



MORALITY, LAW AND HUMAN FREEDOM

By F. McEachran

IN THE preceding pages, I have tried to show that the true cause of dislocation in society is a disregard of natural law which has little to do with moral failing. Original sin, on the definition we have maintained throughout, is a matter which arises between individuals alone, not between groups of individuals, and it is therefore wrong to argue from a private quarrel to a great war. Private quarrels, like any other outcome of human passion, are "inside" nature even when exceptional to it, and they will occur as long as the race lasts. The transition from a private quarrel to a war derives in fact not from original sin but from something outside original sin which takes advantage of it.

The real cause of war and revolution is therefore not individual moral turpitude but economic dislocation outside the moral law. It is obvious, for example, that if we wish to have a chemical laboratory well run it is not advisable to put a bishop in charge of it, however good he may be from the moral point of view. The outcome would only be a series of frightful explosions caused by the bishop's ignorance of the laws of chemistry. Similarly what we need in the economics of the universe is a human society which will adapt itself to the economic laws written in nature. If we fail to do this we shall suffer explosions called wars or revolutions, and no amount of episcopal exhortation will alter this fact. The laws of economics, like the laws of chemistry, are outside the moral sphere.

At the same time what we call original sin is "normal" nature in the sense that at one time or another every man, even the most saintly, will give way to it without ceasing to be natural. Thus the average British, German or Russian artisan, going about his daily work, will occasionally do things not good for society, such as swearing, getting drunk, quarrelling, perhaps (more rarely) even stealing, and so on. But when these occur they are dislocations in the individual as such and not in society. They are incidents within nature which cannot in the last analysis be completely stamped out. But they can be reduced to a minimum. Quite different is the situation which arises when, at the summons of the "State" or of a revolutionary party "executive," the same British, German and Russian artisans put on a uniform, arm themselves with rifles and sally forth to join in an organised massacre. They do it in cold blood, with no individual passion, against an enemy they have never seen, and with

whom, therefore, they cannot really quarrel. Indeed, with the help of lethal weapons of a modern kind they may kill thousands of individuals. They are quite "nice" young men round the tea table in London, Berlin or Moscow, but they are told by their respective States to engage in warfare and they obey the order. Now this sort of "order" and the obedience it entails is an expression of Power, not of original sin, and it is important to realise it. The bomb-aimer in an aircraft, and the general in command at G.H.Q. are in no sense wicked individuals, any more than you or I are wicked. They are simply individuals occupying a position produced not by the evil passions of man, but by a warped social economic background. True, in the heat of conflict they may work up their passions and even commit atrocities, so indulging in real "original sin." But this is a secondary effect, since without the element of power behind, the world would not have been warped. The bomb-aimer would be at home working in an automobile factory and the general probably functioning as a harmless business man. Normality would prevail and life go on smoothly.

It still remains that many good religious people cannot help feeling that surely something more is required to save the world than just economics, the "dismal" science. It appears to them incredible that so many years of strife, of bloody wars and revolutions could be due, not to the evils in men's hearts, but to a simple scientific error, so simple in fact that its very simplicity militates against its abolition. Such people forget the length of history and the possibility of human error. It is terrible, no doubt, that years of misery are endured before error is removed; yet it is a fact which is part of the world order. Man has free will: he has nature to exercise it on and he makes mistakes. Some of the mistakes have frightful historical consequences and he must accept this fact. In accepting it he shows the power of his spirit and the heights to which it can rise. Chattel slavery, which lasted some 9,000 years, was a scientific error which is now put right in Western civilisation. Yet this bare statement leaves out, while formulating the main truth, all that went to soften and mitigate the servile condition, all that nature did to compensate for its own indignity. It leaves out the loving kindness of many slave-owners to their slaves; the courage shown by thousands of slaves under frightful torture. It leaves out the glory of the

spirit which cannot be denied and the splendour of the soul that no evil can daunt. All those who seek a religious and ethical interpretation of evil may find it here to the fullest extent.

