

## THE NEW CULTURE CONCEPT AND MARXIAN SOCIALISM

BY WILLIAM NATHANSON

MAN is a being in whom two tendencies have always struggled for supremacy; first a tendency to construct things which would make his life more comfortable, and secondly a tendency to discover the meaning and purpose of life.

Because of the first tendency he has been called homo faber, the man of mechanics; and because of the second tendency he has been called homo-sapience, the man of reason. Whenever the tendency of man to make life more comfortable by all manner of inventions becomes strong at the expense of the tendency to deepen life's content and to make it spiritually beautiful, "fabrication" or civilization gains the upper hand over "sapience" or culture, and man becomes empty and spiritually degraded.

In every era, in which only things human have been stressed, natural science and civilization won prominence, for both serve the practical side of life—that side which finds expression only in the concept of utility. That is the form of life to which science pays the closest attention and to which it is devoted with indescribable loyalty.

But when in a certain epoch the superhuman, the spiritual, begins to dominate, when there is an increase of people in whose hearts is found an echo of that "small, still voice" which allows itself to be heard in the soul-depths of the sages of that epoch, then soul-searching and culture predominates. Stress is then laid on the speculative side of life, which regards only values.

Values stand in direct contrast to uses. Objects and events which are useless for the practical side of life, with its superficialities and limitations, are nevertheless invaluable to the speculative side, which is profound and infinite.

Thus Oscar Wilde thanked God for having caused society to incarcerate him, not because of the utilities which prison afforded

him, but because of the great spiritual awakening that prison life brought to him. His hymn of praise to God and his acceptance of prison as a grant of favor came from the realization that all the pains and trials which beset him "in battalions" led to the revelation of new values in life. Life acquired for him an entirely new meaning.

And only that human activity can be truly termed culture which aims above all to become aware of the meaning and value of life, of the essence and purposiveness of the universe.

Civilization differs from culture in its emphasis upon things human instead of things superhuman, things mundane instead of things supermundane, practical rather than speculative. Civilization is concerned with the material aspect of the universe; culture seeks to identify itself with the innermost aspect of reality.

The second half of the nineteenth century is marked by the greater and more powerful role assumed by civilization as against culture. Between, approximately, 1850 and 1900 civilization dominated almost uninterruptedly the spirit and soul, the heart and mind of humanity. That was the period when man threw himself without reserve into the quest for well-being, thinking that therein he would find happiness. He looked upon all the discoveries and inventions of the lightning strides of science merely as the means for increasing the comforts of his earthly life, and of lending to his external existence more glow and luster.

Man abandoned the quest for spiritual values coming from the great world within to reap the full harvest of his victory over the external world. He was taken away from his real self by the many triumphs over inanimate nature. She who had been silent for millenniums began to speak and to reveal her many secrets. All the hitherto undreamed of achievements in the realms which are devoted mainly to the material world estranged man from the spiritual world, which stretches into the depths and knows of no length or breadth. That world, in which the entire interest was given only to the significant, the everlasting, and to all that made for profound and impressive experience, became subject to a world in which the chief role was taken by the immediate and transitory and in which pleasure and ease were the goal of every human activity. Man became blind to everything that gave life an inner beauty and glory, and to that which could have opened up for him an inexhaustible fountain of true bliss.

With all its magnificent attainments in its various spheres of human activity, the nineteenth century cannot boast of many achievements in the cultural sphere. Particularly in its latter half, the nineteenth century produced nothing which could refresh anew the human soul and which could, as if by magic, elevate the human spirit into the infinite heavens, and make man feel a certain relation between himself and the world above him. Yet this is just what Spinoza did in the seventeenth century and Kant, Fichte, and Hegel toward the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century.

Since then humanity sacrificed almost its entire energy for its material satisfaction. Its greatest purpose and highest aim became the conquest of the external world, with a view toward deriving from it all that could help to make human life more comfortable, more pleasant, and more contented. The foremost if not the sole aim of the leaders of humanity during the last epoch, was only to conquer and exploit nature in such a way as to multiply the utilities which man could draw from her. In this period, civilization progressed very rapidly, with all its tangible results and effective utilities. As in the growth of civilization and its increase of knowledge and learning, the human intellect always played the greatest part, so the nineteenth century placed great stress on the intellectual and logical side of human culture, expecting that in time, man with pure intellect and clear logic, would see everything and account for everything in a logical, mathematical manner.

