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A Matter of Accounting

By BEATRICE C. BEST

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It is an odd fact and one meriting some attention that the words we apply specifically to arithmetic and accounting matters—sums, calculations and the keeping of accounts, from the payment of household bills to trading and national accounts and budgets—we employ also in speaking of human affairs that are in no way associated with arithmetical or monetary matters. Phrases such as ‘summing up a situation’, or enquiring what it all adds up to, ‘calculating’ how to do such and such, ‘accounting for a person’s behaviour,’ ‘paying off’ an old ‘score’ are familiar instances.

The reason for this identity may, perhaps, lie in an innate desire to be right, to find the correct answer, an instinct for authenticity, a dislike of dubiety and ambiguity. And this accuracy, this correct accounting belongs naturally to the sphere of arithmetic, of mathematics. There is no dubiety about figures; 2 and 2 make 4 is not a matter of opinion, and offers no ground for argument or disputation. A mistake in calculation can be located and corrected. If, however, the mistake, for whatever reason, be hidden or overlooked, it can, no matter how slight, have disastrous consequences, falsifying, as it must, all subsequent calculations based upon it. Thus it could, for instance, cause the collapse of a bridge, with consequent injuries and deaths, and far-reaching results in lives and destinies of those involved in the accident. Subsequent enquiries would be concerned with the cause of the accident, with an endeavour to find and give a correct account of the how and why of it, and finally who should correct it.

The above has bearing on the contention that the error in national accountancy, discovered and revealed by Major Douglas, accounts for the appalling state of affairs in which we find ourselves today. Furthermore, the fact that this error is ignored or denied constrains those concerned to give some account of this state to contrive and offer a variety of explanations. These give rise to confusion and conflicting counsel, but they are useful for diverting the mind from the main issue and may be likened—by analogy—to an endeavour to ‘cook’ the accounts.

The method used is mainly one by way of the use of slogans. These are designed to suit all tastes, and to suggest plausible and acceptable reasons to account for our condition. One example, especially designed one would say to appeal to and satisfy the moralists, is that it is due to man’s selfishness. This—if one may refer to the illustration of the bridge—amounts to accounting for the accident by attributing it to the moral failings of the people who were crossing it at the

time. (Also, incidentally, one might observe that selfish people do not generally direct their affairs to their own manifest disadvantage).

Other slogans current today present the trend of events as inevitable. We are also told that this is an age of ‘confusion’ or ‘anxiety’. These suggestions, when they are accepted as satisfactory accounts, offer the advantage of allaying any wish or demand for further investigation.

But a slogan that merits special attention because it concerns a factor in the situation peculiar to our age, and also seems to appeal to high brow and low alike, is the one that declares that man has become the slave of the machine.

Maybe, it is not so surprising to find the generality of people, not given, perhaps, to much reflection, and not finding much time for it anyway, succumbing to this particular form of mass hypnotism. A man tied to a machine for most of his life or finding himself ‘displaced’ or ‘unemployed’ if someone invents a better one, might be excused if he regards the machine as in some way his slave driver or his enemy. But it *is* surprising to find our self-constituted leaders of thought, our ‘intelligentsia’, allowing themselves to be so successfully hoodwinked.

This comment is provoked by a passage which occurs in the second series of Gifford Lectures delivered by Gabriel Marcel in 1949-50 and published under the title of *The Mystery of Being*.

In Chapter IX, entitled, ‘Death and Hope’, M. Marcel reflects on ‘... a dehumanizing way of behaving which must inevitably, in a world *which is more and more enslaved to the demands of technocracy, become universal...*’ (my italics).

Now, while admittedly, ‘enslaved to the demands of technocracy’ sounds more up-to-date and impressive than man as the slave of the machine, it is no less idiotic and misleading. How can ‘technocracy’ make demands? How can a machine enslave? From whence does the *initiative* ‘to make demands’, ‘to enslave’ arise? It may be retorted that these phrases are merely employed by the way of a *façon de parler* and are not to be taken literally.

Then how are they to be taken, and what do they mean?

In any case, from a philosopher of M. Marcel’s reputation who views the situation so seriously as to see in it a process of dehumanization, one expects a more searching enquiry and exact account than one that can be summed up by a *façon de parler*.

Indeed it is as if—to refer again to the example of the bridge—M. Marcel, having been called in to account for the accident and the ensuing calamities, had been content with declaring that they had all been caused by the bridge, which

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Telling and Knowing

The following letter to the Editor, appeared in *The Times*, December 9, 1961—

'Sir,—One of the difficulties with which the Government have to contend in the complicated problems facing the national economy is that the basic difficulties are only dimly understood, if they are understood at all, by the man-in-the-street.

'The very wording which is commonly used in economic problems turns the eyes of the reader away to something more readable and more easily understood. If the Government are anxious to woo, as they certainly should be, the support of the ordinary member of the community, they must find a way of explaining to him what the fundamental problem is.

