

Anybody walking down a street of any American town will be subject to the impact of numerous impressions different from those of any European town. It is maintained that they are different in kind as well as in intensity and that they are the expression of a social life which is correspondingly different. What is this difference and how did it come about? There are of course as many avenues of approach to this question as there are aspects of social life. I shall attempt an approach based on the assumption that social life is the overt expression of a common philosophy, held conscientiously or unconscientiously by the vast majorities of the members of the society. If this be granted, as I hold it need must be, I shall attempt briefly to discover what are the most characteristic traits of the American philosophy which differentiate it from the European counterpart.

For the sake of simplicity I shall compare two sections of the two societies in question, but I maintain that what is going to be said is equally valid, if at all, for any other two sections, if due allowance is made for local differences. The two sections I propose to consider are North American society as compared to British.

North American society separated from British in the second part of the 18th century politically. The sociological separation, a much more complicated and slower process, started much earlier and has never come to an ideal point of mathematical separation. During the nineteenth century British Society continued its influence, though in an ever decreasing degree and the twentieth century witnessed a reversal of this tendency. Nonetheless we may safely say that by the end of the eighteenth century North America showed all characteristics of an individual society in spite of continued British influence and that Britain maintains its individual traits today in spite of increasing American influence.

It will consequently be seen that both societies share in the development up to the end of the eighteenth century. The point reached could be summed up briefly as follows: The foundations of a very old system of thought based upon Christian tradition and the Greeks, especially Plato and Aristotle have just been shaken. The attack had been a concentrated one and had come from many directions. In philosophy Hume had overrun the concept of Aristotelian logical necessities and Kant had overthrown Platonic metaphysical speculations by proving the impossibility of synthetic judgments a priori. In mathematics Newton's and Leibnitz's calculus has changed the face of Pythagorean arithmetics, whilst analysis has made Euclid's geometry obsolete. In science the new combination of rigorous observation careful hypothetical induction and rational deduction has created a new picture of the world, which appeared reduceable to general laws which could be stated in the new language provided by mathematics. In technology the invention of the steam engine and the automatic loom began to make the individual skill of the worker obsolete and created the concept of the value of work in contrast to the intrinsic value of the goods as a basis of economic speculation. In applied economics this proved to be a coup de grace to feudal society. In consequence the concept of society as a permanent pyramid with a summit sanctioned by God or nature crumbled and, as this concept was, for the time being, replaced by nothing, a period of unrest, revolution and upheaval was introduced. In religion reformation had failed to completely rationalize Christianity and widespread atheistic movements established a supremacy of Reason as opposed to an ethical Godhead. In music a height of structural completeness and an impeccable formalism filled with the spirit of reason has been reached not

to be surpassed again. In painting and the other arts the same spirit had failed to adapt itself to its subject matter and therefore art had arrived at a point of barren formalism from which there was no departure except complete abandon. In letters, the same spirit of formal perfection impressed upon all form of literature and, like in music, reached perfection unattained in the past and future.

To sum up: An age-long society had been attacked and to a great extent destroyed from within. In some respects heights of perfection have been reached, from which there was no continuation except abandonment, in other respects those institutions destroyed had been replaced by no others. It was one of the points in the history of white man when he had to start anew.

The 18th century had witnessed the culmination and final failure of occidental society to master nature, by religion first and by reason later. There were now, at this crucial point, when western society split into two, various roads open. It is submitted that Europe took the road of capitulation to nature, with a masochistic delight in doing so. The movements which led to this capitulation the accomplishment of which is just being witnessed are called in philosophy idealism and materialism, in arts romanticism, impressionism and expressionism, in politics nationalism and socialism, in economics laissez faire and socialism. On the other hand, American society was unable to follow the European lead to disaster by the brute fact that nature in America was too inimical to be capitulated to. If this had been done, white man in America would have simply been destroyed.

I.

In consequence the new American society had to contemporize with nature in the first half of the 19th century and to find a way out of a seemingly unsolvable dilemma, either to fight nature with weapons which have proved, in the past, to be ineffective, namely reason and form, or to surrender to nature and be destroyed. This muddling through the first half of the 19th century, this interregnum where no one basic philosophical system supported American society and where any institution was accepted as long as it was instrumental to survival, bore in itself the seeds to the relativist, pragmatical mathematical philosophy which developed in the second half of the 19th century and was to characterize American as distinct from European thought ever since.

