

ETHICS AND TECHNICS

BY RICHARD NIKOLAUS COUDENHOVE-KALERGI

[We print below a continuation of the discussion of the relation of technical progress to social and political progress, of which an earlier installment was published in the Living Age of December 2.]

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THE critical question facing European civilization is: How can we maintain in comfort a dense population, crowded in the narrow limits of our cold and sterile Northern continent, and assure it liberty and leisure to enjoy the higher blessings of life?

The answer is: through the progress of ethics and of technics.

Ethics can be mastered by the European through education. The printing press and the church can change him from a wild animal to a tame animal, and thereby prepare him for emancipation from arbitrary social and political restraints. Technical progress, by multiplying production and substituting machine labor for muscle labor, can provide the European with leisure and resources for cultivating and developing his higher cultural interests.

Ethics solves the social question from within; technics solves it from without.

In Europe there are two classes of men who possess the prerequisites of happiness: the wealthy, who can do and can have what they wish; and the saintly, who have no desire to do or to have what fate does not give them. The rich win objective freedom through their power to make their fellow men and the forces of nature the servants of their desires. The saintly win freedom through subjective emancipation and indifference to the things of this world.

The rich are unhampered in their relations with the physical universe. The saintly range freely through the world of the spirit.

All other Europeans are slaves to nature and to society — forced laborers and prisoners.

The ethical ideal is to make Europe a community of saints; the technical ideal is to make Europe a community of the rich.

Ethics strives to conquer our desire so that man will no longer feel poor; technics strives to abolish want in order that men may no longer be poor.

Political remedies can never make men either contented or rich. For that reason, political efforts to solve the social question are predestined to fail. We can better social conditions only through ethics and technics.

At the present stage of ethics and technics, the utmost that political measures can attain is to universalize servitude, poverty, and forced labor. Such measures can merely equalize these ills; they can not remove them. Socialism can turn Europe into a workhouse peopled by forced laborers living in perfect equality, but not into a paradise. The citizens of an ideal Socialist community would have less liberty and would suffer more restraint than the members of a convict settlement. The history of civilization would but record a tragic deception of all mankind.

So long as ethical motives are too weak to protect men from their fellow men, and technical progress is too backward to shift their burden of daily toil to the forces of nature, men seek to avert the evils of overpopulation by political remedies, and to overcome the handicaps of climate by human toil.

Organized society protects men from the injustice of their fellow men, and protects their labor from the caprices of nature.

Organized government gives a man who renounces his liberty protection for his person and property against the brutality and greed of his fellow men. Organized industry assures a man in our northern country, providing he renounces free control of his time and acts, protection from starvation and exposure.

These two institutions destine the Europeans, whom nature would otherwise destroy on account of their excessive numbers, to a life of compulsory toil. In order to survive, the European must surrender his liberty. As a citizen, he is confined in a narrow cell of rights and duties; as a forced laborer, he is harnessed under the heavy yoke of personal output. If he revolts against the government, he is threatened with the gallows; if he revolts against labor, he is threatened with starvation.

Government and industry both claim ideal values. They demand of their victims reverence and love. However, they are not ideals; they are irksome social and climatic necessities.

Ever since there has been government in the world, men have dreamed and longed for anarchy; for an ideal state where there would be no laws or masters. Ever since there has been labor in the world, men have dreamed and longed for leisure, as an ideal condition where the divine curse of earning their bread by the sweat of their brow would be lifted from them.

Anarchy and leisure are ideals; government and toil are not.

Anarchy is impossible in a thickly populated country that has not attained the highest ethical level. If attempted, it would destroy the last remnant of freedom and possibility of existence that the State preserves for its citizens. In the engulfing whirlpool of conflicting selfish interests, every man would seek to tyrannize over his fellow man. Anarchy, instead of leading to freedom, would lead to hopeless slavery.

Were all to assert their right to leisure in our northern climate, a majority of our race would fall victims to cold and starvation within a few months. Poverty and misery would reach a climax.

A sort of hermit anarchy exists in the deserts and in the ice-bound regions of the North, among the Bedouins and the Eskimos. Leisure exists in thinly populated and fertile tropical islands. State compulsion and forced labor—these two protectors and slave-drivers of civilized men—cannot be abolished by a political revolution; but only through ethics and technics.

Until our ethical progress enables us to dispense with the police powers of the State, anarchy means universal murder and pillage. Until technical progress has made unnecessary compulsory labor, leisure can be purchased only by universal hunger and exposure.

Only through ethical progress can the people of overpopulated countries redeem themselves from the tyranny of social sanctions; only through technical progress can those who dwell in the colder regions redeem themselves from the tyranny of the natural forces.