It is indeed that personal incomes can only increase in real value if the productivity of the workers of all categories in the country increases first. I do not think it is beyond the capabilities of advertising experts to produce on the hoardings, by illustration or by words or by both, a simple and graphic way of driving this into the minds of the ordinary population. Until some such action is taken, the Government will be struggling with an uninstructed public, upon whose support they must ultimately rely.

I am, Sir, yours truly,

JAMES R. H. HUTCHISON, President, The Association of British Chambers of Commerce.

'68 Queen Street, E.C.4, Dec. 6'

A correspondent replied as follows. His letter was not printed by *The Times*—

'The Editor,

The Times,

'Dear Sir,

'It may be true that if a lie is repeated often enough before an uncritical audience—the dimly-understanding men-in-the-street of Sir James Hutchison in this morning's issue of

The Times—it may come to be believed. The process is facilitated if it is repeated amidst the applause of people interested in its dissemination.

'May I point out that the proposition 'personal incomes can only increase in real value if the productivity of the workers of all categories in the country increases first' is as false, and for reasons not essentially dissimilar, as to say that the amount of energy available through a pipe one inch in diameter can be increased only by increasing the area of the lake which supplies it?

'Yours, etc.,

'December 9, 1961'.

Katanga

(With the permission of the Australian Broadcasting Commission we publish the script of 'Notes on the News' by Sir Raphael Cilento, broadcast over 4QR Brisbane on December 13, 1961).

The average citizen who reads in the paper about the 'Katanga' crisis shrugs his shoulders and passes on perhaps to 'racing form' or the 'comic strips'. He is puzzled when he hears that the Katanga crisis is provoking a grave dilemma for Great Britain, and can't imagine why.

Actually Katanga is the pivot on which Anglo-American relationships and relationships between the white and non-white members of the British Commonwealth of Nations are turning at present, and the results may determine the future of U.N. and also the balance of power in the East and West struggle. One might therefore be interested enough to ask where this place Katanga is; how big it is; and why it looms so large?

The answer, perhaps over simplified, is that Katanga is the testing ground to decide (1) whether the white man now on the run will stay in Africa at all; and (2) whether U.N., now in the grip of a rabble of so-called 'liberated' or 'emerging' states, is to be permitted to force any form of government upon any small and defenceless people, by using against it, the resources and nuclear weapons provided and paid for by the whole world, including ourselves.

Popping up over the edges of the so-called conference tables, are the eager eyes of the international financiers with no national nor any other loyalties, waiting to muscle in on the loot, if and when the vast wealth of Katanga is seized and placed at the disposal of the Central Congolese Government. Mr. Gizenga, the deputy and successor of the late Mr. Lumumba, the Communists' catspaw, is a distinguished ornament of that group. Within a week of the co-called independence of the Congo, a Mr. Dettweiler was reported to have negotiated the virtual purchase of the Congo, but these reports were hurriedly contradicted.

Katanga is the southernmost section of that province of the Congo, that is based on Elizabethville, which itself was built by white men in 1910. It is less than 50,000 sq. miles in extent with a small population, which contains a fairly considerable number of white engineers, technicians, scientists, etc., some six thousand of them.

They were the people who made Katanga by developing its great deposits of copper, tin, cobalt, zinc, uranium, coal and other mineral resources—like Mt. Isa. The Mining Corporation of Upper Katanga which did all this has a mining

concession that is valid till 1990 unless it can be hi-jacked and robbed by foreign interests seeking its destruction and expulsion.

Round this Union Minière du Haut-Katanga have grown up large interests and industries financed largely by British capital, Belgian, French and other European money.

They were and are associated with great schemes for native welfare, which have existed for over forty years. In 1924 when I personally was seeking advice to assist our own government in improving conditions for the natives of New Guinea, it was to Katanga in the Belgian Congo I was directed as a leading light in native welfare, health and education. It was well worth while studying. Eighteen months ago Katanga was the only province in all the chaos of the Congo that remained clear and stable. The capital Leopoldville saw all the most bestial and revolting atrocities against white men, women, nuns, and hospital workers under the regime of Lumumba. They were hushed up in every possible way. It was from the same hot-bed of hate and anti-white propaganda that the atrocities in Portuguese Africa were planned and directed and a safe retreat offered to the murderers. Only a month ago a plane was sent unarmed, with a full cargo of dried milk and other infant foods and supplies to an area controlled by Mr. Gizenga. Thirteen Italian members of U.N., from 22-40 years of age, who might have been your sons, brothers or cousins, were seized as they landed, beaten, propped up against a wall, shot and then butchered like sheep or cattle, and sold to these cannibal savages from the meat stalls in the market.

