

THE STORY OF MY HEART: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION AND CRITIQUE

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Introduction: Responses to The Story

The Annual Report and Bulletin of the Richard Jefferies Society published in October this year contains two or three references to *The Story of My Heart* which, taken together, illustrate the different attitudes to Jefferies' spiritual autobiography or testament (if this is an appropriate thing to call it) which I have encountered in my own reading and conversations. In the account of Mr. Christopher Hall's birthday lecture in November 1987 we find that *The Story of My Heart* is the work of Jefferies with which Mr. Hall is least happy: 'The Speaker could not come to terms with the type of writing in *The Story of My Heart* (transcending, through nature, onto a spiritual plateau). To him it seemed completely irrational when compared with the usual precise observation encountered in his other work. An explanation of this deviation which Mr. Hall felt comfortable with was that Jefferies felt such awe at what he saw he found it difficult to express his reactions on a purely visual and emotional level¹. A few pages later in the account of the April lecture, given by Gladys Mary Coles we read about Mary Webb that, '*The Story of My Heart* had a profound effect upon her as it confirmed her in rejecting traditional religion and becoming a Pantheist'. Finally, on p. 12, there is a reference to Robert Dougall's comment on Jefferies: 'The Greatest of the nature mystics, Richard Jefferies, whose *Story of My Heart* I loved'.

Incomprehension or distrust of the language of the *Story* and aspects of its message; admiration for Jefferies' intensity of emotional involvement with the natural world and powers of evocative writing; acceptance of what he has to say as (almost) a revelation of true religion for his and our own age: these attitudes will probably be familiar to all of you who have read or heard about Jefferies' work. If you are like me you will have found yourself in sympathy with all of them in different degrees and at different times, so it seems a good way to start these reflections on *The Story of my Heart* to remind you of the different responses which the work continues to evoke.

From my own point of view, as a Christian theologian and an interested amateur in philosophy, it is of course the second of these responses, the response of Mary Webb, which is most interesting. Her assessment of the significance of the *Story*, though not necessarily her detailed understanding of it, is shared for instance by John Robinson, the former bishop of Woolwich, in the pages on Jefferies in his own autobiographical book, *The Roots of a Radical* (London, SCM Press, 1980: pp.149-55); and by Edna Manning in her *Richard Jefferies, a Modern Appraisal* (Windsor, Gaby

Goldscheider, 1984: pp, 134-47). For Manning, like Webb, Jefferies' thought is a liberating and inspiring influence to those who understand it (pp. 134-5: 'a revelation... a prophecy of a new religion'); for Robinson, he is the 'seer', the visionary who realised before his time that the religion of the nineteenth century was 'blasphemously inadequate' to the 'Beyond', the transcendent Godhead who is the source of all being and value, which Jefferies sought and which he was compelled to describe as 'infinitely higher than deity' (Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart: My Autobiography*, introduction by Andrew Rossabi, London: Quartet Books, 1979, p.31). A similar assessment of the liberating power of Jefferies' thought is implied by the remarks of Walter Besant which are quoted at the end of Edward Thomas' biography of Jefferies (pp.286-7), with their pejorative references to 'orthodoxy', 'authority and sacerdotalism' as elements in religion from which Jefferies escaped and to which he never returned.

My aim is precisely to say something about the religious value, and limitations of Jefferies' thought, particularly about his understanding of the natural world, the human mind, and the existence and nature of God. The philosophical and religious issues which Jefferies discusses are perennial, age-long human preoccupations, the basic concerns of theologians and mystics both within the Christian tradition and (like Jefferies himself) outside it. For addressing these issues Jefferies deserves our thanks and our intellectual respect. But we must remember that though it is possible to go some way towards assessing the *Story* from a philosophical and theological point of view, to criticise and refine Jefferies' assumptions, discourse and ideas in the light of rational argument and Critical theological reflection, the *Story* itself is not, for the most part, a work of philosophical argument and criticism. It is much less detached, a description of an experience and, in some respects, an almost political statement, a manifesto of Jefferies' ideas on the present state and ideal, desirable future of human life: Edna Manning is particularly strong on portraying Jefferies' work in this way. The free-flowing, discursive, experiential style of the *Story* means that it is not an easy work to summarise and represent in different dress. To reduce its content to the level of a philosophical or religious system may perhaps seem thoroughly disrespectful, perhaps even a failure in itself to appreciate the significance of the work and its liberating qualities. Jefferies himself believed that he was able to express his deepest insights only when he had freed himself from constraints of religious authority and philosophical systems: 'He claims to have erased from his mind,' Jefferies writes in his own description of the contents of the *Story*, 'the traditions and learning of the past ages, and to stand face to face with nature and the unknown. The general aim of the work is to free thought from every trammel, with the view of its entering on another and larger series of ideas than those which have occupied the brain of man so many centuries' (p.24). In the book itself this claim is first made in chapter three, where Jefferies summarises all the important ideas of the past as the threefold discovery of the soul, immortality and deity, made by the 'Cavemen' twelve thousand years ago. For him, nothing that has happened since is important, except for his own experiences and discoveries: 'Now, today, as I write, I stand in exactly the same position as the Caveman. Written traditions, systems of culture,