## II

The main branches of culture are philosophy, religion, morality and art.

These four branches of human endeavor in the nineteenth century and especially the first two began almost to wilt away. Very characteristic of the nineteenth century are the following phrases in which the great pathologist Virchow raged at philosophy. "Philosophy," he says, "was my enemy, from which I have fortunately been saved; for it lured me to speculations full of dreams. But away from philosophy I have taught myself to peer faithfully through my microscope at facts as they are."

Such a view of philosophy was a dam in the way of the stream of culture. It tore man away from all eternal values, the moral value, which is the highest and most absolute in the world, included.

The query of man—how much will it avail his temporal life—became much more imposing than the question—how valuable is it for his being in eternity. In the eyes of man that view destroyed the last morsel of such independent value which gave sustenance to the life of him who saw in the independence of spirit the goal of everything in the universe.

He who does not believe in the independence of spirit cannot believe in his own independence. In all his behavior, in all his joys and sorrows, he must depend upon everything in the world but himself. And wheresoever the independent "I" or profound "self" is not at the root of an experience—that experience brings anything but spiritual joy, and can lead to many things, but not to a higher type of human being. With this denial of the independence of spirit, the last remnant of a logical basis for a desire on the part of man to become a higher and more cultured being, was destroyed. The effort to explain the highest through the lowest and to find a concrete, material expression for all that assumes the term "spirit," was followed by an attempt to translate in a utilitarian manner all the concepts of the higher, the better, and the more beautiful. Thus the query, "what is this thing's true worth?" had to be reduced to "how much can this thing yield in terms of weight and measure?"

Much more than all other values, moral values suffer from this reduction of quality to quantity. For of all the values, the moral is the most distinct from quantity and profoundest in quality; of all the values it is furthest from the arbitrary; more than other values it can exist with a minimum of externality; more than other values it can, in the flash of the eye, yield or snatch away an eternity of bliss, and, more than any of the other values can it be identified with what we understand by the term soul. And whenever the soul is in exile, all the world is enslaved, much as we may strive to free it. "What does it profit a man to free the whole world," asks Santayana, "if his soul is not free? Moral freedom is not an artificial condition, because the ideal is the mother-tongue of both the heart and the senses. All that is requisite is that we should pause in living to enjoy life, and should lift up our hearts to things that are pure goods in themselves, so that once to have found them, no matter what else may betide, may remain a happiness that nothing can sully."

The second half of the nineteenth century did not know of such a love for the pure good which lies hidden in every little furrow and crevice of things, inasmuch as they are an expression of and

through the spiritual reality. It was not aware of the bliss in which the joy and pain of spirit are indistinguishable, and which is a kind of alloy of joy and sorrow, generated from within and entirely free and independent of all that lies external to the self. Such love, such bliss were foreign to the *Zeitgeist*. It was an epoch which desired to commute all inner things for externals, and to reduce all that we designate by the word soul to something which could be weighed on the apothecary's scale. And the nearer that man was drawn toward the external, and the more thoroughly that the qualitative whole of the soul was quantitatively flitted away, the more completely did man begin to consider uses instead of values. Physical adaptability instead of ethical fitness became the ideal of his conduct.

"The whole of the human world," says Tagore, "throughout its length and breadth, has felt the gravitational pull of a giant planet of greed, with concentric rings of innumerable satellites, causing in our society a marked deviation from the moral orbit. In former times the intellectual and spiritual powers of this earth upheld their dignity of independence and were not giddily rocked on the tides of the money market."

Morality became neglected while materialism and civilization held sway. Independence was perforce lost, and every meaning and value of life vanished and with them every stimulus to spur life toward profundity and loftiness instead of length and breadth.

