VOLUME III, NO. 11
MARCH 15, 1950

MEN WITH IDEAS: SPINOZA

EVERY philosopher gets into logical difficulties, and the more important his thinking, the larger, often, are his difficulties. Baruch de Spinoza, who changed his name to Benedict after the seventeenth-century Rabbis of Amsterdam expelled him for heresy from the congregation of Israel, seems to have been unaware of the logical difficulties he got into, for never was there a man more serene in the practice of his philosophical convictions. In Spinoza's system, the critics tell us, the proof of God is a mere tautology, while his theory of causation makes of man a spiritual automaton, without the slightest basis for free will or moral independence. Yet he outdid the saints in his self-taught religious life; and, as to moral independence, it is doubtful if any man in seventeenth-century Europe had as much of it as Spinoza.

To read the writings of men who have inspired other men is to wonder just how important "logical difficulties" are in philosophy and religion. This question is particularly pertinent in connection with Spinoza for the reason that he bowed to no one in his effort to be "logical." The *Ethics* is written in Euclidean style, each chapter beginning with a list of definitions and postulates, the argument then proceeding in statements of "Propositions" followed by "Proofs," with occasional "Corollaries" added for further elucidation. The conclusions Spinoza arrived at must have seemed necessary and inescapable so far as he was concerned, for he was a modest man and would not have set down his Q.E.D. after each proof if he had not been convinced that he was offering the world impersonal demonstrations of truth about the nature of things. Yet while Spinoza has had great influence, it cannot be suggested that many have accepted his proofs in the same way that men accept the proofs of Euclid. The things he affirmed, rather than how he "proved" them, are what have interested the thinkers of later days.

Proofs by reason reached an apex of popularity in Spinoza's time, largely through the influence of Descartes. To this extent, Spinoza was the child of his time, but in little else. The distinctive thing about men like Spinoza is that their convictions seem without essential relation to time and place. If they are to be explained at all, it is by the Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis*, or reminiscence, elaborated by Socrates in the *Meno*. The superficial explanation of Spinoza's ideas deals with his youthful acquaintance with Kabalistic doctrines, his study of Moses Maimonides, of the Neoplatonic philosophers and Giordano Bruno. But such influences were common in the seventeenth century and affected many scholarly young men. Why, in the case of Spinoza, was the young man set on fire by these ideas? Something more than an intellectual heritage was needed to challenge not only the authority of the Synagogue, but the seats of all established religious opinion in Europe.

What made Spinoza great, what made him beloved and of blessed memory was his *direct* devotion to the truth as he saw it, and the extraordinary wholeness of his thought. Spinoza has a primitive grandeur that is wholly lacking in intellectual opportunism. His honesty is that of a child who sees and tells what he sees. The child who retains his honesty while gaining experience and practical wisdom becomes a moral power among men, and that is what happened to Spinoza.

Many men talk about the omnipresence of Deity. Spinoza believed in it with all his heart. This idea was more the breath of life to him than the physical atmosphere. There is Reality, and it is One, he declared. Spinoza was an absolute and

unqualified pantheist. No limiting attribute or human similitude can be applied to God, he maintained, for that which is infinite and eternal is beyond any form of finite description. As Fuller says in his *History of Philosophy*,

> Spinoza's use of the term [God] is apt to be confusing, since, for us, because of the Christian tradition, the word "God" immediately and inevitably suggests a personal being; whereas, for him, . . . it has no such connotations. Indeed, we shall understand him better, if we substitute in our minds a neutral term without personal implications, like Reality, or the Real.

In consequence of his unwillingness to limit the idea of Deity to some form of personal being, Spinoza attained to the curious distinction of being called "the God-intoxicated" by some, while others condemned him as an atheist and unbeliever. The Church historian, Mosheim, in an editor's note appearing in the 1845 edition of Cudworth's *True Intellectual System*, accuses Spinoza of "utterly repudiating all divine nature and reason," when the fact is that Spinoza admitted the reality of nothing else. The evidence that Mosheim offers to support this charge is that in the *Ethics*, Spinoza's chief work, the author "omitted the word God throughout the whole of his book, which was first written in Dutch, using only the term *nature;* but being admonished by Lud. Meyerus, to whom he had given it to be translated into Latin, that if so edited, it would subject him to the greatest odium and arm the authorities against him as an enemy to God, he therefore suffered the translator to substitute the word *God* instead of *nature."*

