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Socrates and the Street Car

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SOCRATES AND THE STREET CAR

It was at half past ten in the morning that they took me down to the operating room, weary with pain and numb with morphine. Upon my closed eyes I felt, for an instant, the soft, cool touch of the doctor's hand, succeeded immediately after by the warmth and woolliness of gauze and by the pressure of the rubber hood over my nose and chin. I wriggled a moment, coughed, and the pressure vanished. When it came again it brought with it the pungent sweetness of ether. I breathed deep, gasped and breathed deeper, gasped again and pumped for breath, my mouth open and my ears ringing. I heard voices, clear but very distant:

"He's going quick."

"Philosophers are easy. Ether is their native element."

The voices were cut off as sharply as they came. I was rushing with swiftness indescribable through black space, past balls of dazzling whiteness, balls immensely large and ridiculously small, but bright unendurably,—rushing straight into the empty-rean. When I stopped, magically, without *why* or *how*, I had a feeling of being nowhere in particular and everywhere at once. At first it was too terrible, like the colic; later it became homelike and acutely pleasant. I soon discovered why. I was in the pineal gland of the Absolute, manipulating his system of eternal and self-representative ideas, which are everywhere and nowhere at the same time. To reach this high estate, mortal man must become disembodied and timeless, a mere neutral unit in the dialectical paradise. The process is far from agreeable, and the attainment peculiarly difficult to report. But, if I may so express it, I was the whole show; I enacted and contemplated my scene at one and the same time; I was both moving and inert, both myself and not myself, amicably at one with my ego, and more amicably divided against it. My whole panorama had that dual aspect which philosophers of the Absolute have made familiar. Seen with the inner eye it was a noncommittal mass of undivided protoplasmic ooze; seen with the outer eye, it was the piling of system on system; systems of philosophy, jujitsu, 'thimble-rigging, dress-making, social reform, bridge, stock-manipulation, tariff-building, all woven into a vertigo of internal relationships,

in the single time-span of eternity. It was so stunning that my synthetic ego of apperception reeled, and I became dissociated, returning by degrees to that fragmentary aspect of the Absolute which is my terrestrial self.

"Does Socrates," I thought, "or does Plato,—do Socrates and Plato *like* this sort of thing?"

"Surely not," a voice replied. "Though this is a world of ideas, it is not our world of ideas. It is called a self-representative system, but to us Hellenes it is no better than chaos. It is identical with all orders, and therefore can exemplify no order in particular. It is sheer potentiality, the region of imperfection, of non-being, of becoming,—that is, it is the ideal world of your own time. *Our* ideal world is the world of perfection. If you wish to see Eternity, come to us."

I seemed both to utter the words and to hear them,—both to see before me a short, broad-shouldered, long-armed, mat-bearded, and touzle-headed old fellow, and to be that old fellow. I obeyed his will, or my impulse, and proceeded toward the Hellenic world of ideas. It lay well beyond the modern one; and as we approached it, comet-swift, the old gentleman became more and more distinct from me, and I from him. When we entered it we were each quite individual. The way to this world was far and hard, up a perpendicular wall of words, a wall translucent in places and of hues warm and sweet. In the middle of the wall was the gate, a narrow one of Attic speech and Athenian dialectic, for me impassable, but as mere vapour of the morning before the halcyon breath of my guide. The land within sloped gently to a broad plateau of emerald, shaded with trees of cypress, of laurel, of oak, and of cedarwood, and starred with ambrosial flowers. In the centre of the plateau stood a noble temple, builded of gold-veined marble, a structure luminous and clear and wonderful. This was the temple of the Highest Good, so just in figure and proportion that, whencesoever viewed, it appeared whole and perfect. Before its portico stood many men; and chariots stood there, each drawn by two horses, a black and a white. Far beyond the temple, clear and luminous, in vast procession filed the march of spirits intent upon the Good. Nearest us who were at the gate, lonely chariots raced and paced in paths parabolic and in perfect circles; they were the chariots of Sophists, intent upon dialectic exercise.

