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NECESSITY AND FREEDOM

The authors discuss the necessity/freedom dichotomy with special reference to the writings of Sartre, Niebuhr and Ellul and the programmes of political parties in Britain.

Introduction: The Dichotomy between Necessity and Freedom

In this paper we shall be examining two related concepts which arise from attempts to understand human experience — those of 'freedom' and 'necessity'. These ideas emerge again and again in contemporary theories of man and society, but an additional reason for choosing them as the focus of our study arises from current interest in the Christian philosophy known as the 'Amsterdam School', whose foremost exponent was the late Professor Dooyeweerd[1]. Representatives of this school have analysed the development of western thought from the standpoint of Biblical Christianity and have emphasised particularly the dependence of all theorising upon pre-theoretical religious presuppositions, and emotional attitudes, called collectively *'ground motives'*. It is our contention that the necessity/ freedom dichotomy found in so much social analysis today derives from the humanistic commitment which pervades our culture.

Different 'ground motives' characterise ideas arising in cultural contexts other than ours. For example, the ancient Greeks had no notion of creation in the Biblical sense. Rather they modelled their theory of origins upon the nature of human creativity. Man forms his products from pre-existent matter. In like manner the Demiurge, Plato's divine Reason, needed pre-existent chaotic matter to which he (or it) gave form. This dualistic form-matter motive was the driving force behind Greek thought and itself had its origins in the conflict between two religions: an earlier one centred on the vital forces of life; and a later one centred on the cultural activities of man. The religious nature of the ground motives underlying all theorising is, according to Dooyeweerd, inevitable and arises from the fact that nature has been created: it is not 'autonomous'. Man must worship and serve either the true God or else an idol, and this applies to theorising as to all other activities of life. (Josh.

24: 14; Rom. Ch. 1 & 2). Theoretical thought is dependent upon religous pre-suppositions, however disguised these may be.[2]

Dooyeweerd locates the root of humanistic thought in the necessity/freedom ground motive. In its most radical form this assumes that man is autonomous and free while nature is completely determined. However in its various articulations, such a simplistic split rarely arises; rather the dualism of the ground motive produces a tension or dialectical conflict of perspective interwoven in the theorising itself.

Examples of this dualistic thought form may be seen in many contemporary debates.

Penal theory is trapped in a perennial oscillation between the poles of freedom and necessity. On one side are those who wish to emphasise the freedom of the individual in his moral choices and hence the significance of criminal responsibility. On the other are those who look to the causal network within which the criminal behaviour occurs and who thus emphasise the environment, the psychology of the offender and the social processes which produce the criminal. These two perspectives have very different implications — punishment or treatment.

In historical studies the setting of the individual in his social context produces similar conflicts. For example, did Napoleon's individual genius change the face of Europe? Or was he the necessary product of objective historical forces owing nothing to his human freedom? Does man make history or does the moment make the man?

Perhaps the most familiar example of this conflict between freedom and necessity arises when we consider the nature of man himself. Does the mechanistic nature of the biochemical processes taking place in the brain prove human freedom to be an illusion? Various 'complementarity' theories have been devised to cope with this and similar questions but all produce a final dualism which institutionalises into the theory a conflict which arose at the level of the pre-theoretical religious assumptions.

Looking at these examples, we see that each offers antithetical ways of interpreting and changing the world. At one pole we have a universe of things, of causality, necessity, mechanism and determinative science. At the other pole a universe of persons, freedom, human experience and feelings. R.D. Laing gives an illustration which is interpreted in each of these ways and which it is worthwhile looking at in more detail.[3] Laing is describing a clinical history involving abnormal human reactions and interactions and which, for this very reason, highlights the issues we are discussing. He quotes a description by Kraepelin (1905) of a patient 'presented' as a case before a room full of students. Kraepelin's description rests on the assumption that the patient's behaviour is subjectively meaningless and is to be understood as the product of mechanistic and pathological forces.