The seventeenth century, as the age of Galileo's great discoveries, saw the birth of the idea of the world-machine. But while the natural philosophers, the first European physicists, devoted themselves to studying the physical causes behind the operation of the world-machine, Spinoza found the origin of all motion, all causation, in God. For him, the world was a machine powered by Divinity. *All,* he asserted, is caused by God, and all things and beings result from and are a part of the nature of God. The evil that men experience comes as a result of their ignorance, for although every man, being a part or modification of the divine nature, has within himself the capacity to understand the true order of things, he is distracted from realizing this knowledge by the activity of the passions, and this leads to incorrect perceptions. Evil, for Spinoza as for Socrates, arises from ignorance, and virtue is knowledge.

The world presents the drama of the unfolding nature of God, in which man is both actor and observer. The more he becomes involved in the partisanships of the passions, the less he is able to see the true relationships of nature—of, that is, the nature of God. Nothing is evil in itself—how could it be, having a divine origin?—but all evil arises from human misunderstanding. We have within us the power to grasp the divine symmetry, and when that power is frustrated by action on emotional impulse, we do and suffer evil. How is evil to be banished? Simply by understanding.

Spinoza, therefore, is no oppressive moralist but a vastly tolerant spirit who founds all hope for human happiness upon the idea of a reasoned obedience to basic intuitions. A man in the grip of a passion has not to "abandon" the passion as an evil thing, but to come to terms with it by understanding it. Then it will become a force for good. This aspect of Spinoza's philosophy is very like the doctrines of the modern psychoanalysts. For the desire that springs from the senses, Spinoza would substitute the desire that springs from reason. Only action based on understanding good and evil can be called virtuous, and good is whatever leads to knowledge, while evil hinders knowledge. A man is freed from bondage to his emotions because he has knowledge, and not the reverse. It would be a mistake to say that freedom springs from control, which then leads to knowledge. The knowledge creates the necessity for the control, and must come first.

Fear, being contrary to reason, is despised by Spinoza. He has little respect for those who would control human conduct by fear:

> Superstitious persons, who know better how to rail at vice than how to teach virtue, and who strive not to guide men by reason, but so to restrain them that they would rather escape evil than love virtue, have no other aim but to make others as wretched as themselves; wherefore it is nothing wonderful, if they be generally troublesome and odious to their fellow-men.

It was natural for Spinoza to feel this way, for what is there, in his universe, for a man to fear? Man has no enemy but his own ignorance.

Spinoza's discussion of how a free man acts shows that the philosopher was concerned with the problems of daily life as well as with logical demonstrations. In Part Four of the *Ethics*, titled, "On Human Bondage," he says:

> Prop. LXX.—The free man, who lives among the ignorant, strives as far as he can, to avoid receiving favors from them.
>
> *Proof.*—Everyone judges what is good according to his disposition; wherefore an ignorant man, who has conferred a benefit upon another, puts his own estimate upon it, and, if it appears to be estimated less highly by the receiver, will feel pain. But the free man only desires to join other men to him in friendship, not repaying their benefits with others reckoned as of like value, but guiding himself and others by the free decision of reason, and doing only such things as he knows to be of primary importance. Therefore the free man, lest he should become hateful to the ignorant, or follow their desires rather than reason, will endeavor, as far as he can, to avoid receiving their favors.
>
> *Note.—I say*, AS FAR AS HE CAN. For though men be ignorant, yet they are men, and in cases of necessity could afford us human aid, the most excellent of all things: therefore it is often necessary to accept favors from them, and consequently to repay such favors in kind, lest we should have the appearance of despising those who bestow them, or of being, from avaricious motives, unwilling to requite them, and so give ground for offense by the very act of striving to avoid it. Thus, in declining favors, we must look to the requirements of utility and courtesy. *(Philosophy of Benedict De Spinoza*, translated by R H. M. Elwes, Tudor Publishing Co., 1933.)

Spinoza practiced a remarkable personal consistency with these ideas. The first "favor" he refused was considerably more than a favor—it was a bribe offered him by the Rabbis of the Amsterdam Synagogue, who wanted him to return to the fold and be a loyal and pious Jew, so that his great scholarship and intellectual gifts would reflect glory upon Israel. Spinoza was only twenty-four years old at the time, but his brilliance was already well known. Spinoza refused the offer, which was of a stipend of 1,000 florins a year, and he was probably not impressed by the morality of the gesture. It was shortly after this event that Spinoza was excommunicated by the Jewish Elders, whose use of the theological vocabulary made it plain that, in parting, they did not wish him well. The official excommunication read in part: "Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lieth down, and cursed be he when he riseth up; cursed be he when he goeth out, and cursed be he when he cometh in." All the vindictive wrath of Jehovah was invoked upon the head of the philosophical youth—and, lest Jehovah might not get around to appropriate measures soon enough, the Rabbis arranged with the civil authorities to have Spinoza banished from Amsterdam.