At the portico of the temple we were greeted by a little ferret-

eyed, bald-headed man, trying to look taller than he actually was, and his companion a broad-shouldered, eager gentleman, weak-mouthed and perfumed, with dreams in his eyes. These were Aristotle and Plato; a little behind them followed a hook-nosed patriarch with a Semitic accent—Protagoras. All were eager to talk, but Socrates stopped only to explain how he had rescued me from the Absolute, and led me into the temple to pay homage to the Highest Good.

Within the temple was nothing which one expects in such a place. A city was there, of perfect beauty. Its centre was a living man, noble of stature, and in form and lineament of inexpressible excellence. He stood at ease, his calm gaze fixed on the boundless flood of dark and light that was the roof of the temple. As the citizens laboured, each cheerfully and utterly, so the man increased in majesty of excellence, while the dark of the roof diminished and the temple grew more luminous. Ever and anon one of the citizens stopped to gaze on the man, and having gazed returned to his task enriched in power and joy. And I too, as I gazed, was filled with comfort and with hope, with desire to achieve excellence. I would have leaped into the city and laid my hand to any needed work, but Socrates took me by the arm.

"It is enough," he said. "Your desire is your libation." And he led me out.

On the porch a crowd surrounded us.

"You have promised, Socrates," said Plato, "to lead us *more geometrico* to the minor properties of the non-Euclidean space."

"Let Euclid do that. He can discover the more swiftly what he does not yet know. But as for me, and this earth-dweller, we have poured a libation of our souls to the god. Our discourse shall be of him."

But Plato persisted, and others; one taking hold of him by the cloak, another by the hand.

"You have promised, Socrates. You have promised *us*. And we are many while this stranger is one. Why do you always prefer the one to the many? Will you ever consort with Alcibiades in his opinion that the majority has no rights which the minority is bound to respect?"

"Have your will, then," said Socrates. And forthwith there was a joyful mounting of chariots. Socrates, with a gesture, indicated that I was still to be his guest. I mounted and he bade me hold the reins while he secured the checks on his horses. "No

precaution can be too great," he said, "in this ideal jungle whereinto we now adventure."

How it happened I could not say. Perhaps, I tugged at the reins without intending it; perhaps, Socrates's unaccustomed labour irritated the horses. There was a sudden rush upward and a more sudden plunge down, down into a horrific abyss yawning infinitely black to swallow us; and when my senses renewed their life they were awake to the circumstance of a dirty street car. I found myself seated on the dust and plush-upholstered bench, wedged against the grime of the unwashed window behind me. On one side of me sat a malodorous fat man, on the other was Socrates; sitting and standing were labourers, with reeking clothes, widespread knees, and heavy voices; gum-chewing and perfumed shop girls; men of business, obese and smug, absorbed in newspapers; students in rakish clothes; gentlemen, gloved and caned and supercilious; a lady with a lap-dog; a bawling newsboy; and next to Socrates a round-shouldered, hollow-breasted woman, soothing a vexed child. Overhead, advertisements of nostrums edible and bibable, of clothes, of cosmetics, of newspapers, of what not, stridently invited the travellers to buy, alluring the loafing attention of the passengers as the car careered along, throwing their bodies from side to side, in the olescent murk. I stared weakly into the plain face of Socrates, now ugly with disgust.

"The depths of Tartarus do not know the like," he said wryly. "Prometheus sinned, but the expiation of his impiety is Elysian bliss compared with this; Tantalus's craving but ecstasies! For what mortal lapse did Zeus contrive this place?"

"But, Socrates," I expostulated, "this is not hell. This is a street car. Thousands of hands have laboured in its making; thousands of men and women live by its use and in its service. Surely, in the world of ideas, you must have contemplated also the idea of a street car."

"Recall, I pray you," he returned, "that in our ideal world mud and hair have no prototypes. How then shall it contain an idea of the street car? But have I understood you aright,—that thousands of men labour in the making of these things?"

"Yes."

"Then street cars must have a purpose, must they not? Or is their making, their purpose?"

"I do not understand you, Socrates."

"Are street cars made for men, or men for street cars?"

