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THE SYSTEM OF SECOND BEST

A MAJOR part of being human lies in deciding how we shall "deal" with the matters which make up our lives—sometimes things, sometimes people, and, all of the time, ourselves. It is the role of science to help us make these decisions. Through science, we are enabled to choose the appropriate means or principle on the basis of which we ought to deal. The laws of chemistry, for example, have been built up from practical experience with the chemical elements and their various combinations. They define the behavior which may be expected of the elements under certain conditions.

When it comes to dealing with human beings, however, the problem of scientific knowledge changes radically. Unlike the elements with which chemistry is concerned, and unlike the forces and masses dealt with in physics, human beings are themselves units whose primary characteristic is that they are continually making decisions as to how they will behave. This is obviously a source of confusion to the man who wishes to practice science in respect to man in the same way that it is practiced in chemistry and physics. It was natural, therefore, for scientists with this background and intent to try to work out a method which would neglect the unpredictable side of human behavior. Since science, as someone has said, is "prediction," a science of man must make predictions about human behavior, and if it is difficult or impossible to make predictions about individual men, then we are obliged to limit our human science to the behavior of large groups of men. This conclusion led to the application of statistics to the science of man. Hence, in large part, the sciences which attempt to deal with man with something like the rigor found in chemistry and physics, are statistical sciences—statistical sociology, statistical psychology, etc. Even when man as a single individual is approached, there has been the tendency to subdivide him into a number of "forces" collected at a common focus, so that a kind of "vector analysis" might be applied to his behavior. Thus there are endless studies of human behavior as an expression of "conditioning," in which the factor of free choice by the individual is left out of account.

While it is widely supposed that this sort of "science of man" is peculiar to modern times, there is no great difficulty in showing that ancient philosophers took account of the same phenomena of human behavior, the difference being that they did not assume that the judgments formed from this sort of observation of man are the only judgments about man worth making. They began with the premise that man is a being who "deals," who *chooses*, that is, regarding this as the essentially human aspect of man. They then turned to the question of *how* men choose, finding that a certain proportion of choices were likely to be such that they endangered the welfare of other men, or the community at large. In respect to these latter choices, which were regarded as either evil or ignorant, a secondary system of dealing with men was devised for the protection of society. This secondary system we call law or politics. The primary system—which is rather an attitude than a system—has reference to the nature of man as one who chooses for himself, and concerns itself with the conditions of freedom. If it is the nature of man to deal or choose, then the science of man will interest itself in the greatest possible freedom of choice.

It was Plato, among the ancients, who most clearly set this general human problem by saying: "There is no man whose natural endowments will ensure that he shall both discern what is good for mankind as a community and invariably be both able and willing to put the good in practice when he has perceived it. As such insight is nowhere to

be met with we have to fall back on the second best—the ordinance of law."

Law, then, in human terms, is an attempt on the part of the community to deal with imperfect or unwise decisions of human beings. It sets arbitrary limits to the exercise of freedom, in the interest of survival and in the interest of freedom itself. Law is an inherently undesirable but inevitably necessary system of second-best means to place otherwise uncontrollable aspects of human behavior on a grossly predictable basis.

Philosophies and religions ought to be classified according to the way they consider or meet the problem of politics and law. Jesus, for example, apparently regarded the problem as an unimportant one. On the subject of law, he said, simply, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's," which meant, in practical terms, that the real issues in life are not touched by external controls or political arrangements. The objective is to be born again, and politics can neither contribute to nor interfere with this rebirth. So, obey the law, but concern yourself with the highest ends in life; yet if the law happens to nullify pursuit of the highest ends, it has no claim on you.

A similar disregard of civic matters is found in Lao-tzu. Lao-tzu seemed to argue that while there are bound to be States and Governments, a man devoted to the truth will have small interest in these social forms. The important thing is the attitude one displays toward all things. Laws are but a phase of the environment in which we live. They cannot make us better or wiser; they may, if we allow them too much dignity, make us worse. Something of this mood is again found in the Stoics who, like their predecessors in primary concern with human decision, regarded the State and its mandates as of small account. This might be said even of Marcus Aurelius, who, although an emperor, discoursed little if at all about the methods of controlling the behavior of other men, preferring to consider the elements of experience which bear directly on a man's endeavor to control himself, his thoughts, his actions.