A brief reflection on the above considerations will reveal the flaw not in genuine Christian charity but in what only too often, in the modern world, goes by that name. Most people will agree, I think, that if we find a man with his foot caught in a trap, the first thing to do is something practical, such as setting him free, rather than exhorting him to be patient, or non-resentful under suffering. Similarly, if the boat in which we are sailing springs a leak and water pours in we gladly lend a hand in bailing it out; and will even fervently admit the priority of this over silent prayer. Yet the world today, and not the Western only, is caught in a trap of this kind which is gradually squeezing it to death and only too often the remedy offered is exhortation and prayer alone. Suffer patiently, practise brotherly love, be long-suffering. But this does not remove the trap and the throttling goes on. On the other hand those who act, act blindly. They mistake speediness of action "doing something at once" for right action. They become Fascist, Socialist or Communist. They arrange the trap in a different way, fiddle with it, and file off here and there a sharp edge. But they do not remove it.

The argument goes even deeper than this. Let us suppose that a large proportion of the richer classes of society were converted to moral goodness and that their only reaction to the poor was one of universal benevolence, as Butler or Godwin would have called it. Let us suppose further that they proceed at once to share out their income with the poor, to give them individually and personally an equal share of what they have, so that eventually, on the average, every person gets roughly what he desires. The rich and the poor then share and share alike and we are, or should be, in the delectable country. Unfortunately there is one thing we have forgotten which may upset all our calculations. The rich still possess the source of income, the poor are still dispossessed. The latter are still in bondage to the former in the sense that they "receive" while the others "give." The inexpressible joys of Christian charity are not for them; they go on receiving for ever. They can never give except at second-hand, and the rich can never receive.

This is the obvious flaw in any scheme of distribution which ignores the real source of poverty. Man obtains wealth, as we shall show later, by the action of "working" on land. If all men have equal rights to the source of production and if all men work, there can be no "class" of poor people who need gifts from a more affluent and charitable class. The first principle then in Christian charity is not to "give" but to "set free," not to "help" the poor, but to "free them to help themselves" — and then to let all men *help* when all *produce*. When this

is done the poor are enabled to produce, some more, some less, and all men are able to be generous. Then comes the application of the second principle in Christian charity which is genuine "giving," not by people in possession of monopoly, but of people giving out of the excess of their own produce. And if we are asked to whom do they give, the answer is not, as of old, to a dispossessed poor who stand in need of a Lady Bountiful; but to those *individuals*, mark the word, of all *classes*, who happen to be unfortunate whether by their own fault or by the fault of others, or by an act of God, i.e. genuine individual cases of original sin. (1) Charity then becomes the exception, not the rule, and by becoming exceptional, becomes a real and admirable thing. All men (except the unfortunate) may now practise it and the unfortunate themselves are not always unfortunate. *All* men may exercise it, *any* man may receive it, which is just as Christ himself would have wished.

Finally, we must deal with those, who being Christian, or Christian Socialists, advocate a change in heart as the sole means of creating a good society. To such as these in spirit I have nothing to say but a hearty good-will and encouragement and complete agreement in principle. But there is one thing they forget out of sheer humanitarian zeal, namely, that society depends, in the last resort, not on morality, nor on exhortation to morality, which is always primarily individualist, but on the *existence* and recognition of natural law. All that the Socialist wants in the good society would follow on the establishment of natural law as surely as the day follows night, even with the modicum of moral sense. The "general will" of Rousseau, which is hardly more than the individual's feeling of solidarity with other men in society, is always present and is prevented from actualisation only by blockage, hindrance, or monopoly. What stands in the way, as we know, is scientific error, and behind it, human ignorance and inertia. If then by individual exhortation we can persuade people to throw off this inertia and start thinking, then by all means let us exhort and persuade. The "moral" line of the good Socialist (and good Conservative, too) has at least this much truth in it, and is to this extent valuable. But always it is secondary to the fundamental significance of knowledge.