"Nay, Socrates, street cars are made that men may go more speedily from place to place."

"Then the function of your street car is speed?"

"Yes."

"So that the best street car would be the street car that runs with greatest speed. Will you now tell me, is the motion of a vehicle helped or impeded by its burden?"

"Impeded."

"Then of two street cars of equal power, the one carrying least unnecessary weight would go faster and exercise its function better?"

"Yes."

"Why, then, carry the roof on your street car, and the walls of glass and those auricupidous praises of worthless things?"

"But you forget, Socrates, that while we desire to be conveyed with speed, we do not aim to be both speedy and uncomfortable. The car must not only take us from place to place, but while so doing, it must take us comfortably."

"And by 'comfortably' you mean?"

"I mean that the well-being of each passenger should not be disturbed, but maintained and even increased in passage."

"Then the function of your street car is to take you speedily and comfortably from place to place?"

"Yes."

"Do you, then, spend all your lives in street cars?"

"You are laughing at me, Socrates. Of course we do not. The street car is only an incident in the affairs of our existence. We have to earn our livelihood, to bring up our children properly, to govern ourselves, and to know the world."

"These are noble and difficult tasks. And what bearing have they on the street car, and on going about speedily from place to place?"

"Why, they justify the being of the street car."

"You would hold, then, that locomotion is not an end in itself, but an instrument."

"Yes."

"And perhaps you would agree that it is a good instrument in as far as it perpetuates and perfects the various functions

that you mention, and that it is evil as far as it fails to do so?"

"Yes."

"We agree, then, that the production, distribution, and operation of street cars are entitled to places in human activity in as far as they serve to maintain the whole of that activity?"

"Yes."

"And what, pray, would you say of this street car?"

"Well, it is not an unmixed good, Socrates."

"And is not the evil wherewith it is mixed greater than the good? Read these advertisements, awaking the discomforts of empty desire. And how are we packed together—not slaves in the trireme lay half so thick; nor were they so shaken and wrenched by the ship's motion as we by this. Were it not better to abandon these waggons of ill-fare utterly?"

"You would be right, Socrates, if the evils you mention were intrinsic demerits of the street car. But they are not. All street cars can be comfortable and speedy. But there is in our society a class of men called capitalists. These are persons who get control of the wealth of our community. And the use they make of it is to breed for themselves more wealth. But they cannot do this alone; so they hire the majority of mankind, whose only wealth is their power to labour, and their children; and for the price of food, they engage them to make street cars and many other things, needed and not needed. And these being made, they obtain from our government the privilege of supplying the people with the street cars and other commodities the people themselves have made and rendered valuable. In this wise the capitalists get back from the people most of what they have paid them in wages; and so they grow ever richer, while their more numerous fellow-citizens grow poorer and poorer. So it is not the street car itself that is evil,—it is the greed of the capitalist that makes it evil."

"Do you mean, then, that the street cars serve two conflicting ends,—namely, the enrichment of the rich and the service of the public?"

"Yes."

"But are not the rich enriched in this instance only through the service of the public?"

"They are, Socrates."

"Then, how will you have their ends in conflict with the

public service? For unless they serve the public they cannot grow rich."

"But have not you yourself said, Socrates, that the street car is evil?"

"I have."

"And is not the evil the failure of the street car to exercise its function?"

"Assuredly."

"And is it not the greed of the owners of the street car that is the cause of this failure?"

"You escape your own notice in the question."

"How so?"

"Let me ask, and do you answer."

"Very well, I will answer."

"Tell me, then—when you pay for any object, do you pay for what you receive or for what you do not receive?"

"For what I receive, assuredly. No, wait a moment, for what I think I receive. Modern commerce is carried on mainly by deception."

"And you are aware, when you purchase a commodity, that the vendor is deceiving you about its nature?"

"Well, I think this to be the case, in most instances."

"Yet you buy it?"

"What else can I do, being honest, if I need it?"

"Are you, then, paying for the article as you believe it is, or for the article as it is represented by the vendor?"

"For the former, surely, Socrates."

"Then you really pay for what you receive?"

"You lead me to believe so."