When Spinoza's father died, his half-sister, Rebeka, feeling that a heretic had no right to share the inheritance, tried to secure it all for herself. Spinoza sued for his share, and having won the action as a matter of principle, he refused to touch the money. All he took of his father's property was "a good bed with its furnishings." Until the time of his death, at the age of forty-four, Spinoza supported himself at the trade of grinding lenses. Throughout his life, he refused offers of money from his admirers. Simon de Vries, a wealthy Amsterdam merchant, tried unsuccessfully to give him $1,000 and was prevented by Spinoza from leaving his entire estate to the philosopher. When, after de Vries' death, it was found that an annuity for Spinoza had been provided in the will, the latter would accept only a part of it. "Nature," he said, "is satisfied with little; and if she is, I am

also." Louis XIV offered him a pension if he would dedicate his next book to the Grand Monarch, but Spinoza courteously refused. He also refused the chair of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg, remarking, after thanking "His Serene Highness the Prince Palatine" for honoring him,

> I do not know within what precise limits that the same liberty of philosophizing [which had been promised him] would have to be restrained, so that I would not seem to interfere with the established religion of the principality. . . . You see, therefore, honored sir, that I do not look for any higher worldly position than that which I now enjoy: and that for love of the quiet which I think I cannot otherwise secure, I must abstain from entering upon the career of a public teacher.

The absence in Spinoza's philosophy of any form of "preaching" or feeling of the desire to exercise constraint over other men is probably responsible for the extraordinary attractiveness of his ideas. Spinoza was a determinist, believing that men do what they do as the result of chains of causation reaching back into the nature of Deity. Why, then, preach at them? As there can be no independence of this ultimate causation, there is no place for moral condemnation in the scheme of things. Yet there is a freedom possible for man—the freedom which grows from responding to the inner instead of the outer chains of causation. The inward nature of man can comprehend the entire natural order, simply because the inward nature of man is not a mere "part," but is open to the knowledge of the *whole* of Reality, and knowledge of this sort is true wisdom—it is God-wisdom. Complete understanding generates a more powerful emotion than the feelings aroused by the partial perceptions of the senses, and the inward desire of the spirit, therefore, will triumph over all lesser emotions. It is by this means that men become free. Intellectual perceptions, however, have no power over us; knowledge must be linked with desire to affect human action. We must learn to feel ourselves a part of the great impersonal processes of life. This feeling, Spinoza calls the intellectual love of God. It is a feeling, however, which is not reciprocated, for God is not a being who either loves or hates. God is the one, passionless Self of All, and the vision or truth in the One Self is the ultimate spiritual realization. There is nothing outside this Self to complete the felicity of the soul that has gained this vision.

Spinoza does not exhort his readers. He endeavors to inform them of the necessary processes of human development. No threats of punishment accompany his ethical precepts, which are presented more as one might describe the principles of engineering than as rules for practicing the good life. He is saying, "If you grow toward the good life, this is how you will grow; and whether you grow or not depends upon the hidden schemes of causation in Nature, which is God."

He seems to be saying, also, that while man has no free will, there is a sense in which he is free, or becomes free—he may be free as an observer who watches the universal laws work out within himself, and who, in consequence of understanding them, does nothing to impede the operation of those laws.

This, then, is the paradox of Spinoza's system: that its liberating atmosphere, its lack of psychological suasion and converting zeal arise from a metaphysical rejection of human freedom; and that out of this rejection a new kind of freedom is born, like the phoenix, from the ashes of denial of the old kind. It is as though the denial itself had created a deeper realization of the actual meaning of spiritual freedom.

Letter from

ENGLAND

LONDON.—Just as the medical profession is inclined to be touchy about the laity trespassing upon their particular domain (the medieval church held similar strong views in regard to its own dogmas), so we are seeing in the present Economic Crisis discussions the wand of the expert being wafted over the ark of the financial Tables of the Law. In these circumstances, the London *Times* felt impelled to publish a sixpenny booklet and a Washington Glossary (giving the meaning of what it calls "this newly born jargon"), presumably to reassure the public that these high matters are in good hands for solution.