modes of thought, have for me no existence. If ever they took any hold of my mind it must have been very slight; they have long ago been erased' (p.57).

This claim is of profound importance for Jefferies' understanding of his own intellectual quest. But it need not necessarily be accepted at face value, or allowed to rule out or invalidate the attempt to relate Jefferies' views to other philosophical and religious traditions. In fact the claim itself needs to be subjected to examination and criticism. Is it generally good to try to free oneself from dependence on all previous views and systems, or does the attempt lay one open to the dangers of excessive subjectivity, of self-deception, and of misinterpretation of one's own motives and experiences?

I would suggest that pursued to its limits, any system of thought which refuses to lay itself open to influence, criticism, and assessment from an alternative point of view is likely to be subject to these undesirable distortions (to become the kind of closed and invulnerable system which is called an 'ideology', with all the potential for evil which that term implies). This is why criticism and cross-fertilisation between different systems is necessary, to alleviate the dangers of undue dependence on our own, inevitably partial experience and understanding, to help us avoid the mistake of thinking that our own particular philosophy or theology is the only, self-evidently, true way of thinking, Jefferies' rejection of all past systems of thought is laudable in so far as it expresses a determination to get to the bottom of things, not to rest content with commonplace solutions; but it is dangerous for the reasons I have suggested. A balance needs to be struck between dependence on our own experience, and acceptance of rational reflection and of the corrective value of points of view different from our own.

So to expose Jefferies to criticism and comparison from other mystical and religious ways of thought is in fact to do him a service: or rather to do ourselves a service greater than if we simply accepted what *he* has to say in straightforward dependence. For we are perhaps best able to criticise our own philosophies and prevent them from becoming ideologies when we exercise our minds by *criticism and assessment* of the systems of the past, not just by leaving them to stand as we find them. The study of the past, the reliving of past intellectual debates and the criticism of past opinions, suddenly and sometimes unexpectedly pays dividends for the development and correction of our own outlook. Thus the past continues to influence us and engage in dialogue with us; we are impoverished if we ignore it.

Jefferies' Aim: Thought in Itself

The Story of My Heart begins with a striking passage, probably well known to many of you, in which Jefferies describes the effect on his state of mind of a walk, frequently undertaken, from his home to a nearby hillside:

The labour of walking three miles to it, all the while gradually ascending, seemed to clear my blood of the heaviness accumulated at home. On a warm summer day the slow continued rise required continual effort, which carried away the sense of oppression. The familiar everyday scene was soon out of sight; I came to other trees, meadows, and fields; I began to breathe a new air and to have fresher aspiration, (pp.29-30)

Throughout the first two or three chapters of the book, Jefferies describes the effect upon him of the natural world with which he was so familiar. His attention is not limited to minutiae of nature, but takes in the earth, the sky and the distant sea as a whole, the totality of the physical cosmos as it appeared to him from the hillside. It is these passages above all which have, I suppose, established Jefferies' reputation as a nature-mystic and, as was suggested by the references with which I began, a pantheist. But is this description accurate, or are there other aspects of Jefferies' thought which deserve closer attention and which are disguised by his concentration on the experience of nature?

