



ORIGINAL SIN

By F. McEACHRAN

AN important problem which must be solved in the story of mankind is the age-old one of original sin, of the flaw in nature which seems to lead to such disastrous consequences in human activity. One whole class of people, the traditional anarchists, reinforced in modern times by the work of the naturalists Rousseau and Darwin, deny categorically the existence of any such "flaw" and incline to attribute any defect in man or in human society to the effect of the environment. To them the infinite perfectibility — and the eventual perfection of man — is an obvious truism which only the reactionary and the obscurantist will try to gainsay.

On the other hand, the traditional Christian and the classicist, observing the actual deeds of living men and believing in human free will, tend to attribute all social evil to moral depravity and exalt the evil effect of original sin. Man, once perfect, has fallen; the world is a vale of sorrow and no human agency is competent to put it right. We can tinker with it and mitigate an abuse here and there, but only the vain Utopian hopes to heal it. The healthy life, the blessed life, is in the other world.

The point of the previous chapter will have been missed if it has not been made clear that both these points of view are right and both wrong, and that there is a third alternative which subsumes and transcends them both. With regard to the objective point of view which places all responsibility on the environment, we can only say that at some point in time the environment appears to become maladjusted and this once admitted all is admitted. If then the environment we are discussing is the social environment of man, then it is, or was, the action of men which originally caused the maladjustment in society and so we are back once more in the subjective sphere.

Examples of this would be when men first "enslaved" other men, or when men first "enclosed" land, with all the defects in the social organism and structure which flow from these. Granted these are not moral defects, as we have abundantly conceded, they are definitely maladjustments, mistakes, flaws — and this is precisely what we mean by original sin. The important feature here is simply that in the last resort the objective and the subjective coincide. We do not know at what remote period in evolution certain fish made an adjustment which brought them on to the land. We do know that other fish failed to do it and remained in the sea. That failure, or maladjustment, was presumably subjective, but its con-

sequences for both fish and men were objective in the extreme.

The subjective argument is perhaps less easy to deal with since it brings up all the incidence of free will and the passionate emotions associated with it. On this theory it is the cruelty of primitive conquerors which invented slavery, the rapacity of landlords which caused slums, the moral turpitude of rulers which is responsible for war. And clearly enough it looks so if, innocent of the objective background which has been violated, we examine only the immediate events unrolling themselves before us. Conquerors have enslaved their captives, landlords have extorted heavy rents, and rulers have declared war, and yet we know quite well that this is only a small part of the total event. The slightest reflection, indeed, will show that the conception of individual wickedness is inadequate to explain the phenomena in question. The conqueror has probably only the alternative of killing his captive, the good landlord receives the same rent as the bad, and the good ruler, like the wicked, declares war. In fact the more we go into the question of what caused human collective action on any given occasion, the more difficult it gets to pin it down to any definite human depravity.

The problem will become clearer, perhaps, if we consider what little effect human depravity or human goodness would have in any of the above-mentioned cases in the absence of an objective nature which was warped. Our first example of a conqueror assumes, for example, the existence of an army ready to obey him and carry out his conquests. The second assumes the existence of land monopoly, and the third the existence of the State — all of which can be shown to be the result of the infringement, in the remote past, of some natural law. Left to himself in the absence of armies, the amount of men one man could conquer would be a negligible factor, insufficient to affect seriously the evolution of the race. Again, in the absence of monopoly the rapacity (or generosity) of any landlord would affect hardly anybody but himself, while the ruler, in the absence of subjects, would declare war for himself and his friends alone. Only when buttressed by some extraneous institution do "acts" as described above involve large-scale suffering and create a world of terror. They explain to a large extent the "vale of sorrow" assumed by the ardent religionist and supported by the learning of traditional classicism.