> The patient I will show you today has almost to be carried into the rooms [sic] ... [He] sits with his eyes shut, and pays no attention to his surroundings. He does not look up even when he is spoken to, but he answers beginning in a low voice, and gradually screaming louder and louder. When asked where he is, he says 'You want to know that too? I tell you who is being measured and is measured and shall be measured. I know all that, and could tell you, but I do not want to'... Although he undoubtedly understood all the questions, he has not given us a single piece of useful information. His talk was...only a series of disconnected sentences having no relation to the general situation.

Kraepelin's description is graphic and his point clear. He is presenting a case to his students in order to illustrate the 'signs' of a 'disease'. The patient's behaviour has no human meaning ('series of disconnected sentences') and was not a free personal response to his situation. Laing, however, turns the tables on Kraepelin by re-interpreting the description precisely as a free personal response of the patient to his situation.

> Surely, [comments Laing], he is carrying on a dialogue between his own parodied version of Kraepelin, and his own defiant rebelling self. 'You want to know that too? I tell you who is being measured and is measured and shall be measured. I know all that, and I could tell you, but I do not want to'. This seems to be plain enough talk. Presumably he (the patient) deeply resents this form of interrogation which is being carried out before a lecture room of students. He probably does not see what it has to do with the things that must be deeply distressing him. But these things would not be 'useful information' to Kraepelin except as further 'signs' of a 'disease'.

Laing goes on to re-interpret further apparently disconnected remarks of the patient in a similar way and concludes:

> This patient's behaviour can be seen in at least two ways... One may see his behaviour as 'signs' of a 'disease'; one may see his behaviour as expressive of his existence... What is he 'about' in speaking and acting in this way? He is objecting to being measured and tested. He wants to be heard.

The conflict between a 'scientific' account of the signs which necessarily accompany a disease and a personalistic account of the patient's free expression of his existence is clear. By skillful re-interpretation Laing has switched from the necessity pole to the freedom pole. To opt for one pole does not however enable him to evade the dualism of humanistic thought and his own later work oscillates irreconcilably between these two poles.[4] In order to switch back to the necessity pole one has only to ask why, if the patient 'wants to be heard', he speaks in so elusive a manner. To answer such a question one must resort to 'mechanistic' concepts, a point Laing, himself, later makes.

Attempts at Resolution

We have, then, a dualism which is implicit in humanistic thought, with two irreconcilable poles. The first, that of necessity, provides a good basis for order, prediction and control but not for humanness; the second, that of freedom, emphasises responsibility, empathy and human experience but is descriptive rather than analytic, individualising rather than generalising. This dualism becomes problematical as soon as we try to deal with concrete situations which obstinately refuse to be categorised in the one way or the other.

In response to this situation we find the following reactions, though often enough they are not consciously articulated.

(i) Popular eclectic solutions aiming at a 'middle path' or 'seeing both sides', but unmindful of the contradictions inherent in such a position. This attitude is common in humanism as Dr. Francis Schaeffer has shown.[5]

(ii) The two poles of necessity and freedom may be explicitly split apart, possibly with the reduction of one pole to the other. This attempted resolution of the conflict often occurs in the form of a science (necessity) — human experience (freedom) dualism. For example, it is only on the ground of a split such as this that the concept of 'social responsibility in science' can arise, for this concept presupposes that social responsibility is external to science, making a synthesis necessary. Instances of the reduction of the one (freedom) to the other (science) are provided by the 'scientisms' which see man as a more or less elaborate machine. Classical behaviourism is a well known example[6].

(iii) Finally there are the attempts at a synthesis between the poles of necessity and freedom which aim to achieve a 'human' science or a scientific anthropology. These attempts at synthesis tackle the problem at its root and often imply a profound insight into the nature of the issues involved. Nevertheless, so long as they hold to the pre-theoretical and religious commitment to the science-freedom ground motive, no degree of insight or sophistication will suffice to resolve the conflict; indeed, the most able attempts have rather served to sharpen it.

