



# THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STATE

By F. McEachran

THE classical and traditional view of mankind lays down that human nature is a mixture of good and evil in which, for the great majority of men, the good is at least the goal of aspiration. Evil, on the other hand, whether defined as a flaw in human nature, or a defect in the environment, or a tendency to fall into error, does seem to run like a red thread through human affairs, and only too often brings man to ruin. Such is the point of view reflected in the tragic drama of the West, showing how the *good man*, owing to some flaw in his nature (pride, folly, ambition, etc.) suffers ultimate defeat. A similar conception emerges when man is defined in modern psychological terms as a bundle of instincts not always successfully harmonised, or even as a combination of conscious or subconscious elements which resist each other. Man fails to integrate himself and so he must collapse.

This "flaw" in human nature was called by the Christians "original sin" (1) and by the Greek moralists "*hamartia*" and in default of a better term I propose to retain the use of it. I want, however, to make it clear that it is always an individual and personal defect, varying in its symptoms from organism to organism and affecting in social life only the immediate environment. An obvious example of this arises when two men quarrel with each other and come to blows, the sort of human breakdown which probably comes within the experience of most people. It constitutes a deplorable but not unnatural situation, and involves no great use of force to restore peace. It is in fact a sort of irreducible minimum of social evil.

There is, however, another sort of defect in human life which has nothing to do with the flaw in the individual, and which involves not two or three people but whole societies or classes. This is the sort of relationship which is found in legal institutions upheld by the State, an obvious example of which is the (now defunct) institution of chattel slavery. When, for example, one man is the slave of another owing to some institution, law or convention, quite independent of his own will or his master's, a dislocation or defect in society arises of a peculiar and far-reaching kind. The origin of chattel slavery is not known with certainty. It may have been at one time the only possible alternative to the slaughtering of prisoners of

war, and it may also have been, and frequently was, an institution upheld by men of the highest moral character. And yet it is generally agreed to be true that the institution involved a human relationship leading to great social evils. Even in ancient times Greek philosophers were uneasy about it. It was a form of property not "in nature," they felt, and while agreeing that their own society might depend on it the fact of its "unnature" left them with an uneasy feeling. For even in those early days a distinction was made by profound thinkers between the "natural" and the "unnatural" in society. And curiously enough, by the abolition of chattel slavery, modern society has removed this particular form of "unnature" from social life and to that extent brought about an improvement. No one today would suggest the setting up in the big towns of a slave market where the unemployed could sell their bodies to individual people. No one would suggest it for a very obvious psychological reason. The particular form of human relationship which chattel slavery involved has gone from the human consciousness. Other forms of slavery still exist, and terrible ones, but not this one.

Most people will agree that the *natural* "defect" in man will never be abolished in the sense that an artificial (and unnecessary) institution like chattel slavery can be abolished, and this is a point that needs to be stressed.

*Original sin is always within the series of nature, even when it is most deplorable in its effects, and nothing on earth can eradicate it.* Tragedy will go on for ever and tragic drama with it. But it is also true that a large part of the evils of society are due not to original sin, but to unnatural institutions; and these institutions, with the exercise of human wisdom and foresight, could be abolished. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to distinguish between an evil which is *due to original sin* and an evil *due to unnatural institutions*; and above all it is important to decide whether the evils dealt with by that powerful organism known as the State belongs to the first or the second of these categories — whether, in point of fact, government is there to "curb" original sin, or whether it is there for some "unnatural" end.

At first sight most Englishmen would at once reply that the State is there to maintain order, and would argue in some such way as follows. The streak of evil in human nature, stronger in some men, weaker in others,

(1) The term is used, of course, without reference to the theological doctrines such as traducianism, etc.

constitutes an element hostile to social life and needing constant control. It is only natural then that those members of the society whose streak of good predominates over their streak of evil, should band themselves together and elect, choose or otherwise "set up" a government armed with sufficient force to keep in check the turbulent minority. This is the "State" as it exists in the mind of the ordinary Englishmen today, and it is a conception which contains an element of truth. Any society of any kind will take steps to protect itself against the effects of original sin, very much as schools in England have a prefect system for the general maintenance of order. But whether this conception of "government" is really even remotely connected with the "State" in the modern world is quite another matter. There is all the difference in the world between a State keeping order among people who stand in normal relationships to one another and one which is keeping order among people in abnormal relationships. Notice that we have used the terms normal, natural and necessary, on the one hand, contrasted with artificial, unnatural and unnecessary on the other, implying that this is the real distinction. It is indeed quite probable that for individuals, original sin has more profound effects, but that is not the question now at issue.