There are those who find this disdain for law annoying. What about the general good, which is preserved by law? they will argue. To whom Lao-tzu would probably respond, "Is it?", and go his way. And Epictetus, if told that without law and State and military establishment, we stand in danger of being killed by an invader, would probably ask, "Does it matter?" Epictetus was a slave, and ought, we may suppose, to be susceptible to appeals in behalf of the general good, but his opinion of what a human being is and how human life is best fulfilled led him to other views. And Jesus—Jesus was executed as a rabble-rouser who threatened the authority of law and the State. Naturally, we can expect little support for the system of second best from him. If we ask him, "Is it good for men like you to be crucified?", he would doubtless answer, "No, it is not good, but there are things which are worse." Then, if pressed for an explanation, he might point out that the more laws you make to control evil behavior, the more you endanger the free exercise of choice to do good. The Romans, he could easily show, thought they were protecting their version of the good society when they crucified him. "How," he might ask, "do you know that they were not right?" This would be difficult for some Christians to answer, except by a show of indignation. And Jesus would not be interested in their indignation, which had little to do with his Father's business. The Americans, who executed Sacco and Vanzetti, the British, who kept Gandhi in prison, might experience similar embarrassments on similar grounds.

But Plato, who was profoundly interested in human freedom, who made the figure of Socrates devote his life to the kind of thinking which was best calculated to make men free within themselves, also felt that law had some importance. Of course, it is difficult to tell when Plato is discussing law more or less symbolically, as representing the conditions of moral decision

within the individual, or actually proposing a scheme of social organization. But enough readers of Plato have concluded that he was really offering counsel on how to set up a system of human law to make him quite unpopular among a large group of modern liberal thinkers.

This judgment, however, seems formed in neglect of Plato's wise conclusion that a system of law, while necessary, can never be more than a system of second best. The particular laws of a system will always depend upon the local circumstances of time, place, custom and tradition. They change with the years. What is immeasurably important is the attitude of both the governed and the governors toward the role of law in human life. Whenever law is permitted to become more than a system of second best in the minds of the people, then the age has become corrupt, the theory of man degrading, and the future dark and hopeless.

It is then that the spirit in man begins to breed anarchist philosophers—men like Jesus, men like Tolstoy. The problems of survival have now become relatively unimportant. What is important is man's respect for himself. For law assumes unnatural and tyrannical importance only when men live in fear, and they live in fear when they suspect each other of intolerable evil and suspect themselves of intolerable weakness. This, Jesus would say, is worse than death, for it is damnation. This, Epictetus might remark, has made you unworthy to survive. Perhaps, if you die, the world will have another chance to learn what it means to be free. It is the love of man which makes the saviours and teachers of the human race so indifferent to obsessions of fear. They are like surgeons who recognize that the time has come for a major operation, the difference being that, not they, but Nature, in the form of dread historical forces, wields the knife.

In a recent book, *Thoughts about Life* (Philosophical Library), a contemporary educator, Felix Friedberg, collected several expressions which have been addressed by great men to our times. Friedberg's work is uneven, but there is a wholeness about what he says. Perhaps the most encouraging thing about these dark times lies in the fact that such thoughtful men seem to be reading the meaning of the present very much as Jesus, Plato, and other very wise men might read it. This book, in short, gives evidence of a mature sense of history to be found not only in the words of "saviours," but in the thinking of ordinary men. Friedberg quotes Alexis Carrel:

> In modern society, we very seldom have the opportunity to observe individuals whose conduct is inspired by a moral ideal. However, such individuals still live. It is impossible not to recognize them when one meets them. The moral beauty leaves an unforgettable memory to those who have experienced it even once. It touches us more than the beauty of nature or that of science. It gives him who possesses it a strange unexplainable power. It increases the force of intelligence. It establishes peace among men. It forms the basis of civilization much more than science, art or religion.

Men who believe in this power are able to form a society with a minimum of repressive laws. But how shall they persuade themselves that the power is real, that it exists, that it is even potential in all men? It is to this question that men like Jesus, Lao-tzu, and Plato address themselves. As Friedberg says:

> If all men would keep destroying ideals the human race would not only fail to improve but actually start to decay. We are indebted to the few that endeavor to fit reality into ideation and do not cower mutely facing the wall. They speak out alone while the masses thinking themselves as good as the ideals they believe in assume an air of self-righteousness and self-satisfaction.

It is a matter, finally, of deciding what is first and what is second best for man, and then a matter of placing first things first. This cannot be done in fear.

Letter from
CENTRAL EUROPE

INNSBRUCK.—The Academie Francaise of Paris was one of the first institutions which made special efforts to spread French language and culture in foreign countries. France imagined in those days that its science and art—and its *Weltanschauung*—were the highest in the world, and spent much money to attract students of all nationalities, endeavoring, also, to erect French institutes or centers of art in different parts of the globe. Other nations followed the French example. Great Britain hoped to extend its civilisation by the government-created "British Council," Germany founded the "Deutsche Akademie," and the U.S.A. built "America Houses." All of these nations said that their purpose in these activities was purely altruistic, and they even pretended to be glad when small countries planned similar projects for themselves. The fact is, however, that these establishments have been and still are nothing but peaceful means for gaining political advantages.

