

Bring back morals

In a recent essay, Arnold J. Toynbee sets out to show "that some of the major maladies of the present-day world--in particular the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature's irreplaceable treasures, and the pollution of those not already devoured--can be traced back to a religious cause..." and here he proceeds to argue that the supersession of pantheism by monotheism robbed man of "his pious worship of nature"--of the awe which constrained "man's greedy impulse to exploit nature." Whether or not his incrimination of monotheism is warranted, Toynbee sees a spiritual degeneration in the Western World which is quite real. Western Civilization is reaping the harvest of the materialism which it has cultivated for centuries.

With the outbreak of the Industrial Revolution exploitation of nature began in earnest, for it was at this time that the earth fell victim to human technology. Technocratic capitalism was born--a beast to ravage the earth. Not being particularly introspective, it did not pause to reflect upon the consequent havoc generated in its wake. Two centuries later the suicidal surge gains impetus.

If it is at all possible to thwart the materialistic insanity which presently blocks all attempts to seriously reevaluate the structure of Western Civilization, it will never occur if Western Civilization is allowed to continue its heedless onward plunge. Western Civilization must take council to collect its thoughts before it can realize its folly. But far be it from the materialistic instincts which pervade Western mentality to allow such introspection.

Having subordinated man politically and economically, Western materialism proceeds to rob him of his humanity. He no longer retains the freedom to actively realize his ideals.

Furthermore, the stimulus to independent thought is lost in the maze of social organization necessary to maintain Western Civilization on its

present course. Sacrificing his individuality to society, man accepts its dictates, drawing from it the opinions by which he lives. There is no recourse to the free-thinking spirit in which all ideas must justify themselves to the individual reason.

"With the surrender of his own personal opinion the modern man surrenders also his personal moral judgment..."

Unconsciously to themselves, the majority of the members of our barbarian civilized states give less and less time to reflection as moral personalities, so that they may not be continually coming into inner conflict with their fellows as a body, and continually having to get over things which they feel to be wrong.

Public opinion helps them by popularizing the idea that the actions of the community are not to be judged so much by the standards of morality as those of expediency. If we find among men of today only too few whose human and moral sensibility is still undamaged, the chief reason is that the majority have offered up their personal morality on the altar of their country, instead of remaining at variance with the mass and acting as a force which impels the latter along the road to perfection." (Albert Schweitzer)

Thus, in travelling the road of material progress, Western Civilization has forfeited the one thing which is all essential: the spiritual advancement of mankind. Even the intellectual agencies of Western Civilization have ceased to function spiritually, no longer reflecting upon the implications of their discoveries and their relationship to man's universe--to the world of human experience.

"Today thought gets no help from science, and the latter stands facing it independent and unconcerned. The newest scientific knowledge may be allied with an entirely unreflecting view of the universe. It maintains that it is concerned only with the establishment of individual facts, since it is only by means of these that scientific knowledge can maintain its practical character; the

coordination of the different branches of knowledge and the utilization of the results to form a world-view are, it says, not its business. Once every man of science was also a thinker who counted for something in the general spiritual life of his generation. Our age has discovered how to divorce knowledge from thought, with the result that we have, indeed, a science which is free, but hardly any science left which reflects." (A. S.)

But of what value is it to decry the spiritual bankruptcy of Western Civilization knowing full well that spiritual freedom is impossible so long as the inherent politico-economic structure of Western materialism subjugates man? Obviously, of no value whatsoever. That is precisely the point. Unless man is willing to transform Western Civilization, it makes no sense to lament its decadence.

The only power which can transform Western Civilization is the power which exists within us as independently reflective individuals, to transform ourselves.

Only when each man realizes his need of a reflective world-view will forces arise which can revolutionize Western Civilization. Only when he begins to ponder the gift of life which has been granted him, will man revere life and only then can "his pious worship of nature" be restored.

"The ways along which we have to struggle towards the goal may be veiled in darkness, yet the direction in which we must travel is clear. We must reflect together about the meaning of life; we must strive together to attain a world-view affirmative of the world and of life, in which the impulse to action which we experience as a necessary and valuable element of our being may find justification, orientation, clarity and depth, may receive a fresh access of moral strength, and be retempered, and thus become capable of formulating, and acting on, definite ideals of civilization, inspired by the spirit of true humanitarianism." (A. S.)

Ted Milner
Science 2

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