'Nature mysticism' at its most general implies the view that nature is the one all-embracing reality, that the experience of nature is a revelation of a mysterious but fundamentally self-explanatory life or impersonal activity which requires nothing beyond itself to support it or explain its existence. If nature is spoken of in religious terms, as the object of prayer, as embodying creative forces and, perhaps, some form of direction and conscious order, as embracing human life and human aspirations in itself – then we call this view Pantheism, the view that 'everything is God' (or divine), that no God or gods exist apart from the natural world itself.

It is easy to detect pantheism when in fact it is not present. The major religions of India, Hinduism and Buddhism, are sometimes erroneously described as pantheist, not because they believe that everything is God, but because they hold certain aspects of nature to be sacred or simply because their conception of God does not have the same concreteness as it is commonly perceived as having in Christian thought. If a particular philosophy seems to be thinking in a way which we regard as vague, obscure or simply alien, it often seems easiest to label it with a familiar term, whether the label itself is regarded as denoting something positive or something negative. This is what has, I think, happened when Richard Jefferies is described as a nature mystic or a pantheist. It does not matter whether we approve of these ways of thinking or not: they are familiar attitudes deeply rooted in the tradition of western thought in the last few centuries; they serve as portmanteau descriptions of the attitudes and beliefs of countless poets and writers from St. Francis of Assisi to Wordsworth and Jefferies; they enable us to feel at home with, to believe we understand, thinkers who otherwise seem remote and incomprehensible, even repulsive. But reality is rarely as simple. Where does the centre of gravity of Jefferies' thought really lie?

The first two chapters of the *Story* define what in the passage quoted above Jefferies calls his 'aspiration'. What is it that, at the deepest level, he wants to experience or understand? 'In the glow of youth there were times every now and then when I felt the necessity of a strong inspiration of soul-thought. My heart was dusty, parched for want of the rain of deep feeling ... An inspiration – a long deep breath of the pure air of thought – could alone give health to the heart' (p.29). These words, taken again from the very beginning the *Story* give us, in fact, the answer to this first question, if we are prepared to listen to it. What Jefferies seeks is not the *product*, of thought – ideas, conclusions, decisions, discovered or understood from the data of nature or his own emotional experiences – but thought itself,

pursued and enjoyed to its fullest and most intense degree. As he says a page or two later (32), the prayer, the soul-emotion, the passion (three more terms are introduced from Jefferies' remarkably fecund and varied vocabulary) he wants 'in itself – not for an object'.

Two terms which are used frequently are 'soul' and 'prayer'. Both of these terms are inadequate, Jefferies believes, to express the reality he seeks: 'I felt an emotion of soul beyond all definition; prayer is a puny thing to it, and the word is a rude sign to the feeling, but I know no other' (p.31, cf.30 for the problems of using 'soul').

A further passage illustrates the fact that Jefferies' search is for thought itself in terms which draw explicit attention to the fact that it was only gradually that he realised the nature of his own aspiration; 'I did not then define, or analyse or understand this. I see now that what I laboured for was soul-life, more soul-nature, to be exalted, to be full of soul-learning' (p.32). But in the remainder of the first chapter there are repeated indications that this is the case. 'Let my soul become enlarged; ... I desire a greatness of soul, and irradiance of mind, a deeper insight, a broader hope. Give me power of soul, so that I may actually effect by its will that which I strive for' (p.34); 'That I might have the deepest of soul-life, the deepest of all ... that I might have a fullness of soul till now unknown, and utterly beyond my own conception¹ (pp.36-7).

What Jefferies describes in these passages as his 'prayer' is then an urgent, passionate desire for greatness of soul, of thought. He is quite explicit about how this prayer is formed, how he finds the energy and inspiration to make it. He prays, he says, with or through every feature of nature and the totality of the cosmos (pp.31-2, 33-4), using it as a source of power to enlarge his soul: 'My soul prays that I may have something from each of these, that I may gather a flower from them, that I may have in myself the secret and meaning of the earth, the golden sun, the light, the foam-flecked sea. Let my soul become enlarged...' (p.34). In another passage in the first chapter (p.33) he explains his experience of embracing the totality of the cosmos in his thought, commenting that 'Losing thus my separateness of being [I] came to seem like a part of the whole¹. This description of the experience of oneness with the material cosmos is important, but it should not be allowed to determine our interpretation of Jefferies' understanding of and use of nature. Even in the passages on which I am presently commenting this use is, I think, purely instrumental, and this becomes even clearer subsequently. Jefferies' essential aim is not absorption into the cosmos, union with nature or even the experience of nature as a living spiritual force on *a level with* his own existence – this is my primary reason for suggesting, as I am, that the description 'nature mystic' is misleading. The enhancing of his own soul-life remains paramount, and nature is at most an aid to his 'prayer'. 'My own soul', he writes, 'that secret existence which above all other things bears the nearest resemblance to the ideal of spirit, infinitely nearer than earth, sun or star' (p.34); he desires a soul not equal to or part of but greater than the energy of the sun, greater than the life of past generations, greater than the fulness of life and the cosmos itself (p.36). Nature has already been left behind in the intensity of Jefferies' search for the power to perfect his own soul. As the