### III

Materialism then in all its length and breadth mastered human thought in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

The materialist conception sees in the high and complicated expression of the world an evolution from something lower and simpler. It cannot therefore place before man, whom it regards as the highest and most complex expression of everything in the world, goals and purposes, ideas and ideals which should reach far above man. Materialism desired, and for a short time it really believed that it was actually able to reduce the immaterial and formless, the spiritual and soulful to something, which is genuinely material and concrete, and which has body and form. It endeavored to transmute all that has quality into something that possesses mere quantity. Hence, in the body (excellent enough material for the laboratory) it saw the source and fountain head of the soul. Nothing served to lead materialism to sense the abyss that separates the pleasure

afforded by the satisfaction of bodily desires from the joy and bliss which are experiences of the soul.

For where the very highest is only a degree of development from the lower, where the heavenly is not considered in its essence and reality entirely other than the earthly, the highest endeavors and deepest desires of man cannot lift him so far and high into the upper worlds that he can entirely forget the plane below. From the viewpoint of materialism, the highest cannot differ from the lowest to such a degree that an abyss could be created between them, nor can the lowest, as from the idealist viewpoint, ever be considered as a spark from the highest. The speculations about God, man and the world, do not enjoy free swing, so as to enable the human eye to escape the practical and worldly, and have in mind only the super-human and divine.

It can therefore be readily understood why the role which civilization played in contrast to culture was greatest and most significant when the effect of materialism was most dominant and extensive. Wherever the diffusion of materialism is widest, there culture is devoured by the tide of civilization.

While materialism reigned supreme in all Europe, the sciences recorded one victory after another over the vast ignorance which persisted in regard to nature and its phenomena. Man became plainly intoxicated with those victories and began to dream that nature would soon lie open before him like a book and demand it be read. At that time Marxian socialism came forth upon the world.

Marxism wove the materialistic *Weltanschauung* pattern into sociology and economics to such an extent that materialism, under the mask of economic determinism, became the *sine qua non* of socialism as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels formulated and expounded it. Today Marxism is differently understood, is interpreted in many ways by the various thinkers and leaders of the socialist movement. But so long as they call themselves Marxists, they are agreed among each other that they are philosophical materialists and aligned against idealism. Their agreement is more obvious when they deal with historical materialism—the conception which desires to see in the means of production and in the socio-economical relations in general, the chief factor of human development. Historical materialism stubbornly insists on the possibility to reduce any by degrees, to resolve the highest to the lowest, the spiritual to the material, the animate to the inanimate, the valuable to the useful.

In his book, *Utopian and Scientific Socialism*, Engels writes: "The ultimate cause of all social changes and political revolutions must be sought not in the human brain, not in man's keen insight into external truth and justice, but in the varying phenomena of production and exchange; they are to be sought not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each epoch."

And in the Communist Manifesto, both Marx and Engels explicitly state that deep intuition is not needed to realize that man's thoughts, opinions, and conceptions, in a word, his consciousness, is changed by every variation of his material existence, of his social relationship, and social life.

#### IV

It is possible that just because the great thinkers who came after the Communist Manifesto was written, were gifted with great intuition, they did not take at all seriously the philosophical foundation of Marxism, and paid little attention to materialism in general.

For after all, materialism as a philosophical view of the world was never an outgrowth of philosophy. It was born on the lap of natural science, and for a long time served as an excellent motive force for all the searchings and investigations concerning problems which could sooner or later, in an experimental manner, be positively explained. So soon, however, as philosophy, which deals in the main with questions outside of the bounds of positivity, threw upon materialism its cognizatory rays and peered deep into reality, materialism thawed like ice under the rays of the sun.

How far-reaching the idealistic reaction of the human thought of today has been against science and materialism, Professor Alliota has demonstrated most conclusively in his book, *The Idealistic Reaction Against Science*. "Pure mechanics," says Professor Alliota, "are then the basis and general form of all physical science; but though, space, time, and motion are necessary, they are not sufficient to exhaust the whole content of external experience. In every natural phenomenon, there will always be found something mechanical; it will therefore be found essential in every branch of physical science to integrate with the help of other explanatory concepts, the universal principles of mechanics which merely present to us the universal form of physical reality, the warp with which he who would weave an intelligible world, cannot dispense. There should, however, be as few as possible of these integrating elements: and it

will always be permissible to attempt to resolve into these four concepts the new phenomena revealed to us by experience, transmuting them into an ideal form in which our intelligence may recognize itself. What, indeed, can be the aim of the age-long work of science, if it be not to bring to light the thought contained in the intimate nature of things?"