It is obvious that the Allies, after 1945, saw opportunity to bless the conquered nations with similar institutions. It seems as if those institutions were especially designed to try to wipe away the bad impression which the Central Europeans had gained from the measures and orders issued by the Allied Military Governments, and from the behaviour of quite a number of the Allied soldiers. These new attempts at "cultural friendship" also had a farcical side while pointing to their classical past and present achievements, to their philosophers and their thinkers, the "Information Centers" and similar institutions unintentionally showed the difference between the French, the Americans or others of the past and of the present.

Since 1946 there has been an Austrian-Soviet Society in this category. It embraces about 10,000 members in Austria. There are influential names among them who joined during the first months of the occupation, hoping that the Russians would soon restore sovereignty to Austria. While such members have not dared to leave the organization, most of them have practically resigned from active work since the Cold War began. Whatever is done at present in the name of this society is done by actual Communists.

Naturally, this Austrian-Soviet Society is a channel for spreading Red ideas and an attempt at peaceful infiltration. The methods used, are—on the other hand—often wonderfully illuminated by literature, music and dance, so that it is not easy for the onlooker to recognize political motives.

Two weeks of every year are reserved as the "Weeks of Russian-Austrian Friendship," with great celebrations at Vienna. At the last of these occasions, the speeches of introduction proclaimed that it is the desire of the Soviets to live in eternal peace with the rest of the world, and the programme itself offered evidence that this desire has been part of the Russian spirit from olden times. On the stage of the Wiener Konzerthaus-Saal a huge Balalaika-Orchestra, imported from Russia, performed for this special event. The musicians were not dressed in traditional Russian style, but were clothed in black evening suits with shining patent leather shoes. The Ballet of the State Opera danced, the world-famous Wiener Sängerknaben sang, and melodies of Schubert and Strauss resounded through the hall. But the Soviet High Commissioner for Austria, Mr. Iljitchov, who sat in a flower-decorated loge, was not very pleased. He saw that—in spite of intensive propaganda every second seat in the auditorium was vacant.

The reasons are clear. The Austrian public knows that a number of Austrian prisoners of war are still held in Russia, although the Soviet authorities pretend that all have been sent home. The Austrian public is also well aware that the Russians (despite their promises) withhold the sovereignty from this small country. To be brief: Austrians will not be interested in such pretentious demonstrations, so long as the political realities differ so much from the "friendship" which the Easterners pretend to have in their hearts.

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
"IN FOR LIFE"

WE seem to be acquiring a valuable library of "prison literature." The number of books published during the last five years, suggesting the need for drastic revision of penological attitudes and practices, has been enormous, and it is easy to subscribe to David Riesman's theory that one bright side of our times is the growing capacity of the average person to feel human ties of sympathy with men we formerly considered social pariahs.

In For Life (Norton, 1953) is the autobiography of Tom Runyon, No. 17602 in Iowa State Penitentiary, serving a life sentence for second degree murder. One of the "hard-times" convicts who robbed banks during the depression years, Runyon tells an honest story of both his clash with society and his subsequent psychological transformations. The book is a sort of modern Odyssey, beginning in confusion, interrupted by mistakes and tragedy, but ending in the light of self-understanding. *In For Life* is excellent supplementary reading in connection with volumes often mentioned here Duffy's *My Home Is San Quentin*, Kenyon Scudder's *Prisoners Are People*, Donald Powell Wilson's *My Six Convicts*, and the recently reviewed *Diary of a Self-made Convict* by Alfred Hassler.

The most inspiring thing about Runyon's story is the fact that, however deeply he feels the need for penal reform, his own words are living proof that an exceptional man and an exceptional mind may rise above resentment, develop a talent for an occupation entirely foreign to his before-prison days, and become a valuable addition to "society" even when permanently confined. Few readers will avoid the feeling that it is a shame and a waste to keep Runyon behind bars, but one sees, too, that a man like Runyon is not entirely "wasted" so long as he is able to write. Runyon is editor of a prison paper, *The Presidio*, and has for years supplied valuable material to sociologists concerned with prison legislation. Though he would like very much to enter into normal living again and rejoin his son, he has over-ridden bitterness by discovering that his life may have become more worth-while as a result of so many troubling experiences. When he found his real work—writing about prison problems—"there was not much time to spend on anything as unproductive as grief":

> Life had more purpose than ever now, and the deeper I went into our effort to make outsiders see how it was inside, the less I thought about escape. Gradually I was getting a kind of philosophy. I felt that if I could help some convicts or all of them, in the long run, I would be doing more real good here in prison with my typewriter than I would have done outside swinging a paint brush and drinking beer.