In conclusion, I would remind the emotionalists of today of an old ideal to which, from time immemorial, emotion of the purest kind has been linked. This is the ideal of liberty which throughout the centuries has inspired so much devoted action on the part of men. Liberty is more than just the song of poets and the words of statesmen, even though in these it is already noble. It is the meaning of evolution, the mainspring of biological development, the real aim of life. The organism which first learnt to control nature, not by concentration on special

(1) Such cases as a "cripple" may be interpreted as original sin on a natural i.e. non-human level. Nature goes wrong occasionally, just as man does.

ised organs, but by preserving its potentiality for new environments, was the organism called man and it is this insight into nature which has brought man where he is. A time came later when man felt himself more than just a natural organism, but he did not belie his origin. He developed new social forms (he had never, of course, lived alone) with ever freer and potentially more powerful relationships, and he experimented as he went along. He made many mistakes, and his social structures often broke down; but society, crippled as a whole, went on towards new forms. So in history the great *revolutions* those which were felt as bringing with them the Promethean hope of freedom, were in truth *evolutions* towards freer relationships and towards greater potentiality. And what is wrong with the world today and a clue to the growing despair in the human psychology is that *nowhere, nowhere at all, does the world offer freedom in this sense.* Men fight today, not in the name of liberty, but for the *control* of production for "economic" security under dictatorship, and the fight evokes no echo in the heart. In the last resort, that is not what men want. There are two problems in human life and they are not ultimately dissociable. One is the production of the food of life (material and spiritual) and the other is individual choice, up to the limit of individual capacity, in that production. The modern world offers the first without the second. If then the democratic world is surprised when the workers succumb to dictatorships, although the word liberty is inscribed on their banner, the reason is simple. Liberty in a collectivist world is a mere catchword and only when we realise that individualism and not collectivism can produce real co-operation shall we regain the freedom which is lost. And to do this we must ground the individual in everlasting law.



Power, Natural and Unnatural

The foregoing considerations have now made it clear that there are only two possible views of life, one the natural and normal, the other the State and abnormal, and that between these two there is a fundamental difference. According to the first point of view human social life is regarded as a natural product, developed in those parts of the earth which are suitable for it and obeying natural laws. In the natural order in human nature there are certain operations, such as producing crops, building houses, digging up iron ore, which are human activities and need no compulsion beyond the general compulsion of nature. Cities will grow up, ships will be built and

crops will be grown, even when the greatest efforts are made by the State to stop them, and all this by dint of the co-operation of human beings. On the other hand, there is another conception of life, which involves boards of officials, civil servants, police guards, Marxist commissars, standing over the men producing, not unlike the ancient slave owners standing over their slaves, and dictating to them what, where and how they shall produce. This is a life which nature does not accept, any more than it accepts chattel slavery, and which, in consequence, involves the use of immense force to keep it in existence. Moreover, it brings up the question of force or power in its acutest form and betrays the weakness of all systems of production that depend upon it. Let us, at this point, look more carefully into the whole problem of power.

Power belongs to the individual and constitutes fundamentally the control each individual has over his environment. It becomes *public* by means of co-operation and never does harm as long as it remains individualised, i.e. does not harness any monopoly in its train. Power in the natural organism is simply the exercise of the instincts and faculties, and one of the joys of life — perhaps the greatest joy of all — lies in the exercise of it. In the relation of one organism to another, power is exercised without doing harm to either and in exact proportion to the respective faculties. There is no room for abuse here, any more than in the natural relationships between animals. Animals, it is true, prey upon one another, but they do not "enslave" each other, nor do they monopolise in any general sense the sources of supply of food. The same is true of the lower creatures, even including the organism known as plants. Now a man, like a plant or animal, has a complete right to all the power which his work of hand or brain can give him, apart from any artificial help from outside, and if that were all the power men enjoyed to-day the weakest individual would have nothing to fear. But what a man has no right to do is to make any claim which prevents the functioning of the faculties of other men and which, once established as a general law, would subordinate permanently their interests to his. Chattel slavery was wrong simply because it had this effect and land monopoly is a similar phenomenon. Once an institution like chattel slavery or land monopoly is established, then the general system of relationship becomes unnatural and gets, in all sorts of ways, far beyond the control of individual morality. The position of 2,000,000 men out of work in Great Britain (1936) is ultimately traceable to monopoly blockage in the economic process and not to anything they personally may have done or not done in their lifetime. Their power, which should extend to the full degree of their capacity of hand and brain, is almost non-existent. They are powerless, in a potentially productive world. On the other hand, the rich mono-

