



ECONOMICS AND RELIGION

By F. McEachran

THEOLOGY has come down to us as a sphere of transcendental knowledge, as though in some mysterious way those who pursue it were set free from all earthly trammels. It is, no doubt, owing to this otherworldly character that the modern mind, avid of the real, has largely disavowed it. I hope it is not blasphemous, nor even impertinent, when I say that the future of theology, as a human doctrine, lies on the earth and not in transcendental spheres. It is rooted in the real world, and yet, just as the lily has its roots in mud but rises to a glorious blossoming, so also theology, despite its lowly origin, may yet have the supreme victory in the realm of thought.

The force of this argument lies in the fact that the ensemble of ideas, prejudices and sentiments, which make up the ideological structure depends on the sort of productive life the community lead, whether it be agricultural or industrial, primitive or advanced, practical or intellectual. A little reflection will at once suggest that the ideas of the Englishmen of the seventeenth century, when England was still a predominantly agricultural country, were very different from those of the England of the nineteenth century, when she became the commercial centre of the world. My main argument is, then, that production conditions ideology (as a whole), and economic law, in its turn, conditions production. It follows that if production is in accord with natural law, and "free" in the natural sense, our conception of God will be a libertarian conception, making us His children rather than His slaves. We shall stand in relation to Him as the parts of an organism stand to the whole, each part functioning freely yet forming part of an harmonious unity. If, on the other hand, economic law is distorted or blocked, our outlook will be affected by it and we shall conceive deity as a tyrant or policeman, whether that conception be of an arbitrary ruler, like the Hebrew Jahveh, or a ruler who works according to man-made law, like the oligarchs of the eighteenth century.

Such a statement does not mean that every individual conceives of deity in the way the economic background conditions him, but only that the general mass of individuals will tend to do so. Children born into an oligarchic age will be taught to revere an oligarchic God; those in a warlike and hazardous age, a God of whims and caprices, but it does not follow that the child as he grows up may

not diverge from what he is taught. There is always the fundamental liberty of the individual, even though it works within certain circumscribed limits. But what is certain is that even if the child creates a new and richer conception of God he will succeed in popularising it only in so far as it harmonises with the social background. Otherwise, however true and profound it may be, it will perish still-born so far as the society around him is concerned.

One thing which is probably true is that the freer an age is in its economic outlook the freer will be the speculation of theology, and so the richer our conception of God. Probably the conception which came nearest the truth, albeit on a low level, was that of the semi-anarchic Dark Ages of the ninth and tenth centuries, the age of the neo-platonic theory of Scotus Eriugena. Next to that probably comes the scholasticism of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of Pierre Abelard and Thomas Aquinas, where already the decadent shadow of orthodoxy may be discerned. But we must always bear in mind, before venturing on platonic flights about the deity, that the real knowledge of God is possessed by God alone, and so, by a logical outcome, He alone can be a true Platonist. He alone is "over there", as Plotinus would say, and for us "over here" to usurp His position and to lay down the law transcendently is not only impious but even un-theological in the highest degree. God to us is an ultimate concept, the last stage of a painful mental process which may indeed bring joy in the end, but which can in no wise be short-circuited. We know God through the sense (perceptually) and through the reason (conceptually), and just as He may appear as a flower or a sunset, or as a human being in Jesus Christ, so also He may appear in the natural law, in the general and universal sense I have given to the word in these pages.

Before going into detail on this point it is important to dwell on the relation between man and the universe, and the way in which he experiences it. Psychologically speaking, this relation resolves into cognition, conation, and affection, by which is meant only that we recognise an object, act toward it, and have a feeling about it, summed up in traditional terminology as intellect, will and feeling. We know the world and we act and feel about it, and in the relation of cognition to conation, of knowledge

to love, a mystery lies hidden.¹ People have been condemned for knowing without loving, and for loving without knowing, and it seems difficult sometimes to lay down which is more disastrous to mankind — knowledge without love, or love without knowledge. In point of fact we are almost equally disappointed by either when taken separately, and seek eagerly for a means of avoiding the dilemma. Clearly enough, before we can love it, we must 'cognise' the object. Until we recognise a man as friend or enemy we neither love nor hate, and it is perhaps even truer to say that knowing and loving go on simultaneously as one act of the individual human spirit, the one at every step vitalising the other. There may even be a harmony between them which a true and balanced experience could attain.