It is both a terrible and wonderful thing to come of age in a prison, when no apparent hope for release exists—terrible for obvious reasons, and wonderful because here, at least, one man has found proof positive that the true life of man is the life of the mind. When Runyon speaks of developing a "philosophy," he uses the word accurately, in our opinion. For the philosopher must rise above frustrations and angers, likewise escape the opposite poles of maudlin sentimentality and flagellation. Runyon's dreams of the society which *should* exist balance delicately intelligent criticism of society and acceptance of his own individual responsibility, at least in part, for the very conditions which need remedying. In the following passages Runyon addresses himself briefly to aspects of the "moral man and immoral society" equation:

> My dream solution of the crime-prison problem lacks the easy simplicity of many convict solutions; I wouldn't be content to "lock up all the cops and turn out all the cons." I would start at the beginning, not at the end, at the weaning pen rather than the meat grinder.
>
> In my world children would gradually and easily and naturally learn to respect themselves and others, to be self-reliant and responsible.
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> The parents would have found marriage a slow, difficult, solemn affair, with at least thirty days of cooling off between the application for a license and the ceremony. They would have found marriage a privilege, not an automatic right. They would have been counseled on their responsibility to each other, their children, and their world, and they would not value their home lightly. Indiscriminate, fly-by-morning marriage would cease, but because my world

would not be puritanical, there would be legal sanction of some kind for those who found release outside wedlock, and no child would be branded as a bastard. Character, not money or social position, would be the criterion for issuing a marriage license; intelligence, not a glib tongue or smooth appearance. And if the marriage failed, as some would, divorce would be obtainable without disgrace; common sense would dictate a judge's decisions, not mere whim or legal technicalities.

Laws in my world would be simple, with no confusing terms at all, so a citizen could understand and respect them "You shall not kill" would be the first law, and it would apply to society also—there would be no death penalty, for two wrongs would not make a right. "You shall not steal" would apply equally to light-fingered merchant and to highway robber. A jury would decide the degree of guilt in each case, for no attempt would be made to define all human foibles in the statutes. "You shall not injure another" might be the one necessary law.

In a later chapter he returns to this theme:

The word "respect" seems to get a bigger play than any other in my plan. I wonder if it isn't the most significant word, if any society will get far from the jungle while its members fail to realize its importance. It seems to me that if I respect society's laws I will be unable to violate them, that cruelty and malice and selfishness will have a hard way to go if men ever learn to respect themselves and others.

But today neither officials nor laws are respected even by the average citizen. From the years of venal government this country has known, sometimes on a local, sometimes on a national scale, has come a kind of grass-roots cynical rottenness that must somehow be cured. No nation can remain great indefinitely while its citizens despise their leaders. Out of such conditions comes Communism or some other form of totalitarianism. Out of them will come a high and rising crime rate with more and more prisons filled until their walls almost bulge, and more riots and higher taxes.

Runyon is neither a moralist nor a religionist. He did, at times, have the uncanny feeling that some sort of natural "destiny" was governing the turn of events in his life and, after negotiating an escape and being recaptured, he began to sense dimly, for the first time, that external conditions are never the final determinants of a man's state of mind. More than anything else he misses the opportunity to "live close to nature," but he has finally learned to draw something of the serenity and inexorable purposefulness of "nature" within the confines of Iowa State Penitentiary.

MANAS recently heard from Alfred Hassler, who thanked us for what he termed "an excellent review" of *Diary of a Self-made Convict*. Hassler is "very much encouraged these days by the reaction to the book, and by the real concern on the part of many readers to do something concrete in the prison field." We are sure that the response to *In For Life* will be equally rewarding to Mr. Runyon, and that he will be able to feel himself a part of a vast movement of thought away from the "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" psychology which has been riding our social back for so long. All the authors mentioned at the beginning of this short review seem to belong to a natural fraternity, and one's eligibility is quite apparently not dependent upon being either a convict or a warden. Runyon, even when he was in "solid lockup," thought the same thoughts and lived much of the same internal life as did Duffy and Scudder when the latter were compassionately administering prisons.

The next tangible step towards constructive reformation should, all these men agree, be the elimination of the death penalty in both state and federal penitentiaries; when and if this finally occurs, a new and better social philosophy will of necessity have been born. *In For Life* brings sharply to mind another factual dimension of the death-penalty question. For Runyon escaped a first degree murder conviction and execution by little more than a hair. Any who concede social value to his subsequent life's work of writing would, therefore, find it difficult to favor execution of criminals. For see what Runyon did and what he became! If this was possible for Runyon, why not for others among those who *have* been executed, or who, until the big change comes about, will be?