The mission of the State is to render itself superfluous by promoting ethical progress, so that men may ultimately

be able to live without social sanctions — that is, in anarchy; the mission of labor is to make itself superfluous by promoting technical industry until, eventually, physical toil becomes unnecessary and leisure becomes general.

The voluntary association of men in communities is no curse; but the compulsion of government is a curse. Voluntary labor is no curse; but enforced labor is a curse. The ideal of humanity is not license but liberty, not idleness but leisure.

Enforced government and enforced toil are evils and must eventually be overcome; but they cannot be supplanted by anarchy and leisure until ethics and technics have matured; and to attain that maturity, men must constantly improve their compulsory government so that it may better promote ethical progress, and they must constantly better the conditions of enforced labor, in order to promote technical progress.

The spiral of cultural evolution, from the paradise of the past to the paradise of the future, follows this double curve: primitive anarchy, overpopulation, compulsory government, ethical perfection, civilized anarchy on the one hand; and on the other, the leisure of primitive man, migration to the North, forced labor, technical progress, civilized leisure.

To-day we are in the middle reaches of this spiral, far removed from either

paradise; therefore, we are unhappy. The average modern European is no longer a nature-man — but he is not yet a culture-man; he is no longer a mere brute; but he is not yet a perfect human being; he is no longer part of nature, but he is not yet the lord of nature.

Ethics and technics are sisters. Ethics rules the natural forces within us. Technics rules the natural forces without us. Both seek to subjugate nature by spirit.

Ethics seeks to liberate man by heroic negation, by resignation; technics seeks to liberate man by heroic affirmation, by action.

Neither ethics nor technics alone can redeem the man of the North; for half-starved, half-frozen men can be neither fed nor warmed by ethics; nor can evil and avaricious men be protected from each other or made contented by technics.

What real profit do men derive from right conduct if they nevertheless starve and freeze? What profit do men derive from technical progress if they abuse it to slaughter and mutilate each other? Asia suffers more from overpopulation than from cold; therefore she has been able to dispense to some extent with technical progress and to devote herself more than has Europe to ethical development. It is in our continent that ethics and technics most completely supplement each other.

VICTOR HUGO AND ITALIAN LIBERTY

BY GUSTAVE SIMON

[Victor Hugo was an ardent champion of Italian liberty, and numbered among his correspondents Garibaldi, Mazzini, and Angelo Brofferio, the Piedmont poet, politician, and Garibaldist who offered the hospitality of Turin to Hugo when the latter was an exile.]

From *La Revue Mondiale*, December 1
(PARIS CURRENT-AFFAIRS SEMIMONTHLY)

IN 1856 Victor Hugo received this appeal from Mazzini: —

‘It is a long time now since we have heard your voice. A page in which you were to say that Italy is just at present agitated but astray, and lured hither and thither by intriguers; that the star of her destiny shines in herself, in her heart, in her people, in her traditions, in her memories of 1848 and 1849, and not in some foreign firmament of alien courts and conferences, would do us great service. Were such a contribution inserted in *L’Homme*, and in *La Nation* of Brussels, I would personally translate it for the Italian press. It is at Paris and at Rome that the question of Europe’s safety is posed to-day: one man less and one nation more.’

Victor Hugo replied in a letter to Italy from which we quote this extract: —

‘Brothers: When one belongs to the ancient race of Italy; when the blood of glorious centuries of human history — the very blood of civilization — flows through one’s veins; when one’s strain runs pure, unmixed, and undegenerate; when one has made the opportunity he sought, and scaled all the heights of aspirations known to the past; when one has made the immemorable effort recorded in the Constitutional Assembly and the Triumvirate; when only yesterday — for 1849 is yesterday — one has demonstrated that he is worthy

of Rome; when, in a word, one is what the Italian is to-day, and is conscious that his destiny is in his own hands; then he may well say to himself that he must be his own deliverer, the carver of his own fate. He may well despise the advances and the offers of princes, and refuse the favors of those from whom he must vindicate his liberty.’

Victor Hugo had a high opinion of Mazzini. I have found this note in his unpublished papers: ‘Mazzini not only knows men, but he forms them. He has at his bidding a group of practical revolutionists whom he has trained; what might be called a complete revolutionary team. And the men he has trained are men indeed, sober, temperate, cool-headed, silent, honest, implacable.’

In 1863, Victor Hugo received a letter from Garibaldi asking him to assist in raising money to purchase a million rifles. He replied, enclosing his own subscription. In 1867, he published his poem, *Mentana*, to which Garibaldi endeavored to reply in French verse. Victor Hugo thanked him with the following letter, here published for the first time: —

HAUTEVILLE-HOUSE, January 20, 1868

DEAR GARIBALDI: —

In the tent of Achilles hung a lyre, and in the tent of Judas Maccabæus a harp. Roland wrote verses to Charle-