Historical materialism can come to no better end than philosophical materialism. For both are products of the same cognition. Both are developments of the self-same bent of thought, results of the self-same quality of human temperament. Therefore, in spite of the fact that Marxism in order to confirm its historical materialism made great effort to nullify all the idealistic philosophers from Plato to Hegel himself upside down, all great philosophers of recent years follow more closely in the footsteps of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel.

All these philosophers, like Bergson, Wundt, Eucken, James, Royce, Dewey, Mach, Avenarius, Hartmann, Schopenhauer, Muensterberg, Nietzsche, Spencer, and Bradley—who diverge into so many different directions, and from each direction into again as many different viewpoints concerning the relations existing between the world, man and God, all join in their negative attitude toward materialism, in their sharp criticism of materialism as it was formulated by many natural scientists, and as it was, in its historico-materialistic sense, applied in the supposedly strictly scientific foundation of socialism.

Josiah Royce has passed the verdict of present-day philosophy in his *The World and the Individual*. "For us," he says, "Nature is an expression of mental life, and all mental life has an internal meaning, and therefore conscious unity of purpose in every pulse of its existence.

"And for the same reason, we reject a form of doctrine that regards nature as in any sense a realm of the genuinely unconscious, or that supposes the absolute to come to self-consciousness first in man, or that conceives the process of evolution as one wherein the life of the natural, as a whole, grows from the darkness of obscurity and unconscious purpose to the daylight of self-possessed reason. Our general theory of Being simply forbids every such interpretation of Nature. All life, everywhere, insofar as it is life, has conscious meaning, and accomplishes a rational end. This is the necessary consequence of Idealism. Where we see inorganic nature seemingly dead, there is, in fact, conscious life just as surely as there is

any Being present in Nature at all. And I insist, meanwhile, that no empirical warrant can be found for affirming the existence of dead material substance anywhere. What we find in inorganic Nature, are processes whose time-rate is faster or slower than those which our consciousness is adapted to read or to appreciate. And we have no empirical evidence of the existence of any, relatively whole, conscious process, which is less intelligent or less rational than our own human processes are."

This revolution in the philosophical thought of the twentieth century should, if there were an appreciable number of serious thinking people among the radical, and especially among the socialist, folks cause them to bethink themselves of the possibility of a Weltanschauung opposed to the materialistic conception, which gives human life a deeper meaning and a greater content. For the newest philosophy was immersed in, and drenched with, all those scientific speculations of the nineteenth century, which drove inevitably to the confirmation of the materialistic Weltanschauung. It had become acquainted in the most intimate manner with all the efforts of triumphant science to drive out the concept of spirit as a first cause and the ultimate aim of all worldly happenings. Out of regard for the gigantic achievements of science, philosophy was for several decades silent. But it did begin to speak anew, and whenever materialism was concerned, to speak over and over again in the very words used by the profoundest thinkers of the distant past.

The very fact that during a stretch of twenty-five centuries, the profoundest thinkers of the world stubbornly held to the idea that the essence of the world cannot be something which has neither will nor reason, neither plan nor compass, ought to have brought to an end, the levity with which the radical, and particularly the socialist ranks treated such conjectures as that an atom is the outcome of an idea and not that an idea is the result of the existence of atoms.

Moreover, now science itself, through its most brilliant representatives, begins to realize that something lacking will and understanding can in no way be considered the cause of something which has will and understanding.

The verdict of science is epitomized in the words of J. Arthur Thomson: "Living transcends all mechanical description."

In regards to life and spirit, there begins to reign a unanimous opinion not only in philosophy but also in science, and that opinion is that life cannot be explained in terms of anything other than life. Says Viscount Haldane: "It is only in terms of life itself that life

can be expressed, and these terms lie outside the words which the physicist has to employ. Of course, physical and chemical conceptions have great value in the observation of the organism. They are needed in order to interpret certain aspects of the taking in and giving out of its energy, aspects which it presents in common with the other objects of external nature. But such aspects are inadequate to the full reality. They are not more than abstractions under which that reality can be properly regarded only if it is remembered that in them no complete or even sufficient account of life is ever given. And end operates quite differently from a cause. Its activity is a present activity—behavior and not causation. Our knowledge about it is determined by a different set of conceptions.”