COMMENTARY
THE ORIGIN OF HELL

MOST readers, we believe, will be as much affected by the long quotations in this week's "Children" as were the editors. These simple stories of unfortunate men and their children possess the element of authentic tragedy and lead to long trains of reflection.

For one thing, they remind us of Hugo Bettelheim's article, "Human Behavior in Extreme Situations," published by Dwight Macdonald in *Politics* during the war. This article on the Nazi concentration camps, by a man who was both a psychologist (Bettelheim later wrote the impressive study, *Love Is Not Enough*) and an inmate of a camp, showed how human beings might be expected to act under invasion by Hell. For this was the nature of the camps. They represented a deliberate attempt on the part of the Nazis to destroy, not just the bodies, but the minds and souls of human beings. They were designed to degrade before they destroyed.

The evil motives involved in the camp system are almost incredible to normal human beings. Their purpose was the dehumanization of men, and, as Bettelheim shows, they were often successful in this enterprise. But the thrilling thing about this earliest analytical writing about the camps is its account of the extraordinary powers of resistance of the few to the pattern of degradation. There are always men, it seems, who, on going to Hell, will insist on remaining human. They may be killed, but they will die as humans, not as dehumanized clods.

Prisons, unlike the camps, are established with an opposite motive in view. The function claimed for prisons is the rehabilitation of human beings. But what people who have never been in prison, or even near one, fail to realize is that the massive indifference of the great majority to the actual practice of penal institutions often results in their becoming places of *relative* dehumanization. To the extent that this is allowed to occur, and in respect to the prison population, our society reflects Nazi-like behavior, even though it may be from ignorance rather than from design. The all-important difference, of course, lies in the fact that a concentration camp system of degradation could never attract or employ administrators like Warden Duffy or Kenyon Scudder (see Review).

What we need to remember, perhaps, is that public policies which grow out of suspicion and fear always create the conditions of Hell for some human beings. For Hell is but the *institutional* result of such emotions.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE following communication and short sketch of prison life comes from the German correspondent who discussed the Rosenberg case and other matters in MANAS for Sept. 16, 1953. He begins with an explanatory note about himself:

> MANAS: You have so much interest in and comprehension of convicts and of children, why not bring the two together?
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> To explain: I was living in Spain as a stateless German refugee when the Spanish Civil War began, and was immediately arrested upon the initiative of the German Consulate. Later I was sentenced to 30 years of imprisonment, of which I served over 9 years. So I know what prison life is like. It was in prison in Spain that I had the experiences here related.
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> After returning to Germany, I was at first a sort of interpreter for the American military government, then lecturer in History at a pedagogic academy at Potsdam (Russian Zone), and when I was dismissed there for not conforming to the Marxist line, I became a social worker in Berlin prisons (British Sector). So I know prison life from both sides of the cell door.

The writer concludes that one of the worst feelings of penal institutions lies in the disinclination to allow a sufficient amount of normal contact between prisoners and their children. It is not only reasonable to maintain that children are the best of all humanizing influences on hard, bitter, or despairing men—anyone who feels a little of the spirit of "universal brotherhood" would certainly feel also that no prisoner need be deprived of contact with his own children by the state. If the relationship lacks inherent strength, or if the "criminal" in question happens to be a thoroughly disreputable character, then the desire of the child to continue the visits will terminate in due time from natural causes. Otherwise, weekly or even more frequent visits should not be impossible.

A MANAS reader who saw the letter from this German correspondent felt that we should call attention to the fact that he is thinking primarily in terms of political prisoners. We doubt, however, that any clear distinction of this sort exists, or should exist, in the mind of the writer. Political prisoners may theoretically stand a better chance of approaching ideal parenthood than the thief, forger or murderer, but even a "lifer" convicted on a murder charge may still become an excellent parent.

To return to the observations of our foreign correspondent: First of all, he deplores the extent to which society encourages deception of the child in respect to a prisoner's "disgraceful" whereabouts. He writes: "We should cease to believe that children are less intelligent than adult people. Of course, they have less experience in life; but with their not yet adulterated instinct they sometimes feel the truth—and the lie—when we do not. They have less judgment, it is true, but also fewer prejudices. Soon the child will know the truth. When the mother shrinks from honest explanation, neighbors' children will be less considerate. 'Your father is not in the hospital; don't believe such lies. He has stolen and is in jail.' This is a double deception for the child. 'Father is stealing, mother is telling lies! Whom can I trust?'"