We can make this distinction clearer by means of a few examples drawn from societies in history. A very obvious case is a slave society where the "State" keeps order by the most brutal and repressive means, not because it is keeping *order* between the citizens but because it is maintaining *disorder*, the disorder known as slavery. Such a State was the ancient Spartan, where the governing classes lived in almost daily dread of revolt of the helots. To preserve the unnatural condition of things established by their own freebooting raids, they had to employ the maximum force and to go on employing it until finally they exhausted themselves. Let us remember, in connection with this, that in all Rome's history one of the most violent events was the Spartanist revolt when the Roman State was really alarmed for its safety. What causes slaves to revolt is, of course, fundamentally, the "unnature" of their situation, and no force that can be created will ever in the end preserve society on such a basis. This particular revolt, if we are to believe the records, was a very bloody one. So was the vengeance of the Roman Republic, when it crucified 70,000 of the defeated slaves along the Appian Way. Yet even ruthless violence did not save Rome in the end, any more than it saved Sparta centuries before. These are extreme cases, but they give some idea of the direction in which organised society sometimes moves. But let us take an example nearer home.

During the Tudor regime in England a considerable amount of land was enclosed by the governing powers and a large number of peasants were thrown on to the roads. Queen Elizabeth, on ascending the throne, found to her surprise that there was in the country an enormous army of vagrants (about 80,000 in number) who had no visible means of sustenance. So large a figure demanded



immediate action, and the outcome was the Elizabethan Poor Law which remained in force down to the middle of the nineteenth century. It was, in its way, almost the first act of what is now known as "socialism" insofar as the State stepped in charitably to help, through the medium of taxation, the poor and needy. But, notice, if the enclosures which had driven the peasants off the land had not occurred, no such government help would have been required, even supposing (which is inconceivable) that government help ever is as good as self-help. Naturally enough, enclosures of land provoke resistance from the peasantry, and the State invariably sends a body of troops to quell the rebellion and so restore what it calls, by a pleasant euphemism, "order." Yet it was originally the State itself which, by an unnatural law, disturbed the relatively normal relationships of the people. And there is little doubt, when we consider the various peasant revolts and agrarian revolutions that have taken place in Europe since the disappearance of feudal land tenure, that the existence of a large police force as well as a regular army, has something to do with this enclosure of land. This is a case rather different from that which we began by considering, but it is a case of the highest significance. We have as the first situation a crude "natural" order (peasants on land); then "disorder" caused by an artificial re-distribution into a few hands, finally an "artificial" order produced by an armed force of the State.

To come nearer to our own time and to give a more normal example, let us consider the problem of trade, which is simply the exchange of commodities among people who are free. Trade went on long before States existed and will go on long after, subject always to the usual occasional hindrances caused by original sin — i.e. traders swindling each other and so on. What can and does hinder trade, however, far more effectively than "original sin," is the interference which arises when the State passes a law against trading and compels people against their desire and will to cease trading. The "unnature" caused by tariffs and similar hindrances to trade is of the same order as the interference mentioned above in the case of the enclosures although its effects are probably not so deadly. The enclosure of land actually prevented people from producing things at all by exiling them from the only source of production, whereas tariffs on trade do at least confine themselves to the particular articles produced. But both are essentially an offence against normal human activities and are both enacted by the organised body called the State. They are never, in any case, the normal desire of the people and resentment evoked is a deeper and more widespread phenomenon than anything caused by original sin. Original sin may lead one man to deceive another, but not much more. States will apply interference, with scientific accuracy, to thousands

or even millions of men and will attempt to punish with scientific precision all attempts to evade.