work proceeds we find a more explicit affirmation of the pure inwardness of his goal; the greatness, the purity, the brilliance of nature supplies an *analogy* for the quality of thought which Jefferies desires (p.39-40, cf.31), but not the reality itself. He can even state that the experience of nature makes him aware of the absence, the otherness, of the soul: it is not in nature (p.39). As he becomes more used to the thought he becomes less dependent on the experience of the greatness of nature to inspire it: 'It is always within. It requires no waking; no renewal; it is always with me. I am it; the fact of my existence expresses it (p.43, cf. 46) Finally, he broadens the picture somewhat by including the power and grace of the human form among those things which inspire in him the desire for soul-life (pp.41-2).

So far then Jefferies has communicated to us in the words of his *Story* the intensity of the thoughts and experiences which came to him first on the hillside. But he does not shirk the task of at least some further explanation of the *content* of these thoughts, a more precise description of the nature of the greatness of soul which he seeks. In chapter two he describes the experience of trying to formulate his prayer more precisely in three divisions – not entirely successfully, for as he explicitly affirms, the emotion of soul which he had come to know was far deeper than the verbal prayer which resulted from his reflections. Words indeed, are inadequate to express the thought, the experience itself (p.43, 46f). What the three divisions of the 'lyra prayer' as he calls it, are is not particularly relevant to my purpose here: the most important is undoubtedly the articulation of the desire for increase in the capacity and power to will and achieve its aims of the soul itself: (I wished to search out a new and higher set of ideas on which the mind should work ... Instead of a set of ideas based on tradition, let me give the mind a new thought, drawn straight from the wondrous present, straight from this very hour¹ (p.46).

Jefferies' Concept of God

With this quotation, we return to the point from which I started my detailed description of the contents of these early chapters of the *Story*: Jefferies' claim to have freed himself of all the thoughts of the past since the Caveman's initial discovery of the soul, immortality and deity. I have quoted these chapters in some detail in order to put forward the point of view – I am not saying that it is completely immune from challenge or criticism – that Jefferies' experience should not be seen as a response to nature, as a species of nature mysticism, but as an expression, sometimes through nature, of his awareness of the potential of his own soul for increased and enhanced thought.

In addition to this basic point, I would maintain that Jefferies rejected any possibility of seeing nature as a part of or a manifestation of the divine; he even rejected any possibility that nature was purposive, and especially that human beings held a special place in it, that nature in any sense exists for the benefit or use of human beings. As John Robinson emphasises in his discussion, Jefferies' view of nature is totally lacking in sentimentality or anthropomorphism. This can be seen particularly from chapter four of the *Story* (especially pp.60-67): Jefferies refuses to 'look for traces of the deity'

(66) in nature or in the exigencies of human existence. Nature is 'a force without a mind ... absolutely devoid of consciousness, and with no more feeling that the force which lifts the tides' (65). There is no force in it that can be called God, and, in Jefferies¹ view, any God responsible for it would be nothing but an object of justified contempt.

I want to stress that from the point of view of its interest as a religious philosophy, Jefferies' assertion of the purposelessness of nature is actually the crux, the vital turning point of his thought. It is often suggested as an objection to Christian beliefs about the world that they are implausibly anthropocentric, that they imply or state that the world was created and exists for the sake of human beings, Jefferies rejects this view explicitly, and with it the 'fatuous belief (p.66) in any deity which is invoked to support such a belief. But it does not follow from this that he accepts a fully naturalistic account of humanity as a product of the natural world and on a simple level with it, denying to human beings any special quality that distinguishes them from the animal world, nor that he necessarily rejects belief in any deity. It merely means that for Jefferies the ultimate source of value of which humans are aware and to which they respond lies not in nature but elsewhere.