Notwithstanding talks and agreements, the hard core of the problem remains formidable. With a deficit of £400,000,000 a year, against Marshall aid which may not exceed £200,000,000, we are told that gold and dollar reserves are likely to be exhausted within two years, and that, at the current rate of drain, sterling can scarcely hold out for more than a matter of months. Nobody suggests that England (in common with other sterling countries) has anything but a hard time ahead to retain her present standard of living, or that anything said or done can alter the fact that the United States economy, ideally suited to the role of a debtor nation, is quite incompatible with her new status as world creditor. Except in Communist ranks, gratitude is felt towards the United States for her prodigious aid; but it is also realized that a trade recession in America and industrial disputes there or in Western countries would upset short- and long-term plans. Indeed, behind all the gibberish of bi-lateralism, convertibility, devaluation, inflation, deflation, stockpiling, hard and soft currencies, and overseas investments, there stands the reality of human weakness and strength. "Enlightened self-interest" is not going to solve what the Marxists jubilantly call the "general crisis of capitalism"—conflict between capital and labour, competition between the Powers for markets, and opposition between ruling nations and coloured dependent peoples—aggravated by the aggression everywhere of the new imperialism of Soviet ideology.

It is idle to prophesy the future of "economic man" in a world of immeasurable suffering which may be transforming itself into a new design, its outlines but dimly discernible. But this much may perhaps be said as a warning footnote to present controversy. Palliatives there may be; but no genuine or durable answer to our distress will be found by way of continued or increasing regimentation in the supposed interests of security or prosperity. Free economies and socialist states alike are guilty of ignoring the just claims of the individual in face of the complex demands of industrial and governmental machinery. It is useless to talk of the Four Freedoms of the United Nations Charter when the whole drift of existence is in the direction of leaving man with none of the attributes of a truly living person, and only distinguishable from his fellows by a different identity number on a card index!

The care of children, the sick, and the aged, is one thing; the loss by able-bodied adults of a sense of responsibility and self-respect in matters of common welfare is quite another. Socialised production in England has thus far meant little more than the transfer to the State (operating through nationalized boards) of the processes of capitalism, with enhanced complexity of administration; and for some branches of industry, a lessening of incentives to responsible work for the due rewards of a Welfare State. That the workers in these industries are not satisfied was clear from the debates at the Trades Union Congress last year, when demands were made for direct representation of the workers concerned on all management boards. Everywhere humanity would appear to be seeking to assuage its manifold torments by extending its needs and the means of satisfying them, unaware of the truth that this is the false quest for satiation, leading to the death of the soul. Few remember Thoreau's words: "The chief want, in every State that I have been into, was a high and earnest purpose in its inhabitants." Where is this call to be heard today, and where the answer?

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
"SIN" AS A POLITICAL PRINCIPLE

THERE are several things to be noted in the current revival of the old argument about whether or not there is a God. First of all, the argument is not so much concerned with the nature and activities of God as it is with the sinfulness of man. A sense of human inadequacy seems to be back of the new search for God—which is logical enough, for human beings have far more experience of each other than of God, and are better qualified to speak on the subject of man. It is not, therefore, the sublime idea of a spiritual origin for all that is being sought in the present renewal of religious discussions, but a theory for the control of evil. Men are measuring the evil they see about them, and, finding it overpowering in prospect, they can think of no other explanation for it besides the Original Sin.

As human evil, in these days, finds expression mainly through political channels, the doctrine of Original Sin at once assumes political significance. Evil is interpreted as arrogant disorder, as disrespect for authority and the neglect of tradition. If the sinfulness of man can be established as a generally accepted fact, having, however, a supernatural origin, then the concrete authority of government will take on a special and partly supernatural dignity. Men, feeling their imperfection, will be less likely to challenge the methods of control that are established to regulate and minimize the effects of their evildoing, and those with power, whether in government or in finance, will become more powerful, while every aspect of the status quo acquires a strong odor of sanctity.

