simply endless. We know that as soon as we stop the desiring, the rivalry, the fighting.

4.4 If we stop to desire to be able to say "Me", we would not any longer threaten each other. We would give each other space. That very moment we would be able to love each other and to give each other, because we love each other, the possibility to say "Me". We are back at the possibility, mentioned above, 2.1. In the same time we would discover that the possibilities to give each other this freedom to say "Me" are again endless.

4.5 We fight to achieve, to get a position in society, to win, finally in order to be able to say "Me". Now and then we achieve this for a certain time, but on the whole it is a hapless fight, of all against all and especially of men against women and the reverse. We can begin the other way round, first of all stopping the desiring, thus being able to say "Me" without further difficulties and, in the same time, being able to love each other, thus giving being, the possibility to say "Me" to each other. As soon as we do that, we find our way in this world, better and more easy than we do now.

One of the central expressions of Jesus, especially in the Gospel according St. John, is "I AM". He is in a relationship which makes it possible for him to say just that, the relationship with his Father. Knowing that he is, he finds and goes his way. The same is true for us: Knowing, out of a relationship, that WE ARE, that we are able to say "I AM", "ME", we find our way through life, through the world.