The next question must be put in rather abstract terms, but I hope the comments which follow will make it clearer. The question is, does Jefferies regard this source of value which transcends nature as consisting simply in the existence and the process of thought itself, or does he attribute to it a more concrete reality, an essence which may be called the soul, or a greater essence which either includes within itself or supports and maintains the existence of souls? Chapters three and four of the *Story* provide the basis of Jefferies¹ answer to this question. Chapter three begins with a well-known passage on immortality and eternity, whose tenor is such as to support strongly the view of the soul as an objectively-existing and eternal essence or being. 'Recognising my own inner consciousness, the psyche, so clearly, death did not seem to me to affect the personality' (p.49). Jefferies goes on from this comment to argue that the soul is not extinguished at death.

Look at another person living; the soul is not visible, only the body which it animates. Therefore, merely because after death the soul is not visible is no demonstration that it does not still live. The condition of being unseen is the same condition which occurs while the body is living, so that intrinsically there is nothing exceptionable, or supernatural, in the life of the soul after death, (*ibid*).

I have called this an argument, as so it is, in a sense. It is at least a reminder that an easy dismissal of the immortality of the human person ought not to carry conviction, even if we need to make many more thorough enquiries into such questions as what is meant by 'soul' and what beliefs about a creative or sustaining force (whether an impersonal one or a personal creator God) are justifiable, before we go on to conclude that the value or a human soul is such to be able to assume that it will survive, or that God will cause it to continue its existence, after the death of the body.

For Jefferies however, arguments take second place to experience. The passage from which I have quoted is full of words like 'seem' and 'feel'. 'Resting by the tumulus, the spirit of the man who had been interred there

was to me really alive, and very close. This was quite natural ... Only by the strongest effort of mind could I understand the idea of extinction ... the immortality of the soul [was] natural, ... I *felt* immortality as I felt the beauty of a summer morning' (*ibid*). The power and value of thought, of the mind, is such for Jefferies that he is unlikely to underestimate the veridical quality of such an experience, an experience so powerful that he can describe it satisfactorily only by calling it an awareness of something more beautiful than existence and higher than immortality. But he is not so entirely carried away by it not to remain aware that immense problems lie in wait for anyone who tries to establish the truth of the soul and immortality. He admits that the truth of either point of view cannot be established. Hence he is willing to concede that the soul may not exist, that death may simply be extinction, that there is no essence which survives or whose persistence is guaranteed by the existence of a transcendent cause. The other alternative I have proposed is possible, that thought itself is the ultimate value, regardless of whether that which thinks, the mind or soul, has any objective eternal existence: 'At least while I am living I have enjoyed the *idea* of immortality, and the idea of my own soul. If then after death, I am resolved without exception into earth, air and water, and the spirit goes out like a flame, still I shall have had the glory of that thought' (pp.49-50; cf.59-60).

Despite his hard-headedness in the face of arguments about immortality, a hard-headedness repeated later in a remarkable discussion of the possibility of miracles (pp.53-4), I believe that Jefferies held out the sincere hope in the reality of the soul and immortality, or rather, of the existence of a reality which transcends these very ideas, the ideas of the 'Caveman'¹, and therefore in a way guarantees them. Beyond the purposelessness of the world and the travesty of an idea of deity which it implies, the power of thought points to something, 'an existence, a something higher than soul – higher, better and more perfect than deity' (p.66). Elsewhere Jefferies refers to this something as a 'fourth idea', 'something more than existence', a 'Soul-Entity', an illimitable, inexpressible 'cosmos of thought', like a whole new civilisation waiting to be discovered (pp.55-8). Of course again such a description is perhaps compatible with the view that what Jefferies refers to is simply his desire to discover the limitless capacity of human thought itself. But enough has been said to make at least plausible the view that what Jefferies claims to grasp or recognise is the existence of another, higher mind, something which exhibits thought and idea in its purest form in its objective existence. How should we assess his detection of this higher reality?