The balance of the letter from Germany runs as follows, and will be of interest to those who have been following the minor crusade in MANAS to list present writings which press for a basic transformation in penological psychology:

> There are families where the strict authority of the father is the very base of family life. For such a family it is of course annoying when the demi-god happens to be in jail. They have to resort to lying to avoid disaster. But if the life of the family is based on mutual love, the children will have as much comprehension for such a situation as adult people, if not more; and it will be seen that love is a more solid base for family life than authority.
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> Children have less judgment? I do not even know whether this is quite right. Their judgment comes more from feeling than from reasoning. Feeling can be mistaken, but so can reasoning. I

know of a boy of eleven, whose parents were often quarreling, till one day the father came to this his eldest son and asked him: "Miguel, if your mother and father were to separate, with whom would you go?" The boy knew what to answer: "If you do that, with neither of you." Struck by so much wisdom, the man silently left the room and went to his wife to make peace with her.

There was once a man in jail in Cuba, sentenced to life imprisonment. He was regularly visited by his wife and daughter, and was always happy when he saw them. He was full of pride in watching that slender girl of his, how she was growing up and making progress in life. But once when he came back to his fellow-prisoners, one of them said: "You always call her your daughter. This cannot be true. You say she is thirteen, yet you have been here over fifteen years!"

The man answered: "She is my daughter, I tell you, though not in the physical sense of the word. When I was arrested, my wife sank into utter misery. One day she spoke about committing suicide, as she saw no way to continue in life. Then it was I who suggested to her to go into the street and to sell her body. It was bitter for me, it hurt my pride as a man and a husband, but I did this to save her life. Then this girl was born, who would not be in life without my consent. So I am rightly her father, I love her as any father in the world can love his child, and I feel happy when she says 'father' to me."

There is one country where once every year the children of convicts are allowed to be with their fathers in the courtyard of the jail for one afternoon. That is Spain. Weeks before the event prison life is permeated with this one idea: the children will come! Many a man is busy all day, carving something out of wood, making this or that toy, and all saving money for buying sweets.

Then the grand day comes and the little ones flood into the courtyard. It was a critical day for some of us. I myself knew, when seeing those children, that I should never again see my own as children, as they were some 2,000 miles away from me and would be grown up when I could see them. And on one of those days I knew that my friend Francis would have his nephew, Gabriel, my best friend's only son. I was a harshened man at the time, after all I had gone through, but when I saw Francis with little Gabriel coming across the courtyard, the feeling was too strong even for me. I once more saw that face, those dark eyes, the same as his father had had, which I should see never again, as he had been executed. It took me some time to calm myself and to meet the child. . . .

But generally on such afternoons all bitterness of prison life is forgotten. I remember a man, not a gentle fellow, known for his bad behaviour and steady opposition to the prison authorities. On the children's day he went to his worst enemy, one of the guards, and said: "Look here! This is my girl. She is eleven now. What do you think of her? Isn't she pretty?" And the guard forgot the trouble he had so often had with that man and chatted with him and the girl.

A girl of six was standing beside a basin of water, her father near her. She had a dirty pocket handkerchief and a piece of soap, she was washing it in the way mother used to. Then she folded it and gave it to her father and said: "Now it is clean. When you have more dirty linen, keep it for me, and next time I come to see you, I shall wash it for you." A dozen of men were looking at the scene, some with envy, some with tears in their eyes. The father was certainly at that moment as happy as a man can be.

On such afternoons my friend Alfonso had no time for me. He was a boy of 21, whom the Franco people had given accumulative sentences of together 170 years of prison. He was very fond of children and knew what to do with them. He could be seen then, running around with little boys, playing football with them, being happy as if he were still one of them.

But it was not all fun on such days. I remember a gentleman who was visited by his 11-year-old son from distant Valencia. For hours the two were walking up and down along the prison wall. The boy had to tell his father all that had happened in the family during the last year, and the father gave his advice as to what in his opinion should best be done. I am sure that boy knew his responsibility to the fullest. He was the link between the two parts of the family, the progress of which was dependent upon his good memory. I am sure that the influence of feeling this responsibility on the boy's development was wholly favorable. . . .

I know no better regenerative power in the world than the influence of children. Why do we keep them away from those whom we intend to regenerate?

FRONTIERS

Second Thoughts on Technology

IN a discussion of the relation between tradition and culture (printed in the English quarterly, *Question*, Spring, 1954), M. B. Foster remarks:

> On the tube of toothpaste which I normally use is written "a scientific dental cream," . . . What does it mean when a manufacturer puts on the dental cream that it is "scientific"? It means that it has not been made by the carrying out of traditional processes learned from his father, and handed down from his forefathers. It has not been done traditionally, but in a different way—a scientific way, which means he has broken with tradition, and is applying this other nontraditional method.