We shall examine three such attempts at synthesis — two by Christians and one by an atheist. In the cases of Niebuhr and Ellul, it is our contention that their work, in attempting a synthesis between necessity and freedom, demonstrates the influence of the humanistic ground motive as well as Biblical revelation. Thus, possibly unwittingly, both thinkers remain trapped in the necessity/freedom dichotomy. Though both have contributed richly to Christian scholarship, their work reminds us of the need for constant reassessment against biblical revelation.

We have not selected these three individuals primarily for their contributions to social analysis, significant though these are. The reason for our choice is rather that all three share a concern for both interpreting the world and changing it. This double focus upon scientific analysis and human experience throws into sharp relief the associated conflict between the science and freedom motives.

Jean-Paul Sartre: Existentialism, a Philosophy of Freedom

J.P. Sartre who identifies himself as an 'atheistic existentialist'[7,8] is probably the best known representative of the European movement known as existentialism and he has had a significant influence on contemporary sociology.

In *Being and Nothingness*[9], his major philosophical work of the early 1940's, he consistently developed the implications of the humanistic thesis that man is alone in the universe, that there is no sovereign God. If this is so, then man is not defined externally, outside himself. There is no external measure of who man is, in the sense that, for example, there is an external measure of a commodity like a house which is, in essence, for living in. If, however, man is not in essence defined, then he first of all exists and must create for himself who he is to be. Hence arises the famous formula defining existentialism as 'existence before essence'[8]. Sartre finds his starting point here, in the supposed nature of man, alone in the world, creating himself, and responsible in his freedom only to himself for who he is. Central to this view is an emphasis on the responsibility inherent in such a freedom which places the individual's choice over against the void. Once the thesis of humanism is taken seriously — that man is alone in the world — emptiness does not simply lurk in the wings waiting, but, in Sartre's horrible phrase, "nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being — like a worm"[9a]. It is scarcely surprising that with this emphasis upon the 'angst' involved in authentic choice and with the entry of nothingness into the very heart of being, Sartre was accused of proposing a sordid, base and nihilistic philosophy[10].

It is clear that Sartre's view is rooted in the freedom pole which we have outlined above. This was early recognised and the philosophy was critcised, particularly lucidly by Marxists, as subjectivistic and voluntaristic; that is to say, rooting itself in the free, undifferentiated and autonomous choices of individuals. Symptomatic of this was the inability of the philosophy to deal with the more complex social structure, with groups or with ethics. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre twice promises to deal with this issue by founding an existentialist ethic which would act as a bridge between individuals in concrete situations[9b]. The whole question is finally relegated to another book which was, however, never written.

The fact is that Sartre never achieved a theoretical ethic and that the weakest area of his thought is his analysis of the relations,other than destructive ones, between individuals[11]. It seems symptomatic that, in his well known trilogy *Roads to Freedom*, the main character, Mathieu, only acts authentically on one occasion and that is one which seemingly involves his own death as he kills others in war. Sartre had intended to write a fourth volume in which Mathieu survives and authentically realises himself in solidarity with the Communist Party. The volume was never written, and the most lucid literary development of existentialist philosophy ends: "But Mathieu went on firing. He fired. He was cleansed. He was all-powerful. He was free."[12] "Hell is other people"[13] is the inevitable finality of such individualism.

The meaninglessness of such an individualistic stance forced Sartre towards a collectivist pole where the norm of freedom gives way to a norm of mechanism: the dialectical method. Sartre tried, and failed, to bridge the abyss which had opened between the individual and larger social structures and it was not until the 1950's that he developed a more sophisticated framework within which to analyse group structures in concrete contexts. It is to this that we must now turn.

A Dialectical Resolution?