A Critique of Jefferies' Theology

In point of fact, bold though it is, Jefferies' detection of a higher mind or reality is less esoteric, less bizarre in form than it may seem to us now. His own claim to have put aside all previous human thoughts and systems obscures the many connexions of Jefferies' view of transcendent reality with those of other thinkers; there is much in the religious traditions which he criticises, including Christianity, which parallels his own thought.

In general, the closest affinities of Jefferies' philosophical system are with Platonism. Platonism too saw ultimate value in a transcendent reality which is accessible not through experience of the material world but only to reason and thought itself. 'Mind' and 'Soul' are terms which are used by the non-Christian philosopher Plotinus (c.204-270) to designate aspects of the ultimate reality of which he believed all lesser minds to be an image or an emanation. Clearly there is some affinity with Jefferies, although Platonism, and Plotinus in particular, tended to attribute ultimate status not to Mind but to perfect unity, the One, whose being is utterly unchangeable and incapable of being analysed or understood by any mind. Whether the One occupies itself in discursive thought as we do, and whether it is in any sense personal, are difficult questions which cannot be answered here.

As well as this strong formal likeness, Jefferies shares many characteristics of language with Platonism, including, in this instance, the Christian Platonism of a writer such as Dionysius the Areopagite (5th century). For both views the transcendent mind is ultimately un-knowable. Jefferies experiences a profound awareness of his inability to think or speak as he would wish of the reality which he is trying to describe. For Platonists, this experience of the unknowability of ultimate reality is considered so important that it is enshrined as a fundamental dogma of their system. Even the language of analogy and metaphor is inadequate to the task of description. In Christian thought, the unknowability of God has been understood in different ways and has served different purposes. Its main value has been to stress that God is truly infinite, whereas human beings are not; to put a stop to human attempts to understand God's action and his nature, and therefore to limit his claims on us to what we want to allow him to be concerned with. A God whose ways are ultimately unknowable to finite human minds makes demands we cannot foresee and cannot control, asks of us more than we are normally comfortable with assuming we can give.

Jefferies' dismissal of unsatisfactory concepts of deity also has important parallels in Christian thought. Christians and others who accept the existence of God must also accept that Jefferies was right to be dissatisfied with the concepts of God which were available to him – a God whose principal concern seemed to be the ordering of the natural world – and right to seek something higher. Even the superlative language which Jefferies uses: 'something beyond deity' and so on, should I think be a challenge rather than a cause of offence for Christians and others for whom it would seem most natural to use the word 'God' to refer to the highest possible reality. It has parallels within the Christian tradition, and can be itself interpreted as a testimony to an important principle of all good theology, that we need to be continually reassessing our ideas of God and checking them to make sure they are not becoming too commonplace.

But, despite this, I still think that Jefferies attitude to the natural world is, theologically speaking, a problem. He allowed no place for human beings in the natural order. His denial that the human mind has evolved in accord with natural laws shows this especially clearly, implying as it does that the human mind is transcendent, supernatural, of value in itself. A century after Jefferies it is no longer possible to deny the theory of evolution and still

maintain one's intellectual integrity: we must accept that whatever its value in ultimate, transcendent terms, the human mind has been produced within the evolutionary process, not arbitrarily imposed from outside it. This is an important point, but not my main one. If no longer credible today, Jefferies' wish to deny the evolution of the human mind is at least understandable in the context of his views as a whole. But he goes even further in backing up his denial of the evolution of the soul by denying any necessity for a causal explanation of the existence of the universe (p.101). Any explanation in terms of evolution, of creation or formation (i.e. by a God) is ruled out. The universe simply is. Jefferies' account of nature, the universe, even the human mind is ultimately static.

One important effect of this view is to drive a wedge between the existence of the material world and the existence of the higher world of thought which Jefferies claims to have detected so that the two simply do not affect one another. And here many theists (not to mention many scientists and philosophers who have not followed the eighteenth century Scot David Hume in denying that the human mind's perceptions of patterns of order and causality have any objective counterpart in the actual, material world) would disagree, and insist that in some sense the natural world should be seen as revelatory of a higher intelligence or cause. It is necessary to qualify this statement and reduce it to its most basic form, which is to say, perhaps paradoxically, that despite the problem of the existence of evil in the world and other arguments which have traditionally been thought to weigh against the creation of the world by a higher being, the very contingency and (perhaps) lack of clear purpose in the world, the fact that it cannot be seen as self-sufficient or self-explanatory, may themselves legitimately be held to show that the world is dependent, that it requires a creator, a being whose own existence is not subject to the same defects, whose nature acts as the source of value which human beings perceive but fail, like Jefferies, to find in nature. A secular naturalism, any more than a religious nature mysticism, cannot explain the human beings' perception of the value of the their own existence, and the intimations of the existence of transcendent value which they experience. The less significance we see in the world itself the more pressing is the need for an explanation for the existence of value and order at all. Jefferies rejected nature in the interests of finding transcendent value. But I would suggest that, a recognition of the value of traditional arguments for the existence of God based on contingency in the material world would have strengthened his case for the existence of ultimate value, rather than weakening it, as I suspect he believed.