An important point arises here in that knowledge divides into perceptual and conceptual, and it is at this point that natural law enters in. A man whose knowledge is particular and perceptual like that of a child, will be subject in his loving to the same irresponsibility of action as that which we expect to find in children. His love will be chaotic, inconstant, haphazard, and so will produce on the people who are its object a bewildered impression. He may be surprised and offended to find that people are not grateful to him and do not reciprocate his feelings. His very actions make him unknowable. His love is felt as shallow and impulsive and falls short of its full effect. On the other hand, there is also the love expressed through conceptual knowledge, and here the loving is of a finer texture. The urge of life, according to Dante, is to rise in our loving from the percept to the concept, from the particular to the general, from the individual case to the general law. Sin is when we fall short of the process which, carried to fruition, leads to God. Thus the sinners in Hell are deficient in knowledge, and their souls turn not to God but to lower things.

This is quite a logical point of view, and it is unanswerable. The criticism which we should make today is merely that our conception of knowledge, as a result of modern science, has considerably widened, and with it our conception of law and justice too. Dante's idea of law in nature — which is also divine law — is wide enough until it comes to the sphere of human nature, where it narrows to a considerable extent. In much the same way as we do he saw the material universe following its appointed course, and the sun and planets circling round the earth in obedience to the will of God. Indeed, Dante is himself caught up into the tenth and last heaven, and expressly states that he was whirled round

the universe as an integral part of it, and his will 'equated' with the will of God. His conception of spiritual gravitation, whereby all evil sinks to Hell at the earth's centre and all good rises to Heaven on high, is



¹ It is convenient to combine cognition and affection (will and feeling) under the one term "love."

essentially an attempt to link up morals and physics in an indissoluble bond. Yet the law which he proclaims as manifest in the movement of the universe he denies to man in the name of individuality and free will. Man as a single unit forges his own destiny subject to no general law.

The difference may be expressed like this. Where Dante recognised that there were general and universal laws regulating the courses of the planets and the growth and development of animal life, he did not recognise that similar laws were at work in human society, determining the production habits, nationality, class, etc., of human beings. We know now that the sum of things which enter into a man's life for which general law is responsible is simply enormous, and we circumscribe in proportion the importance of the individual. Yet while reducing it in one way we also raise it in another. We do not, for example, blame a landowner for owning land, nor a slave-owner for owning slaves, nor the tariff-protected person for approving tariffs. We know that their acts are governed in this connection not by their own free will, but by the group-pattern to which they belong. At the same time we demand that as individuals they should inquire into the pre-supposition of their group or class position and finally attain a knowledge and insight which will bring with it a new and better point of view. When that point comes, and the natural wrong in their position flashes upon their mind, they will then become morally responsible, *and then, and only then, are we back in the individual position of Dante.* The fact that he simply did not recognise the "group" position at all is probably the thing that divides him off most decisively from modern thought. He would blame the rich for being spendthrift or avaricious, for being profiteers or for oppressing the poor, but he would not have understood the relation in which rich and poor stand to economic law. He did not, in fact, realise the existence of natural law in the human sphere.

We can, therefore, extend the medieval point of view in two directions, first that of "raising" the non-human law to the human level, and secondly of "lowering" man more deeply into the natural law. In doing this we extend not only the realm of freedom but also the realm of law, and so make the universe both more free and more constrained by law. Man is made subject to the laws of economics, just as other natural organisms are subject to general laws, but at the same time this very subjection sets him free to enjoy far greater freedom than before. Once his most shackling trammels are cut off the road is open to a moral life in which love and knowledge are conjoined equally. Once slavery is abolished life becomes easier for both slave-owner and slave, and once land monopoly is swept away both employer and employee gain in vitality. The worker gets his full share of production while the employer has a full market to sell to, tensions are relaxed, mutual recriminations become meaningless, and man turns



more easily to the spiritual life. He becomes freer as an individual in the only way nature meant him to be free. He becomes conscious of necessity and of the limits as well as the reach of his power.