In *The Problem of Method*, Sartre asks whether it is possible to construct a structural and historical view of man. That is to say, a view which aims at a synthesis of the necessity/freedom antithesis and avoids both voluntarism and determinism. He starts by criticising Marxism as having come to a full stop, thinking that it knows all the answers and thus falling into idealism. "Men and things had to yield to ideas" and freedom could find no place in historical necessity[14a]. Sartre places

Marxism at the necessity pole as a static, fixed, 'totalised' theory of history and society. Against this he opposes the individualistic pole of existentialism which "intends....to find mediations which allow the individual concrete — the particular life, the real and dated conflict, the person — to emerge from the background of the general contradictions of productive forces and relations of production"[14b]. However, having established these two poles, the problem of finding a synthesis arises and, to do this, he proposes a technique: the progressive-regressive method. Following the structuralist tradition, he identifies two dimensions of a community: a horizontal complexity of men and their relationships (corresponding to our freedom pole); and a vertical complexity consisting of the history of the community spread out, as it were, over time (and corresponding to our necessity pole). The 'method' proposes that, by interweaving these two dimensions (progressing and regressing) so that each enriches the other, it is possible to construct a sort of increasingly complex spiral each point of which gives the totalised background from which the individual acts, as well as the individual's detotalisation of the given in the making of history. A family, for example, has a multiplicity of horizontal aspects — the environment, the relationships between members and so on; however, it also has a vertical, historical dimension of previous generations, of present parents as past children and even of the 'survival' of previous family members in the present family nexus (as when a mother says of her son that he is the 'spitting image' of his deceased grandfather). According to Sartre, such a family cannot be understood either in terms of the free activity of its members in the present, or in terms of its history; in order not to get lost in such complexity, one has to analyse methodically both dimensions and rediscover, elucidated, the truth of the present.

This attempt by Sartre to resolve the conflict within humanism between individual freedom and historical necessity is criticised by traditional Marxists as simply another form of voluntarism — that is, as attempting to ground history in contingent individual choices. Certainly Sartre has difficulty in establishing that existentialist ideology does not undermine the Marxist concept of truth in history and he has largely failed to extend his critique to wider social analysis. In view of the fact that he regards collective objects as parasitical upon the concrete activities of the individuals involved, this is perhaps not surprising. Sartre, himself, has demonstrated his method most convincingly in biographical works which again find their focus in the lives of the individuals concerned.[15] The other notable development has been the application of the progressive-regressive method to the analysis of families experiencing crisis[16,17]. It is significant that here too the emphasis is on the individual within a social structure (family) and that the social structure itself, because it is in crisis, is in a fragmented state. It would be interesting to see a similar analysis of less fragmented families where the structural aspects might be expected to have a more prominent place and the biographical aspects a lesser one. Laing *et al.* promised just such a volume in the mid-1960's but it was never published.

Sartre's appeal to a dialectical method to resolve the necessity-freedom antinomy of contemporary humanism is unconvincing. The specific applications are most successful when the focus is biographical or in some other way centred upon the individual. There has however been a general failure to do justice to the structure of particular concrete social institutions.

Two Christian Approaches

Both Niebuhr, an American of German origin, and Ellul, a Frenchman, are influenced by modern existentialism to the extent that *paradox* is central to their thinking, as is the case with key existentialist figures such as Kierkegaard and even Sartre. Neither of them really attempts to resolve the necessity/freedom issue; Niebuhr seeing a contrast between 'natural necessity' and 'creative freedom' as a distinctive factor in human life, and Ellul wishing to emphasize God's freedom and, at the same time, man's responsibility to make a personal decision of faith when confronted by God's Word, in spite of the binding realities of social and political 'necessities' which may hinder him.

Reinhold Niebuhr: A synthesis?

Niebuhr's thought developed over the period of the 1920s to the 1950s, quickly leading away from a liberal, social gospel, towards a more radical perspective in which he was strongly influenced by his experience as a pastor among car workers in Detroit, and by his reading of Karl Marx. At the same time he opposed Protestant orthodoxy on the grounds that it was too strongly committed to the *status quo*. In his later work themes such as sin and redemption play an increasingly prominent role, but his treatment of these issues remains 'neo-orthodox' in that the Biblical accounts from which these themes emerge are treated primarily as 'myths' rather than as rooted in historical events.