"And do you pay in proportion to your own desire and need, or to the need and desire of him who sells?"

"In proportion to both, I think."

"And if you had no need of the object or chose to deny yourself the satisfaction of that need, neither could the vendor satisfy his own desire."

"True."

"Then the satisfaction of his desire depends upon the satisfaction of yours; and conversely the satisfaction of yours depends upon the satisfaction of his."

"Quite right."

"So far, then, you serve each other, and do not defraud each

other, nor can one of you live without the other. You are in harmony and not in conflict. And the street car serves not conflicting but harmonious ends?"

"I had not thought of this, Socrates. Perhaps I should have said that the street car subordinates the service of the public to the enrichment of the rich."

"Do you mean by this that the enrichment of the rich is in your state a higher good than the service of the state?"

"Our society seems to be organised to that end, Socrates. The whole process of our social life, our government, our industry, our art, seems to accelerate the increase of wealth, merely, and to concentrate it in the hands of a very few."

"And these few, do they make no use of their wealth?"

"They cause it, as I told you, to breed more wealth for themselves."

"So that the accumulation of wealth among a few people is your highest good?"

"Not so, Socrates. Our state is evil just because its purpose *seems* to be accumulation of wealth among a few people. There are many among us who abhor this practice and desire, besides accumulation, the equitable and just distribution of wealth among all of us. If this could be, then the public service and the enrichment of men would be more than harmonious; they would be coincident. For the possessor of wealth and the user of wealth would be identical persons."

"Excellent. And your highest good would, in that case, remain still the increase of the riches of your state, but the apportionment of the riches would be altered?"

"Yes."

"And how would you bring about this reapportionment?"

"Our social philosophers plan the gradual absorption by the government of all the instruments which serve to create wealth. They urge the ownership and use of those instruments by the state and the distribution of the created wealth by the state. So each man would be in the service of all, and all in the service of each."

"That is very good. But do you not escape your own notice when you say that each man would be in the service of all, and all in the service of each?"

"How?"

"Have you not just said that your highest good is the accumulation of wealth?"

"Yes."

"And however wealth were distributed, your aim would be still to get more wealth?"

"I admit it."

"Then would not each man and all men serve wealth rather than each other?"

"But, Socrates, they would use this wealth?"

"For what purpose, if not to breed more wealth? Since otherwise, the production of wealth and the existence of wealth must be instruments to a good, and not themselves the good."

"But cannot wealth be both instrument and end?"

"Not unless it is the highest good. The highest good alone is self-perpetuating. By its virtue alone are other things good. In its service they are not only used, they are used up; while it remains eternal."

"I had not thought of that, Socrates. You mean, do you not, that if men are really to change society, they cannot change it by merely altering the position or distribution of its ideal? They must alter the ideal."

"You say well and truly. Our friends are like certain housewives who wash only the outside of the cup. But the clean cup must have first of all a clean interior. Let us return, however, to the public conveyance in which we set out. Can you tell me what difference in the street car the reorganisation of your state would make?"

"Why, as it would be the property of the state, and at the same time in the service of the state, the more useful it became, the more the state would gain. Therefore, it would be built so as to serve its function perfectly."

"And how would it perfectly serve its function?"

"It would run much faster, more smoothly, more commodiously, and at less expense. It would contain no advertisements stimulating unnatural appetites. It would carry no more passengers than could healthfully travel in it. In a word, it would supply maximum efficiency at minimum cost."

"I see that you have the perfect street car well in mind. But, my young friend, is this perfection an intrinsic perfection, independent of all external accidents, or is it of the nature of those things which are perfect by virtue of a perfect cause?"

"Our new street car would be intrinsically perfect, Socrates."

"Then it could never, while in operation, lapse from its perfection? It would always remain swift and comfortable?"

"I should think so."

"In this street car in which we are now riding, which is the greater evil—its tardy gait or its deleterious discomforts?"

"The latter, Socrates, for speed is unnecessary to health, while good air and space are both needful."

"And does the street car intrinsically exclude air and space, or are these excluded for other reasons?"