But on the other hand, without monopoly, without the

accompanying infringement of law for which no individual person can be held responsible, they present an individual flaw which, however deadly, remains always a personal matter. The flaw in Hitler was undoubtedly a serious one and there are not wanting psychiatrists who, for paranoia alone, would have consigned him to a mental home. But the evil caused by Hitler in the world was not an outcome of his personal defects by themselves, but of these when they were harnessed in the service of monopoly power arising from quite different sources. No doubt once monopoly had placed Hitler in power it is difficult to disentangle the combined effect, but the fact remains that in origin and in end they are two quite different things. A German nation, producing and exchanging easily, would never have been the dupe of the Nazi Party and become its dupe for reasons quite outside the "original sin" in Hitler.

We contend then that both the classicist religionist and the anarchist are right if only they will concede a point or two to each other. The classicist Christian must concede that social evil derives from an *unnature* of a warped social structure and not — originally — from the evil twist in man. For his part the anarchist must concede that man is imperfect in some sense and should not build up his ideal society on any theory of perfectibility. What brings the good society into the world is the basis of natural law on which it is founded and that is due *not to the goodness but to the knowledge* of mankind. Once the foundation of natural law is laid down it is the interest of everyone, even of the most selfish, to follow it. Anarchism then should not be a result of *believing man to be perfect* but of *knowing and implementing the law of nature*.

Once this is done the anarchist will find that the state has in fact "withered away" and he will be content to leave to the Christian the individual problems that remain. The Christian in his turn will perceive that society need not rest on police or superstition, but on the background of natural law which God has stretched out behind the puny intentions of mankind. He will also find that what he calls "original sin" remains, circumscribed in its effects by personal and individual destiny. Children will still be naughty, adults still quarrelsome, men will be ambitious, jealous and revengeful, and here the solace and healing power of religion may well have its proper sphere.

In the last resort the only individual sin is pride, the one by which Lucifer fell and which led our first father to desecrate the perfect Garden. It may be true, as the anarchist maintains, that the progress of psychology and education on a natural background will enable us to cure most of the individual passions of today, perhaps even the traditional vices. But it is doubtful if pride will be uprooted, because of all human failings it is the one most bound up with liberty. There are few among us, I imagine, who have not at some time secretly sympathised with Lucifer in his revolt against God or

even with Adam and Eve for upsetting the smugness of the Garden. It may be, that something in omnipotence calls out for revolt, and that man, born free, is not made for complete submission.

Pride may be defined as self-assertion indulged beyond its proper sphere, the sort of excess the Greek philosophers so much deplored. Whatever its effects be in the transcendental sphere — and, as we have seen, they may be diabolical — they can go no further in the human than the "reach" of each individual. The realisation of this fact has indeed in the past reconverted many despairing agnostics to the Christian religion, since the world it represents is not a gloomy, but a rational and kindly one. The misery of the slums, the slaughter of war and the degradation of poverty are not part of the order of nature, but ulcers upon it. God is not far away, provoking by merciless decrees the resistance of a man-made devil in the name of liberty, but an "order" which runs through all time and space and exemplified in the science known already or yet to be known. The service of God is not a submission to the relentless decree of the far-off imperator, but the observance, application and even the fight to establish the order of nature, the vital urge which flows in the veins of every man born. The fight for freedom is the fight to implement the laws which man sees potentially, but the actualisation of which still lies beyond him.

This fight is the same fight which brought the pre-human organism from sea to land and raised it through countless ages to the level where it now stands. It is at one and the same time a fight for freedom and a fight for law, since only in the recognition of law does man's true freedom lie. If he asserts himself, under the law, equating his will with the will "that moves the sun and the other stars" (Dante: *The Divine Comedy*), he is asserting himself under the law that is pride or *hubris*, with which in the last resort religion is concerned. Both occur and always will. But the significant thing is that both freedom and law are inside the natural order, and immanent in each organism; they spring from the inside, not from the outside, surging up from that *fontana vivace* which has been flowing since the world began. The guarantee that the human organism will not succumb in its fight for freedom to the fascist, the communist, or even the liberal "state" is simply that the power in us which saved us from wreckage on the ocean of the ages will sustain us to the end. The state may compel to the utmost, the very conception of a free society and a free man may seem to perish, but the organism known as man will sooner or later burst the integument, however hard.