Observation tells us that people *when not interfered with seem to be more normal than when interfered with, and that their most normal functions seem to be producing wealth freely from land, and then exchanging it freely by trade.* Sporadic interference arising from original sin such as robbery, murder, etc., will occur from time to time, but by its very nature never actually becomes, or ever can become, a general law. On the other hand, institutional interferences as practised by the State in the form of land monopoly or tariffs on trade bring with them an unnatural human behaviour such as peasant revolts or smuggling. The modern organised State (as is well known), dates from the epoch of the Reformation, at a time when, in passing from feudal land tenure, an act of spoliation occurred. No doubt, as the historian will assure us, the new system of farming large acres was more "efficient" than the system it superseded, but it could after all hardly be more efficient in the eyes of the dispossessed peasantry. (1) And as the latter (later to become the landless "proletariat" of Marxist theory) constituted the majority of the population, it became necessary to create, in order to maintain "law and order" in a completely unnatural structure, what is technically called the modern "police state;" the forces of troops and police which uphold our present social regime of "law and disorder."

We have seen that by the general law of his being, man produces and exchanges what he produces; human weakness does not do more than provide an occasional exception to the rule. We have shown further, I hope, that an essential feature of State behaviour, since States have existed, has been to interfere by force with these natural human activities, and each interference — however practical and advantageous it may have appeared — was an unnatural act. Last of all we have suggested that force has been required, on a very large scale, to keep this unnatural situation unchanged. By this means some indication may also have been given as to what is the ultimate cause of war. There never was a truer aphorism than the old Aristotelian "Man is a *social animal*" and it will serve our purpose now in an important way. Every act of man, from picking up a pen and writing, or buying a stamp in a post-office, down to organising a joint stock company for exploiting the land or driving a railway across a desert, is a *public* and social act and can never really be "isolated" as a single act or event. Even the simplest operation such as writing involves, on analysis, the help of other men in the materials required — pen, ink and paper — and previous to that enough food to keep the organism going while writing, and previous to that education by teachers in the alphabet, and so on. *There is, indeed, no act in the world which is not an act of co-operation when it is properly analysed.* And we do not

(1) Its superior efficiency has recently been disputed.

hesitate to draw attention to this fact in view of the erroneous distinction that is made today between "public" and "private" enterprise. In the public act of co-operation which each individual performs when he does anything at all (beyond perhaps just breathing) there is a part which he may call his own and there is a part which belongs to the general public, and these two can be distinguished. Thus when the writer exerts himself to write, picking up the pen and marking the paper, he is engaged in performing the *private* part of this particular act of unity, while the other accessories to the total enterprise, comprising the pen, paper, writing table, and room where he is writing, not to mention a dozen more unseen things in the background embody the *public* part (which here belongs largely to the past). Now it so happens that this combination of private and public effort occurs in any enterprise at all, whether it be, in our own loose terminology, the great factories built by Ford (*and his engineers and his workmen*) or whether it be the British Fleet built by naval contractors (*and their engineers and their workmen*). All we can say is that human beings co-operate in production and their activity involves a "public" and a "private" element, "*private*" in what each individual taken separately does, "*public*" in what all the others do collectively for that individual. If we have five individuals working together, A,B,C,D,E, A's work can be considered as private and that of B,C,D,E, as public, or B's as private and A,C,D,E as public, and so on according to the various relationships in which they stand. It is always a matter of the relation of the individual to the public in each case and not, as is often thought, a relation of the individual (private enterprise) to the State (public enterprise).

In fact no greater red herring can be drawn across the track than the one that suggests that if the individual (e.g. a "private" company) performs a piece of work it must *ipso facto* be selfish and profit-seeking, while if the State does it (corporations, town councils "public" bodies) it is *ipso facto* unselfish and beneficent. The implications of this gigantic misuse of words will become clearer later.

The next important point to make clear is the exact nature of what is called planned production or planned economy and to decide what precisely an *unplanned* economy would be. Now the odd fact which seems to emerge once the activity of human beings is examined is that *every act is always planned* and there is positively no exception to this rule. Whether it be an individual just simply purchasing a pen in a shop, or a few men starting a workshop or the business magnate building up a vast enterprise (with the help of other men) nothing is ever left to chance or done haphazardly, but is invariably carefully planned. It is planned whether it succeeds or fails. It is planned even if it goes bankrupt from the very beginning; and if it fails, as it may do, it is never for the want of planning. The result, it is true, may be a ruined countryside, a

(continued on back inside cover)



## THE EVILS OF LICENSED ROAD HAULAGE

(continued from page 117)

the controls, the inducements to breach the law and the interference with the free play of supply and demand.