"I see what you are driving at, Socrates. The greater evil of the street car is caused by overcrowding."

"Then your intrinsically perfect car, made and owned and operated by the state, might yet be as evil as is this in which we now ride?"

"You convince me of it, Socrates."

"And if the collective ownership and operation of wealth cannot be pledged to abolish or even mitigate this evil, have we any assurance that it will free us of any others?"

"I must agree that we have not."

"How, then, shall we perfect our imperfect car, or keep the perfect car as it is?"

"Why, we must seek the source of imperfection and remove it, in the first instance, while in the second we must prevent it from infecting our excellent car."

"Right. And what have we found to be the source of imperfection?"

"Overcrowding."

"But overcrowding is an act of individuals, is it not?"

"Yes."

"And individuals act, either freely, through desire; or slavishly, upon compulsion?"

"You speak truly, Socrates."

"Is there any compulsion which forces men and women to crowd into cars?"

"None."

"They do so freely, of their own wills, do they not?"

"Yes."

"What, then, is the source of our car's worst imperfection—its mode of production, its ownership and operation, or the will and desire of those who use it?"

"The will and desire of those who use it."

"Then, to have perfect street cars, you would first need perfect men?"

"Right."

"And the source and seat of perfection is not a multitude of possessions, but excellence of character?"

"Yes."

"In this you approve the saying of my disciple, Aristotle, that 'character is man's destiny.' Have we not thereby indicated already the general nature of the highest good of any state?"

"Do you mean that the highest good of society is human character and that all other values are only instruments in its attainment and maintenance?"

"Nothing less."

"But, Socrates, there are characters and characters. How is one to choose?"

"You ask well, O Earth-dweller, and your question is most difficult. For excellences are infinite, and some, by their very existence, prevent the existence of others; while the varieties that may exist together are multiform and complex. But we shall not let the difficulty affright us; rather we shall proceed bravely to the task. And do you answer me carefully. Of two actions, equally good in respect to pleasantness, to completeness, and to expressiveness,—but in respect to self-conservation different—one tending to conserve and perpetuate itself in its own process, the other to destroy itself thereby—which is the preferable?"

"I cannot say surely, Socrates, but I think the one which tends to perpetuate itself."

"You think rightly; for it is true, is it not, that a self-destructive action in destroying itself destroys also all that it engenders and all that depends upon it, so that not only is it in itself ephemeral, but as an instrument it is positively harmful."

"True."

"And is the source and principle of conduct character, or is it some other matter?"

"It is character, Socrates."

"Then shall we say that our first requirement for excellence of character is that it shall confirm and preserve itself in operation?"

"I do not know, Socrates. I am not sure that what you describe as excellence is not mere selfishness."

"How do you mean, selfishness?"

"Why, egoism—concentration on one's own interest as against the interest of others."

"O Earth-dweller, have we not already seen that in a society one man cannot live by the destruction of another, but that as far as he destroys the other he destroys also himself?"

"I do not understand you."

"Have you not agreed that public service and private development or enrichment support and harmonise one with the other?"

"I have. But how does this concern the present issue?"

"Do you not mean by selfishness the activity and aggrandisement which individuals undertake in their own behalf?"

"I do."

"With respect to our street car, could this go on without the corresponding development and perfection of service?"

"No."

"Then selfishness, in as far as it is self-conserving, is coincident with altruism? And if in this instance, why not in all?"

"I am very stupid, Socrates. Even yet I do not understand you. Show me how the altruism of a man who loses his life in saving another is coincident with selfishness."

"Very good. If men are free to do as they choose, would they do what they like, what pleases them, and enhances their proper sense of their own worth, or the contrary?"

"They would do what pleases them."

"And is it not customary to call doing what you please selfish?"

"Why, more or less so."

"Rather more than less, my friend. Now tell me, is there any external compulsion upon which a man acts, when he performs impulsively an act of daring?"

"One would think so, Socrates."

"What is this compulsion?"

"I cannot name it."