No one seems to have heard anything more about this atrocious massacre, done in an area that believes it has Russian protection. U.N. troops, however, were sent to invade Katanga recently to drive out the so-called *white mercenaries* in order to prevent the Katanga people and their President Tshombe from staying outside the corrupt Congo State. The argument is apparently that no one has any right of self determination; if you were once a part of a State, you are always a part of it—no matter who sets up its boundaries; no matter whether you are of a different stage of development; or have racial brothers outside these holy boundaries or not.

The Russians, of course, are delighted at the turn things have taken. The best chess players in the world, have in my opinion used the American's offer to pull their chestnuts out of the fire for them, and to get their paws burnt in the process repeatedly. The Americans are rather willing, too, to have the spot-light turned away from their complete defeat in strategy and status in Laos and in South East Asia generally.

It is a very grave matter, however, to use or abuse the forces of U.N., made up of so-called 'peace-loving powers', to strangle as I think is intended, the only decent section of the Congo for the ultimate benefit of the Soviet powers and their fellow travellers. No wonder there is a grave dilemma in Great Britain, which at any rate has some clarity of viewpoint and has no intentions of providing British bombs to blast the Katangans out of Elizabethville. What a change of front in America since they had hysterical street parades there to condemn Mussolini for bombing Ethiopia twenty-five years ago.

Over-sloppy in their sentimentalism as I think they are, over-wealthy and over-anxious to remain that way, America, in situations like Katanga, seems to me to surrender principle to expediency on many an occasion and, so far as the white man's future is concerned, to show no leadership—except in retreat.

Modern Art

In the chapter on El Greco in his book *Don Fernando* (Collected Edition, William Heinemann Ltd., 1960) Somerset Maugham, after expressing his view that *The Burial of Count Orgaz* is one of the greatest pictures in the world, dismisses the suggestion that this 'greatest of baroque painters' suffered from astigmatism. He sees in the 'immense elongation' of El Greco's figures 'a natural development of treating the human form as decoration', which is also found in many of Tintoretto's pictures. He says that it is not strange that the moderns should set such great store by El Greco and that if he were alive today he imagines that he would paint pictures as abstract as the later work of Bracque, Picasso and Fernand Léger. The author also says that it may be that the interest in formal design of the present day is due to the same causes as produced baroque art in the sixteenth century. 'Now we are spiritually at sixes and sevens. Afraid of the sublime, we take refuge in the multiplication table.

'For now the world is sullen and jealous as the world of the Counter-reformation. The great issues that occupied the Victorians, which seemed to offer the spirit boundless horizons, have played us false. We mock at those who maunder of truth, goodness and beauty. We are afraid of greatness. And we too have lost the inestimable blessing of freedom. Liberty throughout the world is dying or dead. Nobody dares tackle great subjects and the heresy has become orthodox that subject is of no consequence. . . Artists have not yet learnt how to deal with what really matters to our world and so are driven to devote themselves to decoration. They make technical devices the end and aim of their endeavour. They have cast off the shackles of tradition, but use their independence to stand on their heads and, like Hippokleides, kick their legs in the air. Modern critics are wrong when they blame writers for writing about themselves. When art is no more than a side issue they have nothing else to write about. . .'

Jacques Barzun, in *Epilogue Romanticism in 1960* (*Classic, Romantic and Modern*, second edition, Anchor Books New York, 1961) carries matters still further. He says, 'One need not be a practitioner to see that 'artists' have painted themselves into a corner. There is nothing left for them to 'say' in any manner that relies on mind. Every conceivable nuance, all imaginable devices have been tried, combined, and parodied.

'Nor is this situation confined to the plastic arts'. Barzun quotes an experienced critic of new music, who is also a composer and musicologist, Mr. R. G. Goldman who, 'speaking of Stravinsky's long search through the past for musical substance that might still be fertile, concedes, the 'inevitability, in our anxious and history-conscious age, of the artistic ransacking of the past in search of a companionship that Mozart and Beethoven no longer provide. They are not only too big for us, on a different scale, but represent a different relation to civilization'. And he considers the likelihood that 'harmony is dead, that the composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have explored all the possibilities of what we have come to call traditional harmony, and that the composer today can add nothing to what they have left us'. This relation of past to present, taken together with the enormous verbalism that goes with the slightest of new works, leads the critic to conclude: 'I fear that (like Webern who 'so analyzed

music that only style remains') enough like-minded activists on the periphery of art will succeed in analyzing music out of existence'."

—*Musical Quarterly*, April 1960.

Mr. Goldman mentions in passing that Stravinsky may wind up by exploring 'electronic music . . . So far, the sounds of electronic music are meaningless, like the drippings and droppings of the abstract expressionists and action painters, like the words and images that the beat poets seek to capture with a tape recorder during their mind-less monologues or in the trances of drug taking. The search is for materials absolutely disinfected from Art and ideas . . . The aim is to flee from the previously actualized and also from the prescient foreshadowing. It is a sacrificial effort, a true anti-mental education.