This entire trend is examined in the *American Scholar* (Winter, 1949-50) by Robert Gorham Davis, under the title, "The New Criticism and the Democratic Tradition." The principles of the New Criticism are represented by such terms as *"authority, hierarchy, catholicism, aristocracy, tradition, absolutes, dogma, baths,"* which are opposed to another set of values—*"liberalism, naturalism, scientism, individualism, equalitarianism, progress, protestantism, pragmatism* and *personality."* In illustration of the New Criticism, Mr. Davis quotes from T. S. Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society* the following interesting admission: "I doubt whether what I am saying can convey very much to anyone for whom the doctrine of the Original Sin is not a very real and tremendous thing." Mr. Davis traces the revival of dogma and the distrust of "liberal" ideas to the *Syllabus of Errors* issued by Pope Pius IX in 1864.

The depressing thing about the modern attack on liberalism is that it seeks out the weaknesses of liberalism, not to correct them, but in order to justify abandoning the spirit of freedom and self-reliant striving for human betterment. As Mr. Davis says, "The central question is the nature of man, and from its answer the religious, literary and political conclusions follow." If the nature of man is sinful—if he is "naturally" depraved—then the reactionary monarchs and priests of the past were right, and the revolutionists, protestants and freethinkers were wrong. For if man is essentially evil, a God is needed to hold the world together. The defeatists of mankind *feel* this as well as argue for it as a logical conclusion.

The question which liberalism will have to face, or lose the battle with the advocates of hierarchy and authority, has to do with its failure to explain the evil that men do. Liberalism has no philosophy of human nature except a sort of shallow optimism. It has never really accepted the challenge or reality of evil. Defenders of liberalism only repeat the slogans of the eighteenth century and echo the Marxist demands of the nineteenth century. If their ideal of freedom is to survive, they will have to discover metaphysical principles capable of standing against the theological explanation of evil by the Original Sin—and, quite possibly, they should seek for these principles in the archaic religious ideas which were borrowed and distorted by the Christian theologians.

Mr. Davis' article in the *American Scholar* is worth reading for a number of reasons. It is much more than a tocsin calling all good liberals to the standard for the fight against reaction. His main point—a most important one—is that while the argument for authority and order and hierarchy has had numerous supporters in the United States, here, the appreciation of discipline has sometimes been

accompanied by a characteristic devotion to freedom. The humanist, Irving Babbitt, for one, refused to identify his criticisms of progressivism and scientific naturalism with support for any theological orthodoxy. Babbitt believed in an *inner* discipline, and he "retained his New England individualism and an affection for Emerson."

While Mr. Davis does not exactly say so, one implication of his article is that men of intelligence are under no necessity to choose between sacerdotal authority and skeptical materialism. To his mention of Babbitt as one who resisted both these alternatives, he might have added Dr. Hutchins of the University of Chicago. Dr. Hukhins is often accused of flirting with, if not embracing, the effortless security of a theological solution of human ills. Yet in the first number of the new quarterly, *Measure*, published by Henry Regnery in Chicago, Dr. Hutchins pursues a devastating analysis of the underlying assumptions of Mr. Eliot's *Idea of a Christian Society*, and the tools he uses for this analysis are educational principles consistent with a liberal political philosophy. There is not much left of Mr. Eliot's dignified pose as an educator, after Dr. Hutchins gets through with him. Mr. Eliot is one of the leaders of the New Criticism, and so, some say, is Dr. Hutchins. Obviously, there is more than one kind of New Criticism. To distinguish Dr. Hutchins' kind from some others, we can do no better than to quote from his article:

> Mr. Eliot's chief complaint of other writers on education is that they seek to use the schools to achieve social purposes they have at heart. Then he falls into the pit he has digged for others: he wants to use the schools to advance social purposes of his own. Mr. Eliot wants a society that has both the class, those who have inherited advantages, and the elite, those who have ability. And so, after anathematizing writers on education who seek to obtain the society they desire through the schools, Mr. Eliot says, "Education should help to preserve the class and select the elite." Since this would be bringing about a social change that Mr. Eliot has at heart, it would not according to his criticisms of other writers, be education but something else. Nor does it conform to my view of education; for in that view the only true education is that which aims at a social ideal that can be achieved by the improvement of men. The improvement of men is irrelevant to the preservation of the class and the elite; for the class can be stupid and wicked, and the elite can be wicked.