In this fight with nature, in this period of growth, the American man learned two facts European man had forgotten in his long history away from the forest:

1. Civilization is the enemy of nature
2. Nature must consequently be conquered if civilization is to survive. Every weapon against nature is therefore part of civilization. Value is therefore dependent on the function of any weapon against nature at a given situation. The better the function the higher the value.

It will be seen that two concepts were thus introduced into white thought not so considered in the past, namely function and measurement. They were profoundly to influence the philosophical tradition which America had inherited from 18th century Europe, when American philosophy began to crystallize in the second half of the 19th century. They proved to be the way out of the dilemma as outlined above.

a. Translated into the domain of logic, they meant the abandonment of the concept of truth as an aim in itself and led to the concept of truth function of a given proposition in a given situation. The whole problem of meaning was reformulated and led to the concept of "meaning = possibility of verification". In noetics these two concepts led to an instrumental understanding of the concept "knowledge". In ethics they led to something which I might call "objective relativism of value". They prevented any systematic metaphysics from arising. In general they were inimical to any closed philosophical system and could not be conducive to anything like a German or Russian Weltanschauung. They led to a philosophy of life which could not and did not want to answer the questions which start with the word why and limited itself to try an answer questions beginning with the how.

This is why, if we compare American to European philosophy, we feel that American philosophers do not even start to ask the questions which the Europeans consider their daily bread and butter. American philosophy leaves us therefore dissatisfied, it is in a sense shallow. On the other hand, not being schematized and doctrinary, it can survive even if parts of it are proved to be wrong. It does not, itself, make any other claim to truth than the one that it is workable. On the other hand, the beautifully complete closed European systems, Weltanschauungen etc. are wrong the moment any part of them is proven wrong and this, of course diminishes one's faith into their truthfulness or even sensibleness. This is true of all the systems of 19th and 20th century Europe, including Hegel and all moderns, be it logisists, Thomists, Neoplatonists, Kantists, Marxists etc. This is the reason why, if we read a philosopher we think him shallow, and if we read a European philosopher of the last 150 years, we think him hollow or nonsensical. At this point might be said that this is the reason why the common prejudice of Europe against America is that it is stupidly practical without any higher aspirations, and the common prejudice of America against Europe is that it is idiotically fanatical, killing and destroying for the sake of empty words.

I shall now attempt to show, how this American philosophy, if it is as I say, produced American society as we know it to-day. If we keep in mind the two basical concepts of American philosophy as mentioned above, namely function and measurement, much of the overt expressions of American life as against European will be brought to a common denominator.

b. In religion this will lead to an interpretation of the good life which will have very little other-worldliness. Good deeds will be held in higher value than prayer. Doctrinarism will melt, the differences of the churches will be blunted and, in consequence, a multitude of churches will exist side by side, competing in practical achievements, but very little in dogma except that they will conserve prejudices already in existence.

c. In arts such a philosophy will result in an essay to express the antinaturalness and rationality of mind. Invention of the themes of art will therefore tend to be independent of nature and the form will try to be ornamental rather than informative. The artist will be, ~~xxxxxxx~~ in short, inclined to see beauty in mathematics rather than in biology. Such is the philosophical basis of non-objective painting, of the rigid lines of American architecture, of the crisp and formalist American poetry, and of the stylized American ornamentation on articles of daily use, from ties to electric shavers. Because it is within the spirit of America that beauty should be an everyday affair and penetrate the daily life of everyone with an intensity unknown in the history of white man, except in Gothics. American art is but beginning, but the strong spirit of it can be felt in every tin of butter, in every bag of flour, in every box of pills.

d. In science this concept of life will lead to a massing of empirically established facts and to the measuring of these facts, and to the attempt to bring into relation classes of seemingly unrelated facts. Such scientific bias will tend to produce inventions of useful hypotheses rather than general theories. In applied science and technology it will mean an enormous mass of practical inventions which will fill the life of the American with an unusual number of practical gadgets, ranging from a can-opener to a television set.

e. But this is the only one source of the mechanization of American life. The other is the economic picture of the world which American philosophy creates. Human work is considered the only real value of goods and the whole economic organization is thought to exist to economize work at the expense of labor saving devices. This is a profoundly different outlook from Europe. In America economic processes are always regarded primarily from the point of view of man qua producer, χ in Europe of man qua consumer. This is one of the reasons why labor is so expensive in America as compared to Europe and why characteristically trade unionism is in America not a question of politics but industrial convenience.

f. In politics doctrinarism must be absent. The political structure is not conceived like in Europe to be a question of relation between a majority and a