I have used terms like 'source of value' several times and I would like to end by commenting on this. It is not a term used by Jefferies; it is rather a term drawn from the language of traditional theism. Its use draws attention to what I consider a problem in Jefferies' thought. Jefferies says very little – I think rather less than writers like Edna Manning make out – about the ethical implications of his views. He deduces few if any moral values from his system. What values he does deduce seem to me to be rather uncritically accepted and to demonstrate the uncontrolled building of ideas on the basis of his own aesthetic and emotional experience. I refer to a problem which seems to me to be a crucial one in any discussion of the adequacy of

Jefferies' moral views – his elevation of power of the will, apparently for its own sake, to the status of ultimate goal (cf. especially pp.76-7), and his worship, if that is not too strong a term, of the physical prowess and power of the human form (cf. pp.42, 74, and chapter 8 *passim*).

I do not think it follows from his statement, of this view that Jefferies was in any sense strongly egotistical as a person: I do not wish to criticise his personal life or ethics at all, But the views which he expresses are I think capable of dangerous perversion when they lead him to scorn conventional descriptions of virtue and to denounce asceticism and practices such as self-examination as manifestations of impurity, weakness or slavery of mind (pp.93-4, 117-8). In the Christian tradition in particular, moral virtues have been seen in part, if not principally, as ways of checking the lust for power and self-assertion and thus of emphasising our dependence on God and our responsibility to others. Asceticism sees true moral strength in bodily weakness and in virtues such as humility and patience which, by implication, Jefferies derides. Virtues like this teach us that though we recognise signs of transcendent value in ourselves, we are not ourselves simply part of the ultimate transcendent reality: we are finite and dependent beings.

Although Jefferies does not clearly recognise this aspect of the human experience of ultimate value, still I think there is no reason why his views should necessarily lead to an ethic of self-assertion in the way they do. The uncontrolled nature of his own reflection – the fact that he accepted his own experiences without question as offering him the unvarnished truth about reality – probably explains its intrusion. But a tradition of philosophical thought, and a religious tradition especially, if it functions well, will pay attention not only to such intense experiences of God and ultimate value as may be granted to mystics, even to theologians, but also to the religious and moral values which are accessible in the everyday world and to the ordinary person who is not blessed with Jefferies' power of thought. These things too tell us something about what it is to be human and to live as spiritual beings in a material world. It is Jefferies' contempt for the *ordinary* achievements of human life and thought that disturbs me most about the *Story*, and which I do not think is completely redeemed by the more 'political' aspects of his programme, such as his hopes for the improvement of the education and conditions of life of ordinary people (cf. pp.81-4, 98-9; chapters 9-11). It is important that we are alerted to Jefferies' mistake so that if we follow him down the mystical path which he treads we may avoid also following him in these less palatable respects.

I do not wish to end on a note of criticism, so let me conclude by reiterating that to me *The Story of My Heart*, is a most impressive work, full of insight and of arresting power. If I have criticised it at a number of points, still I think that the work deserves a place among the great works of mysticism and philosophy of religion; few writers have been able to express their personal vision of the world with such intensity. It is time that *The Story of My Heart* received more recognition and serious treatment, from philosophers and theologians than it has.

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[Note: this paper was written at relatively short notice and has been submitted to the Society in written form with comparatively few changes beyond the removal of some expressions and asides appropriate to a lecture but not to a written text. In the author's view it bears the marks, particularly in its latter stages, of hasty composition and inadequate preparation, and I would not like it to be considered or cited as a definitive expression of my views on the subjects with which it deals.]