Mr. Yorke says "There would be no real hardship in this (his 'C' license proposals); they are merely precluded from exercising a private right to the public disadvantage." What he proposes amounts to private disadvantage in the interests of an alleged public "right" — a "right" to be declared arbitrarily by a "licensing authority," a "right" to tell a trader where, how and when he shall operate a vehicle his own business common sense has told him he needs. No trader in his right mind contemplates the purchase, running and maintenance of a vehicle unless it is going to save him money. Would Mr. Yorke deny the trader the right to follow his own business instinct? It follows from this that no trader would be likely to sink his capital in such a proposition if a satisfactory haulage service is available to him at a competitive rate.

As for the argument that account must be taken of the present and prospective state of British roads, that, surely, has nothing to do with economic principle. Restrictions of some kind may be temporarily necessary so long as the bad conditions exist, but let it be clear that they are emergency measures only, intended to be abrogated the moment the conditions are removed. No one would seriously suggest that, because of an earthquake or a tidal wave which destroyed certain roads, all traffic throughout the country should be permanently subjected to emergency controls.

There can be only one certain way of safeguarding the ideal of private freedom of action and choice without damaging the public interest; that is to remove all obstacles to that freedom and leave the matter of infringement of rights to the courts of justice.

## COMMON MARKET CONTROVERSY

(continued from page 123)

Hamilton argued that it was "a wild, speculative paradox" to suppose that trade could regulate itself. So this was an early version of the E.E.C. except that Hamilton was quite frank in his intention of using it to reduce the political independence of the contracting parties. After 175 years, the U.S.A. appears to be no nearer to Free Trade. That Common Market proved a cul-de-sac for the idea.

The British movement towards Free Trade operated on the contrary principle. Deliberately refraining from political efforts to influence other nations British governments from the 1820's onwards reduced tariffs progressively and unilaterally. The benefits became so obvious that almost all European governments began to follow Britain's example. The movement was arrested only by the repercussions of commercial depressions which, as Henry George demonstrated, derive from checks to production at its source, not from the secondary factor of exchange.

This surely suggests the angle where free traders can exert their influence most effectively.

We delude ourselves if we think there is any alternative to arousing an informed public opinion on the true nature of trade. Conferences innumerable of politicians and experts, all professing devotion to freer trade, have achieved nothing. This is the method of the E.E.C. and almost certainly, as hitherto, the interests of monopolists, not consumers, will prevail. The Common Market offers such obvious facilities to the big combines that some method of Britain's entry will probably be devised. But frictions will not be removed and provided Free Traders have not compromised their principles the difficulties of collectivist trading will present opportunities for pressing home the simple straight-forward method of overcoming man-made obstructions arising from fallacies widely accepted. Meanwhile we might usefully endeavour to devise new methods of putting our case to the changing elements of modern society.

Yours faithfully,  
FRANK DUPUIS.

Cheshire.

## THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STATE

(continued from page 126)

conglomeration of slum properties, or a dozen other things — but that is not because of any lack of planning. Here again, when people talk of a "planned" economy they have in mind a benevolent and far-seeing State stepping in to put right what (apparently) the competition of individuals has put wrong. They are substituting in fact, one sort of *public* action for another and not necessarily one that will make the situation better. We have made clear, I hope, that the business magnate and his assistants are just as "public" as say a county architect and his assistants. All that I wish to do here is to show the fallacy on which the theory of planning is based in the world today. There is a plan in nature and in every subsection of nature including the human, if we care to look for it, but it will not be found in a government department, nor in the pigeon-hole of bureaucracy. Expressed in other terms the real distinction is between *ministerial* planning, which by its very nature must be political, and the planning of an *entrepreneur* in the old sense, which was purely "on the market." The former involves regulation from some person or persons outside the market, the latter nothing but the intelligent co-operation of individuals. If the plans of the world have gone amiss these last few years it may be we shall trace the ruin eventually to its real source.

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