Here, in a nutshell, is almost the entire story of the breakaway of modern civilization from traditional forms of behavior. To say that a thing is "scientific" is to say that it is created by the methods of rational discovery and development. This is a procedure which applies to the manufacture of commodities for human use the rule of Plato, for Plato was interested in *rational* rules for the regulation of conduct. Plato's dialectic, exhibited in the Socratic dialogues, has the purpose of showing the superiority of reason over prejudice and uncritically accepted tradition in forming judgments and choosing a course of action. Technology, then, is the attempt to *rationalize* the economic side of human life, subjecting every traditional method to the rule of science.

This seems to be the philosophical justification for technology. Technology on these terms, however, requires a similar discipline at a higher level among those who apply and enjoy the results of the technological process. Economics and technology without tradition are appropriate only to a society which has risen from traditional forms of behavior to rational principles of conduct. The power of rationalized technology turns out to be uncontrollable when rationalized individual and social morality is lacking.

This problem has been anticipated by any number of wise men. Among contemporaries, it was recognized by Gandhi. Among the ancients, Lao-tzu saw it perhaps most clearly of all. Another writer in Question, Otto van der Sprenkel, conveys the viewpoint of the Chinese sage:

> Lao-tzu's insistence on the virtue of restricting wants to a minimum and on living the simplest kind of existence is closely connected with his preference for the natural as against the artificial, with his hostility (on moral grounds) to the machine, and his call for a return to nature.
>
> The grounds underlying this dislike of the machine are clearly brought out in the following quotation from the *Chuang-tzu* (XXI, ii):
>
> Tzu-kung, the disciple of Confucius, after traveling to Ch'u in the south, came back by way of Chin. When he was passing through Han-yin he saw an old man who was engaged in irrigating his vegetable plots. The way the old man did it was to let himself down into the well-pit by foot-holds cut into the side and emerge clasping a pitcher, which he carefully emptied into a channel, thus expending a great deal of energy with very small results.
>
> "There exists," Tzu-kung said to him, "a contrivance with which one can irrigate a hundred vegetable plots in a single day. Unlike what you are doing, it demands a very small expenditure of energy, but produces very great results. Wouldn't you like me to tell you about it?" The gardener raised his head and looked at Tzu-kung. "What's it like?" he asked. "It's an instrument carved out of wood," said Tzukung, "heavy at the back and light in front. It scoops up the water like a bale, as quickly as you drain a bath-tub. It's called a well-sweep."
>
> A look of indignation came into the gardener's face. He laughed scornfully, saying: "My teacher used to tell me that where there are cunning contrivances there will be cunning behavior, and where there is cunning behavior there will be a cunning heart. The man who carries in his breast a cunning heart has smudged the pristine purity of his nature; he who has smudged the pristine purity of his nature has troubled the quiet of his soul; and with one who has troubled the quiet of his soul, Tao will not dwell. It's not that I don't know about this invention, but that I should be ashamed to use it."

Just because this illustration of the terrors of technology seems so ridiculous, we have chosen to quote it, hoping to put the reader on his own in deciding whether it has any moral at all. Naturally, we think it has. There is a large and important moral in any anecdote which brings home the ultimate issue

of ends and means. We live in a society in which the great majority are enslaved by the complex requirements of the society's technological means. Where, it may be asked, is all our productiveness and efficiency leading us? To what end are we moving so furiously by motor, rail and air, and what are we saying and hearing by telephone, telegraph, radio and television? Those who claim that we have enshrined the trivial and the vulgar and work like men possessed to accumulate enough money to purchase forgetfulness of the kind of work we do seem very close to the truth.

Men who have made it their life-work to bring the advantages of technology to the so-called "undeveloped countries" have further light to throw on this question. Dr. Alfred Metraux, of the Social Science Department of UNESCO, writes in *Harijan* for Jan. 9:

> The members of a village community often enjoy a measure of protection that they will lose when swamped in a proletarian society. The leisurely well-ordered rhythm of country life has all too often been replaced by joyless, soul-deadened toil.
>
> We have learnt by now that no culture has succeeded in bringing into play all the potentialities of human nature, and that some of the humblest forms of culture have solved problems that baffled the more highly developed. Higher standards of living, industrialization—these will inevitably destroy such values and thus tend towards the impoverishment of the human race. Our own society has passed through a similar crisis, and, the wiser for our experience, we might perhaps be able to save other cultures from making the same mistakes as ourselves. When the transformation is on a vast scale, the original culture may be shaken to its foundations or even destroyed. As Dr. Bowles so aptly remarks:
>
> "The tragedy lies not in the disappearance of a culture, it lies in the replacement of a functioning society with a mass of disunited individuals who, as victims of circumstances, can fall easy prey to exploitation of one sort or another."
>
> It all too frequently happens that plans made for assisting economically backward peoples make no allowance for the tastes and feelings of those who are to benefit from the so-called improvements. Economists and statisticians, because they deal in statistics and handle practical problems, became imbued with an alarming self-confidence. They seldom have any inkling of the relationship that exists between the various institutions of a group and fail to realize that its culture cannot be altered piecemeal. . . . Customs and institutions which to us seem harmful and incompatible with our conception of human happiness may nevertheless represent, to the members of certain groups, a source of satisfaction for which they are given no substitute.