'The social and political image of this programme is obvious. It is the dream of total revolution; to start with a fresh slate, to discard even the ghost of an echo of the past. Undoubtedly the temper, if not the doctrine, of Marxist Leninism lies behind much of this energy to achieve a liberating blankness; and in this too, one can see the ultimate intensification of the original Romanticist idea; Marx's abolitionism, based on Romantic premises, leads logically to destroying the contents of any institution concerned with the past. We thus arrive at the aesthetics of annihilation which best suit a century exasperated by two world wars and twenty abortive revolutions . . .

' . . . the disturbing thought occurs that these artist enemies of Art are moved not alone by nausea at the idea of the past, and not alone by fear and hatred of a society in the grip of science and machinery, but irresistibly also by the model of science itself . . . The drugs of their trances (heroin, lysergic acid), the tools of their search (tape recorders, electronic synthesizers) the forms of their rationalisation (number, algebraic logic) as well as their critical and advertising vocabulary are none of them products of art or nature, all smell of the factory or the lab. And in this, I think, we must see not a concession or a convenience but a reinforcement of the desperate hostility to Art . . . '

A MATTER OF ACCOUNTING

(continued from page 1).

had unaccountably decided to collapse! Whereas, of course, the point was *why* did the bridge collapse and *who* was responsible.

By the same token then, *why* are we being increasingly enslaved and dehumanized by the demands of 'technocracy' and *who* is responsible for such a misdirection and misapplication of means? More precisely why has that factor in the situation that man has devised and developed as an instrument that could free him from the necessity of incessant labour to produce all his material needs, resulted in his enslavement? Why has it not been used by him to procure the leisure to pursue other and less material ends; leisure, for instance, to read M. Marcel's books, or perhaps write his own, leisure to choose and to follow his own vocation?

Why—to sum up—the insensate demand and cry for 'Full Employment', coming from *all* parties and echoed repeatedly from pulpit and platform alike, in the very face of that 'thing' that was devised, and should be used, to disemploy?

It is in the answer to this question that the true account of man's enslavement and dehumanization must be sought. But

M. Marcel does not ask this question. One must therefore suppose that he does indeed believe that man's enslavement and dehumanization can be satisfactorily accounted for by 'the demands of technocracy', otherwise by technological progress, and does not see the need to enquire any further, to enquire, for instance, why man has submitted to this tyranny, and why and by whom it has been imposed on him.

Moreover, M. Marcel appears to regard the situation fatalistically and to see it as an inevitable trend, and thus impossible to arrest. One is justified in assuming this, since in his last chapter he concludes that: 'It may be that we are witnessing a deterioration of the human species . . .' This is a dreadful conclusion to come to, and one calculated to induce despair, the devil's most potent weapon, and 'the final sin'.

Faced with it one is compelled to ask why this persistent and consistent *trahison des clercs*? Is it due to stupidity, to a lack of real intelligence, to true discernment? Is it due to ignorance? If so such ignorance must be classed as criminal. For the answer to this question that M. Marcel does not ask is known. Ignored alike by academic and official circles it has, notwithstanding, though responded to by few, been carried round the world. One hesitates to suggest a third alternative to account for the 'blind eye', the 'deaf ear', so the question must be left open.

Nevertheless it leads one to reflect upon how small and negligible a contribution 'culture' has made to the civilising of man. It is a remarkable and familiar fact that some of the most refined and sophisticated cultures have existed side by side with the greatest cruelties both inflicted upon and submitted to, by the people of the nations in which those cultures flourished. Periods characterised by a great flowering of literature and the arts have been also characterised by conditions such that it might well be thought no truly cultured people would tolerate in their midst.

And now, nearly two thousand years after the revelation of Christian values, after Christ's promise to us of freedom and abundant life, after man, led by the spirit of truth, has discovered and devised ways and means by which these values could be realised by all, we find these same means being perfected and, unwittingly almost, and as though under the influence of some evil, being directed by man for purposes of annihilation.

Is it not time our self-constituted élite, our intelligentsia, our teachers, our preachers, whatever their self-chosen titles, were called to account?

What have they said, what are they saying to enlighten the darkness, and to help to arrest the present hell-bent course towards enslavement, dehumanization, deterioration and death, which they appear almost eager, at times with eloquence, to describe and deplore?

They patronise or deride those they are pleased to call the multitude, the masses, but it would be salutary if they were to perceive that, with far less excuse, *they have allowed themselves to be caught in the same trap*. As it is they present the picture of a group of people who, confronted with calamity, stand by impotently and wring their hands.

Therefore, one is tempted by the thought that man, whilst preserving true cultural values, is destined to pass beyond the cultural age into the purely social age, in which he may learn to love the Lord his God with all his might and his neighbour as himself.