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minority divided for ideological reasons, but it is conceived to be a very precarious ^{balance} of power of hundreds of small pressure groups, united at times for strategic purposes in two blocks which should be as equal in strength as possible. The ideal state, then, is not conceived to be such a one where everybody is content, since there is not conceived ~~xxxxxxx~~ a possibility for such a state, but a state where no one group is strong enough to impress its will upon any other group. Political warfare therefore is not conceived to be a war of life and death on one or two fronts, but a guerilla with hundreds of individual fights. The supreme aim of politics is therefore much less lofty than the various European counterparts. It is to find a common interest upon which most of the members of the society agree at a given time. This is why democracy means something quite different in America than it does in Europe. In Europe it means roughly the rule of the majority, if and when the rights of the minority are respected, but in America where there is no majority it means the rule of statistics. This is also why technically the highest expression of democracy in Europe is a strong parliamentary minority, whilst in America it is the attention which ~~xx~~ the administration gives to periodical statistics of opinion.

II.

If we now compare what has been said about North America with what is happening in Britain, we can see how far these two societies have parted. The treason against humanity which was committed in Europe during the 19th century, and for which Europe paid so dearly in the 20th was spared America. Europe is now trying to retrace her way to the point where the decline began, namely the French Revolution, but all her institutions bear the stamp of the last 150 years. That decline started when 18th century rationalism was abandoned, and Europe divided into two bitterly opposing camps.

a. This division which started in philosophy and eventually divided all social institutions and led to ideological slaughter, can roughly be described as the treason of spirit by nature through 1/ living matter /biology/ on the one hand, and 2/through dead matter /physics/ on the other hand. Thus in reality the two factions of European social thought were united in their antihumanitarian attitude. This is why everything modern European has such a anti-ancient regime character and why, in comparison, so much of America reminds the attentive observer of the 18th century, in a curious way.

The tremendous advantage of science in general and of the physical sciences in particular during the 19th century, and the barren unproductiveness of rationalistic speculations at the end of the 18th century led Europe to revise all concepts of life from the two opposing scientific approaches mentioned above. The biological attitude was dominated by the concept of selection and fitness, the physical by the concept of equilibrium of force and matter.

The biological attitude led in ultimate analysis to a complete denial of logic as a source of truthfinding, whereas the physical attitude, in logical analysis for instance, made logic the only field of human study, closed in every respect, like the physical space, in a sense identical to it. Metaphysics for the biologists was the field where to construct beautiful edifices to the glory of the highest selection. Metaphysics to the physicists was nothing but empty speculation. However one metaphysical opinion was common to both, namely that the world is apparently divided between a knower and a known. It is this dualism of the world which is characteristic of the Western thought, including America and which differentiates it from Indian, for example.

In noetics the biologists inclined to a profound distrust of our senses and glorified our mystical feelings, drives and instincts instead. The physicists on the other hand ridiculed these unwarranted concepts and laid stress on our senses. Both of course, for this is the typical sign of Europe, minimized our rational faculties. It will be seen that such philosophical bias will be unproductive to compromise. It is the kind of philosophy which makes doctrinaires out of people.

It is clear that as time went on such a philosophy had to create an intellectual bad conscience and that the antihumanitarian trait common to all European philosophy as outlined above, could not definitely be concealed. This was best seen in ethics where both opposing philosophies met on common ground. Both arrived at absolutistic ethics of a very concrete and primitive kind which is best described as brutal. The biological summum bonum may be shortly stated as "the strongest is the best" and the physical summum bonum as "the most numerous is best". If we compare this philosophy to the one as outlined for America we can see that there are very few points of contact. There will be seen similarity with the biological point of view in the concept of "function" and with the physical in the concept of "measurement", but this similarity is superficial. The spirit is completely different. We can now venture

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to summarize the difference between American and European philosophy as follows: The American is relativistic, pragmatist and rational, where the Europeans absolutistic, dogmatical and emotional.

b. This means for Europe in religion a sharpening of religion differences, a strong revival of old religious doctrines, creation of new doctrinary religions, like fascism and communism, and bloody warfare between them. It means strong revival of the messianic feeling, with the promise that the millenium is at hand. But that millenium will necessarily be of a very worldly nature, due to the bestial ethics of modern Europe. These battles will be especially cruel, because of the strange mixture of existentialist irresponsibility and optimistic metaphysical prepotence, which is common to both the biological and physical approach.