At this point, we should like to note the solid grounds which support the practice of technology, the application of science to practical problems, and the determination of moral issues by rational modes of decision. It was Krishna, the spiritual teacher of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, who urged his disciple Arjuna on to freedom from tradition. Krishna told the young prince that in effect the practice of duty according to tradition was no more than relying on hearsay evidence—that what a man should really want is knowledge, and to gain *knowledge* he would have to forsake the comforts and shields of tradition and become a philosopher or a yogi. This worried Arjuna, and he asked Krishna what would happen to the unhappy disciple who, after renouncing the guide of tradition, turned out to be a very poor yogi as well. Krishna nevertheless encouraged him to have a try at becoming a yogi, remarking, "Never to an evil place goeth one who doeth good."

Plato made the same advocacy of reason, and likewise, a thousand years later, the political philosophers of the eighteenth century. Rousseau demanded that men throw off the shackles of traditional culture and live as free men, unprejudiced by the institutions of their time. This was also the inspiration of the popular revolution in thinking of the nineteenth century, which led to extraordinary faith in scientific method.

Today, however, it is almost a commonplace of criticism to note that while the scientific method has released modern man from traditional methods of economic activity, very little progress has been made in rationalizing the peculiarly *human* or moral side of life. As a result, the technical freedom gained through technology has not only been largely wasted, but has given ungoverned scope to the now traditionless and unrationalized motives for human behavior.

Mr. Foster has some interesting things to say on this subject. Tracing the emancipation from tradition to its Western beginnings in ancient Greece, he defends the idea that the break with tradition in modern times is unique in that it affects practically everyone:

> . . . in the older times, in the beginnings of this process of being emancipated from tradition, the classes of people affected were very small; they were the intellectual classes who in the nature of things were an extremely small class. It did not, on the whole, touch the great masses of mankind. What is unique in the present situation could almost be described by saying that that same freedom from traditions as the philosophers and sophists and the intellectuals of previous societies had, has become universal and is spread by means which are not only the possession of a small intellectual class. Part of the reason for that seems to me that this emancipation from tradition is not now conveyed only by study. . . . It is communicated much more widely [than by the study and practice of science] by the use of, and familiarity with, *machinery*, which is the product of this scientific point of view. I suggest that that is what carries this new state of mind to the African tribe. You discover copper, for example, and introduce modern techniques and machinery, and employ Africans to work that machinery. That is what breaks down their traditions; you do not need to bring a science text book with you, the process is much more unintellectual than that.

These are some of the gross effects of rationalization at the level of science and industry. It is not of course "emancipation" for the African, nor even for the button-pushing beneficiary of technology in the West, but *dislocation*—a sort of dislocation similar to that feared by the old gardener of the *Chuang-tzu*. It is emancipation only for the man who is master of the theory and practice of modern technology, and master of balance and proportion in the use of technology as well.

Mr. Foster has a further point to make that the freedom of men from blind acceptance of moral tradition has been accomplished at the same time:

> This was the thing which according to Plato a philosopher had to do—and that was why he (the philosopher) was the one man who fulfilled the true destiny of humanity. This was the thing which in modern times not only philosophers, but every rational creature, was called upon to do. Kant was the great philosopher of this point of view: you were no longer to follow blindly the traditions you were brought up in, but by the use of reason to determine a moral law and a rule of conduct and to guide your behavior by this. This is putting morality in the place of tradition. . . .

It is only after this is attempted, Foster points out, that men, having abandoned tradition, begin to wonder whether morality and right and wrong exist at all. As he puts it: "When we talk, as we often do, about the breakdown of morals in the present age, I think it is this which we are thinking of. We no longer have either the firm enclosure within a traditional system which would give us certainty; nor have we the rational conviction which earlier ages thought they could put in place of this."

These are some of the burdens placed upon us by the activity of the modern mind, in science, in technology, in philosophy and morals. There must have been something intrinsic in the cycle of European and American development which made this sudden rush of self-conscious rationalism inevitable and necessary. It was a progression obviously precocious in many respects, yet we can hardly blame technology and science. The fault lies neither in our stars nor in our machines, nor can we turn back to the simplicity of the village to find our salvation. Yet the Taoist philosopher's counsels haunt the present with the insistence of a vital but forgotten truth. And the truth is not in the cult of primitivism, but in something Lao-tzu named the *Tao*. It has to do, not with the things men make, nor how they make them, but with the things upon which the heart is set.