So, it comes down to a question of whether you believe in man or not, and after you have answered this question, then will be time enough to decide whether you believe in God or not. For the God of a person who does not believe in man is always a God that teaches tyranny of one sort or another. It would be desirable for Dr. Hutchins to discuss this question at length, some time, even though it cost him the support of some of his more pious admirers. For there are others among his admirers who are wondering—and have been wondering for years—what he would say

COMMENTARY
PREREQUISITES OF PEACE

A PUBLIC declaration by Albert Einstein is of interest for two reasons. First, he is not only a great physicist, but a great man as well. Second, on those infrequent occasions when he speaks, he says exactly what he thinks. Usually, there is internal evidence of both wisdom and courage in what he says.

In his recent address on atomic energy and world peace, Dr. Einstein told his hearers, in so many words, that the present policy of seeking security through national armament—the policy of all the world powers, and of the United States and the U.S.S.R. in particular—is a "disastrous illusion" that promises, in the end, "general annihilation." Although we have vanquished "an external enemy," the hysterical armament race between the United States and Russia has meant, on both sides, that "the means to mass destruction are perfected with feverish haste—behind respective walls of secrecy." We seem "incapable of getting rid of the mentality created by the war."

The result:

> If successful, radioactive poisoning of the atmosphere and hence annihilation of any life on earth has been brought within the range of technical possibilities. The ghostlike character of this development lies in its apparently compulsory trend. Every step appears as the unavoidable consequence of the preceding one. In the end, there beckons more and more clearly general annihilation.

Dr. Einstein has two proposals and one qualification. First, in order to do away with mutual fear and distrust, "Solemn renunciation of violence (not only with respect to means of mass destruction) is undoubtedly necessary." This proposal is based on the fact that so long as every action of the nations is taken in the expectation of war, peace will be impossible to achieve.

The second proposal calls for a "restricted world government" to take the place of a violent solution of international differences. It would function through "a supernational judicial and executive body . . . empowered to decide questions of immediate concern to the security of the nations."

In these few words, Dr. Einstein describes what seem to him the minimum practical essentials of the peace of the world. His qualification, however, seems of greater importance than even the practical ways and means to peace. It is that—

> In the last analysis, every kind of peaceful cooperation among men is primarily based on mutual trust and only secondarily on institutions such as courts of justice and police. This holds for nations as well as for individuals.

His last word is a warning not to overestimate the value of police methods of control.

There may be clearer and more succinct statements of the dilemma of the modern world, but they have not come to our attention. Volumes have been written on the problem of world peace, but none of them, we think, has added anything of value to Dr. Einstein's analysis, which has simple common sense for its foundation.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

A SUBSCRIBER recently mailed us a page from a Toronto (Canada) newspaper containing the somewhat startling text of a "Youth Sunday" address, in which a seventeen-year-old girl makes animated appeal for the psychological emancipation of the younger generation. In so doing, she may help to prepare many among her readers for an appreciation of the characteristic contentions of those psychologists whose writing on adolescents has a more constructive orientation than an outlining of "the downfalls of youth." Of responsibility, she says:

> Most people will agree that adults are responsible people, but when and how did they get that way? I think it came gradually and with experience. A teen-ager is considered to be impetuous and senseless—but suddenly at 21 he is considered capable of helping decide his country's destiny by voting, and often to be married and supporting a family.
>
> It isn't fair and it isn't right. We are half adults. We make mistakes, but we are not afraid of them as are our more conservative parents. We think of new and different ways to do things and have the daring to try. Many youthful ambitions plus daring have given you the comforts you take for granted.
>
> Adults can and ought to help us. First, we want to be recognized as individuals and not stereotyped into gangs and newspaper headlines. Second, we want to be guided—but by reason, not by a lot of don'ts and no's as a little child. Third, we want to be given the chance to prove ourselves; the chance to show that in many things we are just as dependable and capable as adults. In the other things we want to be taught and given some experience.

Implicit in the above are many justifiable charges against the status-quo attitude on adolescent education. Of course, there are extenuating circumstances. The post-industrialization practice of isolating children from practical experience, until they either marry or become twenty-one years of age, is partially due to the fact that mechanization and specialization leave so little work to be done around the home. And as the children of the leisure-class families developed a reputation for complete freedom from any responsibility except going to school, it has seemed more and more the obligation of hardworking parents to provide their children with "leisure." The obvious result has been a precocious sophistication on the part of the young in regard to what is euphemistically termed "social life," and a corresponding immaturity in regard to social responsibility. But these errors are compounded only when parents and educators become angered with the young ones for not developing sufficiently "constructive" personalities.