As we see it today, the universe is a space-time continuum, each "unit" of which moves exactly as it pleases, subject only to the lie of the land. It was once thought, for example, that the earth was the centre of the universe and that the planets revolved round the earth. Later it was thought that the sun was the centre and the earth and planets revolved round it, and the earlier theory was given up. Now it is thought that any body may be taken as the centre, the others may be consid-



ered as revolving round it, whether that centre be the moon, the sun, or the earth, subject only to the "lie of the land," or, more accurately, to the nature of the space-time surrounding it. The parallel would be a man walking across a plain coming to a hill and deciding to walk round it rather than climb straight over it. His behaviour plotted on a flat surface would roughly illustrate the movement of the moon in changing her direction to move round the earth. Obviously the nature of the object itself (the space-time event)² will prevent it enjoying freedom to the extent possessed by the human organism, but its relation to the environment is now seen to be of a very similar kind. And no doubt when a shooting star appears or a meteor falls we are seeing the individuality of a space-time event expressed in a striking way on a background which is none the less conditioned.

It is this relationship of freedom to law which is the key to any moral philosophy of the future. Because man realises fully the extent of natural law he does not surrender freedom but rather levers it up to a higher level. What he attains thereby is the marvellous feeling which comes only when the body and the mind, the part and the whole, are functioning properly in an integrated system, a feeling which neither worker nor employer can enjoy in the world today. In fact, so greatly is its absence felt that all sorts of pseudo-philosophies are thrown up in an attempt to cover up the void. How many feelings the ancient slaves were made to repress, what depths of unconscious resentment lay concealed in the psyche, we shall probably never know, but the discontents of the present world arising from similar causes are a fairly good index. It helps us to imagine a world where there was no slave-owner holding down slaves, no monopolies beating down revolutionary resistance, where the only human defects are those which run through nature as a whole. No repression, no monopoly coercion, only the individual constraint required from time to time to deal with "original sin".

It should not now be necessary to say how far we are from such a world and how false the ideals which even the most kindly people cherish today. If the world of free spirits is the desirable world, it can never be achieved

²This is the theory held by Professor Eddington.

through the State, nor through force of arms, nor through socialism, nor through UNO, nor through any pattern imposed by human means on a power basis. *There is no way of forcing men to be free and happy, and there never will be.* All that men can do for their fellow men is to remove the artificial shackles which fetter them and then allow them to act in whatever way they think fit, subject only to the necessity nature imposes. *The love of man for man implies precisely this piece of knowledge, that we must obey the law of nature once we know it — and then love and let be.* Not for nothing does knowledge precede love, just as in psychology cognition guides conation. Man should order his love before he indulges in it, lest it become an expression of something impure.

Paths To Prestige

BY PETER TRACEY

THE hankering after status symbols, and the desire to join exclusive societies is very much the fashion of our age, but this desire for recognition is not confined to individuals. There are class distinctions in the society of nations.

For instance, we read of "Article Eight Status of IMF" or "Article Eleven Status of GATT." To be really one-up, however, a nation needs to be a member of one of the more exclusive economic associations.

OECD, comprising twenty top nations from among the more than a hundred members of UNO, is one of these, and it is very sticky about whom it lets in. Membership obligations are considerable, including the moral duty to help to achieve the 20 per cent planned growth rate by 1970.

However, there are compensating advantages. Japan has now applied to join, conscious, so I am told, that "OECD membership will greatly boost its prestige in both international politics and economics."

Japan, if admitted, will of course be able to put "Member of OECD" at the top of its notepaper. It will know full well that "affiliation with the OECD will greatly enhance its international position, and strengthen its voice in world affairs."

This search for world status might find expression in various ways. What about other countries following the example of Malta, G.C., for example, and putting letters after their names. *Peruvia, IMF 8* or *Japan GATT 11* would make others take notice, and Great Britain, *MOECD, MEFTA* etc., might be just the thing to enhance its dwindling world prestige.

I am convinced that this is the true path to greatness. H-Bombs and rocket ships are old stuff now. It's prestige letters after one's name that counts. Let's drop all this cold war business and concentrate on joining a few more international organisations. We could easily outdo the Russians in this field.