"Because it does not exist. Impulse, since it springs from character, not consideration, is its own compulsion. A daring act, we may say, is as natural as eating or loving. It is performed because it is preferred, and it is preferred because it is inwardly

inevitable to the nature of him who executes it. Must not we say, then, that in its essence your act of courage is a selfish act?"

"But he who performs this act risks and loses his own life, Socrates."

"Does not such a risk accompany all activities—even eating and loving? And do you forget that the purport of the act is not to destroy the hero's own life but to save that of another? The loss is a calamity arising not from the inner quality of the act but from the external disfavour of fortune. It is but another expression of the omnipresent evil with which man must blindly cope."

"I am compelled to accede to your contention."

"Let us, then, carry the argument farther. Who is the more selfish, in your sense of the word—he who acts with respect to few interests or he who acts with respect to many?"

"He who acts with respect to few."

"And since a man acting on impulse considers nothing but the end envisaged in his impulse, may we not say that impulsive men are generally more selfish than others?"

"Yes."

"So that your hero, in as far as he had other interests and shut them off or even destroyed them by his act, would be, in your sense of the term, not less selfish but more selfish?"

"True."

"And in as far as his act by intent destroyed the possibility of his repeating it, it was selfish?"

"In this you are certainly right."

"While in as far as he acted with reference to the largest possible number of his interests, he approached the altruistic ideal, as you call it?"

"Right."

"Let us consider other examples. What is the interest of the physician?"

"To heal the sick, and to keep the healthy in health."

"And concentration upon this interest, its development and aggrandisement, you have called selfishness and egoism."

"I must admit it."

"So that the more people cured and the more stable and assured the public health were rendered by the acts of the physician, the more selfish he would be?"

"Ye-e-s."

"And this would be true of the farmer, whose function as a

farmer is to grow corn; of the oil-refiner, whose function is to perfect oil; and of the cotton manufacturer, whose function it is to render cotton usable. Their business would be to perpetuate, aggrandise, and conserve these functions?"

"I agree."

"Then in these cases is it not true that the private right is the common weal? And if in these cases, why not in every case?"

"You have convinced me, Socrates, in that I cannot answer you. But my conviction is merely verbal; I do not *feel* convinced. You cannot deny that there is evil and injustice in our social organisation."

"Have I denied it? First, I have but pointed out that the difficulty in your society lies not so much in its form as in its ends and ideals. Secondly, I have sought to make you see that change of form can do no good unless it presupposes a different ideal. Thirdly, you have agreed that this ideal is an ideal of the perfection of individual character, and that social organisation can be only an instrument toward this end. You feel, however, that I reason like a sophist, granting me the victory of words and refusing the homage of truth. This comes, first, from the fact that your generation have inherited an unnatural tradition, an immoral notion of justice, and a false view of goodness. You think only of instruments and care not at all for ends and ideals rationally defined. Whereas in all actions the end is the important thing, since thereby the excellences of all instruments are defined and adjudged. The ideal, by conserving itself, perpetuates the instruments that serve it: an unnatural ideal makes an inhuman society. Your second reason for charging me with the sophist's sin is your characteristically latter-day failure to see that the source of conduct is character, and that character is an inner necessity, not an external compulsion. For consider any action, contrary to nature, would it continue or disappear if its occasion were removed?"

"It would disappear."

"Surely, it would disappear, as the bent spring leaps to its proper form when the force which constrains it is removed. But of the motives and conduct of men you moderns consider only their external occasions not their internal demands. When you speak of *self-interest*, you speak of a slavish and unnatural thing which even among you is relatively rare; you speak of the self-interest of such as perform a deed at the sword's point, a