This means that all causes which have brought life to the world, all factors that motivate life, lie hidden within life itself, and by no means in something foreign to life. Life is a self-reproducing process. J. Arthur Thomson, again well says “for certain purposes it is not amiss to think of the organism as an engine, but it is a self-stoking, self-repairing, self-preservative, self-adjusting, self-increasing, self-reproducing machine.”

It is the same with spirit.

Spirit likewise cannot be explained by any incident outside of itself. The only definition that can be given for spirit is that spirit is spirit. Spirit is that force which is able to produce itself and all else and which cannot be brought forth from any other substance; and outside of spirit there is nothing, for whatsoever in the world we should choose to name cannot be placed outside of the spirit, since the naming and the calling themselves are spiritual processes—expressions of human thought. And just as it is impossible to imagine seas and rivers without water—for it is the water which forms the river and sea-beds in the soil, so it is impossible to imagine anything without spirit; for an object is primarily a consciousness, a concept, and it is the spirit which carves out in us and around us the concept and the consciousness of the object.

With just this in mind, Bradley writes the last paragraph of his great book *Appearance and Reality*. “And Reality is one experience, self-pervading and superior to mere relations. Its character is opposite of that fabled extreme which is barely mechanical, and it is, in the end, the sole perfect realization. We may fairly close this work then by insisting that Reality is spiritual. There is a great saving of Hegel’s, a saving too well known, and one which without some explanation I should not like to endorse. But I will end with some-

thing not very different, something perhaps more certainly the message of Hegel. Outside of spirit, there is not and cannot be, any reality, and the more that anything is spiritual, so much the more is it veritably real."

In the same vein Professor Alliota, also speaks, when he says: "The reality of nature presupposes the reality of consciousness as its essential epistemological basis. Thus we do but move in a vicious circle when we try to derive thought from the world of mechanics or energetics, since there is nothing left of that world when the concepts, principles, and ideas used by conscious activity in its construction have been eliminated.

Thus write the profoundest philosophers and scientists of our time in the spirit of Philosopher Berkeley's declaration of long ago—that matter is of little use for natural philosophy.

What does this mean but that quantity can be qualitatively evaluated but never vice versa.

The tendency of the twentieth century is toward the full reaffirmation of the hypothesis that quality cannot be reduced to quantity. This tendency has led the thinkers of our day to invest time itself with quality and differentiation.

Time has ceased to be a homogeneous mental emanation, a pure abstraction in which events occur. Instead, it is gradually being seen as in a metaphysical womb whence all events are urged forth. Time itself becomes concrete. Accordingly its three expressions—the past, the present, and the future—are each bound to have a certain individuality. And thus a previous expression cannot completely mould an expression following and by no means explain or predict it.

Such a concept of time and its resultant demand for the differentiation between time and space as thought entities were already intimated by Hegel. He accepted that "mentality" in which Kant frames his concepts of time and space, but he insisted on qualitative differentiation which time and not space possess.

Until Bergson came forth with creative evolution and Einstein with the theory of relativity, our century did not pause to think of Hegel's highly significant remark about the specific properties and about the uniqueness of time.

In their treatment of time, both Hegel and Bergson come to somewhat similar conclusions.

In this close approach is indicated, or reflected, the nearness between the thought trends of the beginning of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. In both periods, much impor-

tance was attached to quality. But between these two periods, the latter half of the nineteenth century injected its emphasis of quantity instead of quality, and also intellectual abstraction instead of sentient concreteness. Marxism fell into this pitfall which as we have seen, present-day thinking carefully avoids. Philosophy and science are gradually coming together on this point.

And since there are no higher courts of issue than science and philosophy which together are the expression of culture, the "radical sociology" with its zest for considering itself a science will therefore be unable to both forsake its cultural heritage and at the same time to stubbornly tread its materialistic measures, when all the present march of thought is permeated with idealism or spiritualism. And the more thoroughly idealism will pervade the human mind, the more completely will culture dominate human activity, control human life and direct the growth and influence of civilization.