The seventeen-year-old who spoke out so forthrightly is apparently willing to accept home responsibilities and the tests that a gradually increasing extension of them would force her to undergo:

> In many homes a lot of petty regulations are imposed because teen-agers are supposed to lack judgment and can't be fully trusted to be wise. A parent who is a friend rather than a dictator is needed desperately in many homes. This turning point where we are becoming adults is where we most need to be accepted as intelligent people. In spite of a bold front, we are uncertain, and want friendly help.
>
> I believe that we ought to be on an allowance which could cover all but the bare necessities. In this way we would learn to budget our money and to save for big things. We would take better care of our clothes to save cleaning bills, and think twice before buying something we momentarily think we need.

If younger children could be as articulate as this, it is probable that many of them would say the same things. The child who has an opportunity to prove himself in some constructive undertaking is a happy child. No matter how young, he is interested, as are all adults, in developing into something more than he presently is. Adolescence is actually too late for a sudden precipitation into household responsibilities. The recalcitrance and general inefficiency of many adolescents around the home are often due to the fact that no one ever took the time or thought to help them become an integral part in the life of the

home when they were younger. While adolescents may respond naturally to the needs of the home, regardless of their isolation from any sort of practical responsibility during their early years, we cannot expect this from the majority.

A recent article in *Look* provides an interesting corollary to the above. Under the title, "Freedom Frightens Me," Sergei Malakhov explains why one of his friends who risked everything to come to the United States for "freedom," later went back to Russia. He had been without responsibility for so long that he found it made "unaccustomed demands" on him. When education in *personal responsibility* is deferred, a sudden subsequent pressure of obligations is apt to produce similar reactions

Sergei Malakhov, despite his preference for America, makes one significant indictment: "America may not know it, but it is a nation of worriers and I am becoming one of them. Even when things are good for me today, I worry lest they be bad tomorrow. This is because I am responsible for what happens to me tomorrow." If this is true, it can only mean that in America we have deferred responsibility so long for adolescents that it does not finally set well upon their shoulders.

We know that there is a great difference between being biologically capable of bearing children and being *psychologically* capable of helping them; the work that we do with our youngest children, *now*, is their own real training for parenthood. Every time we are sufficiently patient to leave them jobs to do—which may be bungled, but what of that.?—every time we allow them free exercise of choice, and every time we hold our protective instincts back sufficiently to let them observe the results of their own choices, we are increasing their opportunity for becoming good parents in their turn. At present, the differences in home education are so great that some children are better able to be parents at twelve years of age than are many adults at forty.

In conclusion, it seems to us that an underestimation of the potential of every human "soul" is our greatest single failing, and that this stands behind our obliviousness to an incipient maturity of viewpoint possible, in degree, in even the youngest child.

FRONTIERS

Morals From Technology

As Socrates, to his sorrow—or, at least, to the sorrow of his friends—discovered a long time ago, a man can produce the best possible reasons for abandoning the ways of prejudice and blind custom, and get absolutely nowhere, so long as the prejudice remains prejudice and the custom remains blind. Yet Socrates persisted with his reasoning, in the conviction that reason is the last best hope of mankind.

In the first book of the *Republic*, arguing against the redoubtable Thrasymachus, Socrates draws on illustrations from the various technologies—the skills of the specialists—of his time, to disprove the contention that "justice is the interest of the stronger." "Medicine," he said, "does not consider the interest of medicine, but the interest of the body." And horsemanship—is it not concerned with the interests of the horse, instead of its own art? Thus also with all the arts—they none of them care for themselves, but only for the subject of their art.

Why, then, said Socrates, should the ruler differ from all these lesser artisans? The ruler must consider the good of the community, which results from the practice of justice. The ruler's own interest does not define justice any more than medicine is devoted to the income of the doctor.

But Thrasymachus is untouched by this little triumph of Socratic logic, and asks Socrates if he has a nurse. Your behavior, he says, is like a sniveling little boy who needs his nose wiped and is unable to notice that the rulers of men, by both day and night, "are studying their own advantage."

One does not expect to find Socrates writing for the *Scientific Monthly*, presenting the same old arguments, but if Elgin Williams, in "The Morality of the Machine" (February *Scientific Monthly)*, has in any way augmented the Socratic argument from technology, the addition is very slight indeed. How shall we learn to order our economic life? Addressing himself to this question, Prof. Williams endeavors to prove that the mechanisms of the industrial system will themselves instruct us in practical economic wisdom. He contends against the "price system" as the proper means for determining what and how much we should manufacture. The price system, in his view, is quite plainly the "interest of the stronger." According to conventional "free enterprise" economics, the price system is supposed to establish "consumer sovereignty," in this way:

> A great number of purchases recorded for any item causes its price to rise, and this is a signal for additional business men to drop whatever else they may be doing and produce the demanded goods. Their motive is profit, but the outcome is the production of just what the community wants. Thus self-interest is harnessed to the general welfare: resources are allocated in a process in which every individual participates, guiding by his purchases all the know-how of the community into production of just those things the community wants and chooses.