thing external and unreal, neither binding on honour nor viable for justice. Whereas natural self-interest is internal in its compulsion, being the untrammelled expression of human character. Natural self-interest should be the art of life, spontaneous, free, liberal, like sport or play. But among you life is not art; it is labour. You are not concerned with humanity and its perfection; you are concerned with wages. You forget that the function of the wage is not to breed more wage, but to liberate life, to free human instincts, and to enlarge human capacities. All of you, rich and poor, are therefore mere labourers. Your arts are artificial and your artists parasites. Whereas, of any naturally and truly rational society, the contrary should be true—collectively you should be artists, while your labourers, if labourers there must be, should be the parasitic class. The greater part of you are engaged on tasks for which you are not naturally fitted, your social life is slavish, you are labourers and not artists, and you are bondsmen to unnatural needs and exotic desires. The injustice lies not in the existence of these maladjustments but in the ideal which lives upon them. It is your false notion of justice which is the source of your incompetent exercise of it. You think of justice as restitution, or equality, or wages according to the measure of need, whereas we, you will remember, have long ago shown justice to be coincident with the spontaneous and proper exercise of all natural human functions, by all men. True justice is the greatest possible harmony of ends, the Highest Good. Your own way of saying this would be to call justice the uttermost perfection of self-interest."

"Why do you call justice the perfection of self-interest, Socrates?"

"Such a self-interest would be adequately stable and self-perpetuating, would it not?"

"It would. But how shall such a perfect self-interest be made real?"

"Have we not agreed that such a self-interest shall consist in the exercise by each of the function natural to each?"

"We have."

"Then if we devise a means by which we may discover what functions each may most perfectly exercise, we shall have discovered at the same time the means of realising our ideal of justice? And that would be a perfection of self-interest?"

"Right."

"Let us consider. In a society of young men who seek to perfect themselves in the sport of running—do all run equally fast and equal distances, or do they run some faster, some slower, some short distances, some long distances?"

"The latter is the case, Socrates."

"And how is it ascertained?"

"Why, their members have free entry to all forms of running. And in trials those who can best run certain given distances are selected to perfect themselves in these distances."

"And how do they perfect themselves?"

"By training, each in his special aptitude."

"Then the whole function of the club is to select and train runners, each according to his capacity, and to prevent them from such acts as are contrary to their natural capacities?"

"Yes."

"Does it not also reward excellence in running?"

"Yes, it distributes medals and cups and trophies."

"And it recognises, does it not, that the excellence of the individual is the glory of the club, and honours him according to his excellence?"

"Assuredly."

"Will you tell me now if this inverts the natural process of selection, or is in harmony with it."

"I think it is in harmony with natural selection; in fact, an improvement upon it."

"Why an improvement?"

"Because it prevents much waste and discomfort and unhappiness."

"Right. And the activity of the club might be called rationalised and progressive selection."

"True."

"Then, cannot we now define the means to attain social justice?"

"Will you tell me how, Socrates?"

"That is my intention, though I had rather you had told me. We must organise our state as this club of runners is organised. Instead of aiming to produce wealth we must aim to produce perfect men. The basis of our new state must be not industrial but *eugenic*; its organisation not commercial, but *educational*."

"And how is this change to be accomplished?"

"Primarily, as I have already shown, by honestly changing

your ideal. The instrument with which the ideal is realised must be analogous to that used by our club of runners—progressive selection through the test and training of education.”

“As in your Republic, Socrates?”

“Exactly, in principle. But our ideal republic had reference to conditions which you of the latter-day need not face. For you the principle of selective education should be paramount. In your society the children of all classes should receive identical opportunities in education and should be trained to a readiness for all things and perfection in those for which they have especial aptitude. Their education should make, not for efficiency or vocation, but for a just life, honoured and rewarded in proportion to the scope of other interests their activities directly involve. By such means you would form a state in which everybody would be in his place and in which there would be a place for every healthy body. Such a society would be just, would be fundamentally and absolutely human. Its concern would be, in intent as well as fact, the improvement of mankind. Its sanction would be its perfection of individuals; as it progressively produced and perpetuated these. Its outcome——”

Here the car swung round a sudden curve and seemed to keel over. The baby in the lap of the woman beside me fell forward and to save itself caught me by the throat; the umbrella of the strap-hanger jabbed me in the right side, cutting like a knife. The baby's clasp grew tense and choking.

“Out with it,” I heard an impatient voice, “out with it.” I opened my eyes. Before me stood the nurse, basin in hand. The operation was over, and I was back in my bed. How Socrates must have regretted the sudden disappearance of his auditor. And I am still wondering about “Its outcome——”

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