To accept this point of view is not really so hard as



it seems, even for the most convinced Platonist. True, at first sight it seems that to make so many significant spiritual and idealistic reactions depend largely on a mere "science" such as economics, is a sordid and material approach — so sordid indeed that the mind, bent on sacrifice, revolts instinctively against it. But only at first sight. As soon as we begin to realise that the world functions according to law, that God is greater and more serene when incarnate in law and that sacrifice is made to law just as easily as to pure chance the whole problem assumes another aspect.

It is, in fact, a harder and nobler sacrifice to help on the slow movement of history which offers no immediate glory than to demand for sacrifice the pseudo-splendour of the romantic death or the tinsel sublime of the surface cause. The long patience of the scientist searching for truth bears no radiant badge, but it leads in the end to a better human adjustment. So it is with the sordid science of economics which, after all, is not really sordid. We are not in fact considering men as either greedy or unselfish, but only as obedient to a law which, like those of mathematics, is independent of themselves.

The whole process of evolution is a constant process of adjusting the subject to the object, the inner relation to the outer, and this really is what the reign of law is to the man who perceives it. The man who sacrifices to establish the law he has seen in vision is doing the ideal thing the Platonist would have him do, only he is doing it for the sake of the ideas "in" the things not "before" and "beyond" them. The greatest sin of all probably is to have seen the truth and to thwart it, the "sin against the Holy Ghost" which Goethe embodied in the figure of Mephistopheles:

*so setzest du der ewig regen
der heilsam schaffenden Gewalt,
die kalte Teufelsfaust entgegen*¹

the attempt to block creative evolutionary activity.

If we seek in human life for a motive for such actions we may find it in the old conception of *hubris*, the pride that makes the individual assert himself too much. It is right for the organism to assert itself — that is the meaning of evolution and the freedom which the poets have so gloriously sung. But, it is wrong to assert oneself against the law and if we do this we shall be cast out of Heaven. The law of nature, which is the law of God, prevails in the end.

¹ "So you with your devilishly cold fist oppose the healing creative power (of nature)"—Faust.

NOTICE

Unforeseen circumstances may prevent the next International Conference from being held in Toronto in 1963, as announced in our last issue. Watch for further announcement.

NEWS FROM DENMARK

Farming and Politics

BY PAVLOS GIANNELIAS



HARALD GRONBORG, Director of the famous Folk High School at Odense, Denmark, (which belongs to the Association of Smallholders of Funen) has recently published an interesting and well-documented study which shows that small farms in Denmark are more productive than large ones. And these benefits to the small farmers have resulted from only a partial application of the remedy of Henry George: "Abolish all taxation save that upon land values." These reforms have not only encouraged a more intensive use of land already under cultivation, but have brought into use land previously idle by subjecting it to the payment of land tax.

Farms of 25 acres and under have increased their yield of wheat, beetroot and hay by 35 per cent., as compared with farms of 250 acres and over. Also, on average, small farms support more than twice as many cows, three times as many pigs and twenty times as much poultry per acre.

For both sizes of farm the annual taxes upon land value are nearly equal, being about £5 per acre, but for income tax purposes the small farms pay about £8 per acre, which is nearly double that paid by the large. (Improvements are almost exempt from taxation).

Although Gronborg is convinced that further tax reforms would enable farms of even 5 or 7 acres to become profitable, opinion is more and more inclining to the view that the days of the small farms are numbered, unless they amalgamate. One of the reasons why many of them are so productive is the fact that both the farmer and his family are working.

The large landowners are still seeking to abolish land value taxation, even though it is obvious that the system has encouraged a more intensive use of land. In their role of wheat producers they have succeeded in obtaining a customs duty on imported wheat, which is penalising the consumer, and also the small farmers who need wheat for use as cattle food.

A great struggle is now taking place concerning the proposed substitution of land-value taxation by increases in consumer taxes. *Ret Og Frihed*, the journal of the Danish Justice Party, organised a meeting recently to discuss this and other questions, and particularly the burning one of Denmark's future if she joins the Common Market.

Former deputy Neils Anderson and other Georgeists, although not against a United Europe, are critical of the

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