Such a religion will contrast with what we have seen in America in that it will be much more living and real and that to a European, American religion will look like religion at all.

c. In arts the mark of the biological approach will be expressionist and surrealist and of the physical will be impressionist and cubist etc. Both will have one in common, they will be the expression of a fundamental feeling of guilt the artist has towards his art. For it is in the character of art, that it is anti-natural and intended to master nature. It is therefore why in comparison with American art it will appear artificial and sick to the point of corruption, while American art if compared to the European will seem superfluous and ornamental.

d. In science such a philosophy will create daring theories and will prove to be a happy basis for scientific progress. This is why the 19th and 20th century saw such unparalleled progress in abstract science in Europe. This is also why it seems to the European that America only borrows science from Europe in order to apply it, and why it seems to the American that Europe is content with stating sweeping theories and leaving it to the others to corroborate them or not. This is also why the scientific books of Europe are so full of general statements and why Europe has produced so much bad and prejudiced science and pseudoscience, and why American books on science are so full of exact observation, measurement and statistics without conclusion.

e. In economics European philosophy will lead to an all or nothing reaction. The biological approach will be toward an absolute laissez faire, while the physical will be inclined to an absolute directing of the market. The mystical and religious bent of all European thought will endow economical speculations with a messianic coloring, which is completely uncomprehensible to America. Work, which for the American is something to be avoided, if possible, and sold as dearly as possible, if unavoidable, will be something of a holy duty to Europeans of the physical species, and something of a heroic deed to Europeans of the biological species. In view of European ethic, economics, in Europe, will be expected to yield happiness rather than comfort, like in America. This is why the European will be inclined to dare economic experiments which entail immediate privation with a promise of late tremendous reward. This is what the austerity program means to Britain. Economics being what they are in America, such an attitude is quite uncomprehensible to an American who expects immediate dollars and cents for every effort. This is the reason why the American seems to the European so selfish and dollar-minded, and the European to the American such a damn fool for taking pride in being poor when only he himself is to be blamed for it. This is also why an immediate profit expectancy in America makes her subject to such tremendous individual and collective ups and downs, and this is also why there is no parallel of economic and social position in America as it is in Europe. Because he who is a millionaire today may be bankrupt tomorrow, and he who sells apples on Fifth Avenue today may be the profiteer of the prosperity of tomorrow. Incidentally, this is also the reason why, human work, being as expensive it is, human life is considered of greater value than in Europe, from a purely economic point of view. This is why in wartime America is ready to risk so much material in order to save a few life.

f. In politics, division of Europe into two led to two disastrous political concepts, namely liberty, on the biological end, and equality, on the physical end. If both these concepts are taken uncompromisingly, and how else can they be taken in such an absolutistic spirit like the European, they are contradictory. Because liberty, if so understood, means the society of the jungle, and equality the society of the graveyard. Both these concepts are unknown in America in this sense. They are considered in the typically American pragmatical spirit and limiting series converging upon each other in the infinite, or, to put it differently: Liberty of every member of the society to do what ever he likes except he infringes upon the liberty of another member, means exactly the same as every member having

having equal rights. That means, in ultimate analysis, liberty is the same thing like equality. This is why an American cannot conceive these two principles apart from each other. To a European, however, these two concepts are not really pragmatical working principles, but utopistic ideas to be aimed at. Liberty, to a European, means an abstract society where everybody is eternally and unchangingly free to do whatever he likes. Equality is a society where everybody is eternally and unchangingly equal to everybody else. If put to such an extreme, I think the purely mystical character of both concepts is clear to everybody. This is the reason why Europeans are always about to construct a happy society but never have one, while the Americans do not care about happy societies, they just want to make the best of the society they have got. This is also the reason why to a European American society appears so muddled, unorganic and unsequa and to the American the European society appears so petty and Europeans so untaleted politically.

III.

If I may now venture to sum up what has been said up to now, I would put it this way: European and American society have two thousand years of history in common and there are basic concepts in their philosophy which differentiate them from other societies, like the Indian, Chinese etc. The central theme of both of them, which has been inherited from Jews and Greeks, is that man is the measure of all things. They differ in what they mean by man. To the European, man is either an animal or a machine for the sake of production and consumption. For the American he is an instrument for the conquest of nature through his rational capacities, which can be used practically only by the method of hit or miss. /By the way, this last limitation of the rational capacity is the most important difference between 20th century America and 18th century Europe/. To an independent observer all three of the aspects of man mentioned seem incomplete, like everything human. Man is indeed an animal, a machine and an instrument, but he is more than that. I cannot hope to arrive at any other philosophy of life than the two I have compared above, because I am a product of the ways of life based upon them. But the comparison may be conducive to an independent and unprejudiced critical appreciation of facts which is so easy for one who belongs to two societies and consequently to none.