A pretty theory, Prof. Williams admits, the only trouble being that it doesn't really work. On the contrary—

> In recent years the community has learned that not only does the price system fail to give expression to the desires of the community, instead serving as the errand boy of the wealthy in proportion to their wealth, but that periodically the system breaks down altogether. The extreme inequality of income [the wealthiest 10 per cent of the nation receive among them as much income per year as two thirds of the rest of our families put together] which piles up massive incomes at the top of the heap leaves a virtual vacuum throughout wide portions of the community. Oversaving and underconsumption result; the rich fail to find investment outlets for their savings precisely because these huge savings at the top mean that the mass markets on which new investments depend are absent. The result is a progressive falling off of investment, production, and employment which spells depression. The industrial plant grinds to a stop.

We have failed, Prof. Williams tells us, to learn the lesson that the machines themselves can teach. He quotes Charles F. Kettering, "the

grand old man of the General Motors Corporation," as saying that when a motor is to be improved, "We set up the motor and let it talk." But the technical requirements of machinery are only a part of the industrial ethic:

> The dictates of the machine, the internal mechanical requirements of industrialism, go far beyond merely physical decisions in the making of automobiles, railroads, and dynamos. Already it is becoming clear that social arrangements are also involved. Interestingly enough, the focus here has been at the very point at which capitalist morality broke down so disastrously: the distribution of income. It is now a commonplace that "mass production is impossible without mass markets," that full production calls for full consumption, and so on, although we have not yet taken the steps to reduce income inequality which this perception requires.

Peace, tolerance and abundance are other necessities of a harmoniously functioning industrial society. The machines have no need of "'profits." Excessive profits actually stall the processes of industrialism, condemning both men and machines to rusting idleness during periods of depression. To ignore the ethical implications of industrialism will mean ultimate disaster:

> Men and societies can *try* to turn machines to inherently illogical (and immoral) purposes, but such acts are self-defeating. This is true not only for dictators, who discover that to use machines for war purposes is to raise up their own executioners. In just the same way capitalists will destroy capitalism, I think, if in the next few years they use machines to "maintain profits"; i.e., if they allow our technology to lie idle half the time. Finally, if politicians continue trying to disregard the morality of the machine and consequently use machines to preserve national sovereignty, they are going to blow up the world, they are going to blow up national sovereignty, and they are going to put an end to politicians, too.

The dictate of the machine, Prof. Williams assures us, will be very different from the dictate of an all-powerful central committee, and different from that of all-powerful industrial magnates. What he really means, of course, is that machines are for making things and that things are for human use, and that the employment of machines for any other purpose is a violation of the inherent logic of technology.

The modern Thrasymachus will be sure to challenge Prof. Williams by saying that production for profits is not only written in history, but in the stars, as well. Human action for disinterested ends, he will be told, is a tainted doctrine, asserted by visionaries and radicals who know nothing about human nature. And Prof. Williams, we fear, will be no more successful in converting his audience than was Socrates some 2350 years ago.

Men will recognize and accept the primary necessities of the machine because, denied them, the machine stops working at once. But if the subtler needs of a technological society are denied, the results accumulate a while before they clog up the machinery. And then it is easier to blame a Hitler or a Politburo for what happens than it is to admit that the self-interest which misuses the machine may be at fault.

Prof. Williams is aware that not only businessmen and politicians, but engineers and scientists, as well, are captives of the price morality. And he admits that both intellectual and moral revolutions will have to precede any general reform. But the engineer *as* engineer, and the scientist *as* scientist, care nothing about "price" or "profit." They use the tools and machines of technology for making things that factories and laboratories set out to make. This same principle can be applied to an entire society—to make it into the kind of a civilization that human beings want and need. It is simply that the principle must be extended.

That is all that Socrates was arguing for, in the *Republic*. He was asking men to abandon self-interest. No good technologist, he said, cares about "profits," and why, Thrasymachus, should you?