(Continued on back inside cover)

MORALITY, LAW AND HUMAN FREEDOM

(Continued from Page 144)

pol'ists, who are in fact as little responsible for the general situation as are the workers who are its victims, have power in some respects beyond the dreams of Caesar. True, it is qualified by all sorts of considerations, by a long development towards freedom in modern times, and by certain limits which nature itself never allows to be infringed. No power is really absolute, nor can ever be. But the truth is that if we only let nature follow its course, power is invariably good and, in the bad sense, would never grow up at all.

Power is good when diffused, when enjoyed by each member of the community in due proportion, and it is bad in any other sense. Each organism in nature, whether plant, animal or man, is born with certain functions and through exercise of them will enjoy power. Admittedly an organism will sometimes find its interests opposed to those of another organism and out of the clash harm will

ensue, but that possibility is inside nature, not outside it. It arises in man in the form of original sin: it explains the man who quarrels with his neighbours, or the father who bullies his children. But it is not and can never be a general law in nature that men quarrel or bully their children. Were it so the race would long ago have ceased to be. The general law is that men are friendly to each other and parents affectionate, and, if we express it scientifically, that organisms *co-operate* in using their faculties so that each may attain proportionately greater power. Chattel slavery or land monopoly are interferences of a totally different kind to the sporadic effects of original sin. They are fetters on the general law of nature. They are more than this. They are scientific mistakes which mankind, having seen to be wrong, puts right in the end. Last of all, they are mistakes made by State power which ultimately recoil on the heads of those who commit them. Every civilisation yet known crashed finally on some form of monopoly. Ours may be no exception.

A Statement of Principles

THE collection of the rent of land for the community by the Taxation of Land Values is not the only reform necessary, but it is the first reform and it would make all other reforms easier. The social and economic effects of raising public revenues by land-value taxation could be threefold.

IN THE FIRST PLACE taxes that now fall upon wages and production could be abolished. No one need be taxed for building a house or improving a farm, for bringing things in from other countries or for adding in any way to the general stock of wealth. Everyone could be free to make and save wealth; to buy, sell, give, or exchange, without hindrance, any article of human production the use of which did not involve any public injury, infringe in any way the freedom of others or result in their exploitation. All those taxes which increase prices as things pass from hand to hand, falling finally upon the consumer, could be dispensed with.

IN THE SECOND PLACE, a large and constantly increasing fund would be provided for the community's use as the labour, enterprise and industry of the people increased the value of land.

IN THE THIRD PLACE, and most important of all, the monopoly of land would be abolished. The economic effect of taxing land values whether land be used or not, would be to make certain that all land was put to its best use. The effect of thus freeing the land would be to make it available for the many needs of labour and capital. The temptation and power to speculate in natural opportunities would be gone. The speculative value of land would be destroyed as soon as it was known that the land-value "tax" would be increased as fast as land value increased. The benefits would go not to individuals but to the community generally — individuals, however, retaining the full results of their labour and enterprise.

Thus the fundamental cause of the present unequal distribution of wealth would no longer exist. When men have equal rights to the value of land and are able to produce freely and on equal terms with their neighbours, when they are freed from monopoly and privilege in all its forms, then employment will cease to have the underlying implication of economic servitude, and take on its natural form — that of free and open co-operation. Wages will then be carried up to what is truly their natural rate — the full value of the produce of labour — and will be kept there.