Niebuhr accepts the assessment of 'positivist' science that 'objective' factors surrounding human life are governed by necessity. These factors give a general shape to society and history and constrain the lives of individuals: "The most indubitable constancies are those which are rooted in natural necessities, as, for instance, facts of geography and climate in man's collective life and those of sex and age in man's individual life."[18a]

Freedom enters in that man attributes meaning to his experience of such necessities and he is able to act upon them to some degree and to use them creatively to achieve his goals. Niebuhr sees 'the self' as "a creature which is in constant dialogue with itself, its neighbours and with God"[18b] and this he holds to be the Biblical view.[19] However, his view of freedom is far from romantic and here his position can be clearly distinguished from the optimism of liberal theology. He is acutely aware that we all use our freedom to further our own selfish ends, and that sin is a reality in our experience, such that any view of personal or community relationships which overlooks this is hopelessly utopian. His insight into the multifarious ways in which this self-centredness can be revealed, even in the most altruistic actions, is one of the most striking aspects of his thought:

> The universal inclination of the self to be more concerned with itself than to be embarrassed by its undue claims may be defined as 'original sin' ... We will understand the nature of this universal inclination if we note that it expresses itself on many levels ... A person may be thoroughly 'devoted' to a cause, a community, or a creative relationship and yet he may, within the terms of that devotion, express his final concern for his own prestige, power or security.[18c]

Indeed, Niebuhr sees the most worthy causes and the most noble commitments as allowing the possibility of the greatest pretension and therefore the greatest sin. For example, writing just after the end of World War Two he issued a warning to America, Russia and Britain not to fall into the same temptations of pride and injustice against which they had been fighting:

> No man or nation is wise or good enough to hold the power which the great nations in the victorious alliance hold, without being tempted to both pride and injustice. Pride is the religious dimension of the sin which flows from absolute power and injustice is its social dimension. The great nations speak so glibly of their passion for justice and peace; and so obviously betray interests which contradict justice and peace.

It is, however, important to note that Niebuhr, rightly, does not equate finiteness and sin as, for example, classical Greek thought did — he cites the story of Prometheus to illustrate this. Rather, the Biblical account shows us that sin is evidenced in man's attempts to use the freedom which God has given him to challenge the limits which God has rightfully set: "In the 'Fall' myth it is not regarded as inevitable that men offend God in his creativity. God sets limits for finite man, but these limits do not exclude his dominion over nature and all that this dominion implies ... Man's sin consists in a pride which pretends to defy those limits."[18d]

Thus Niebuhr sees an order of natural necessity constraining our lives but at the same time an area of real freedom and creativity, although this freedom carries with it a destructive undertow which cannot be ignored. This makes it necessary for us to be realistic, not idealistic, in our hopes for society. We cannot expect, for example, to carry the Christian ideal of love directly into the political arena. Considerations of justice must come first in this sphere. "If love means wanting the welfare of the neighbour, it can never be irrelevant to any social situation. If love is defined exclusively in terms of attitudes which can express themselves only in personal relations, as it is frequently defined by Christians ... it becomes irrelevant in any situation in which structures of justice must become instruments of love".[18e]

Niebuhr poses two key questions regarding any social and political programme: Does it "do justice to the moral resources and possibilities in human nature and provide for the exploitation of every latent moral capacity in man?" and does it "take account of the limitations of human nature, particularly those which manifest themselves in man's collective behaviour?"[21] Thus he sees 'freedom' and 'necessity' as equally important in social policy and political activity. As a result he has been termed a 'Christian realist'.

Similarly, Niebuhr sees freedom and necessity as intertwined in the fabric of human history, so that the task of historical interpretation is highly complex and not subject to easy generalizations. The metaphor he uses is that of a 'drama', with plot and sub-plot cutting across one another: "History is the more complex because one pattern is super-imposed upon another: the dramatic pattern of a national history, for instance, on the dramatic pattern of a whole culture."[18f]

The emphasis on drama, however, highlights an undercurrent in Niebuhr's thought which still owes much to a dialectic ultimately derived from the Greek world-view, and in particular the shape of Greek tragedy, rather than that of Biblical history. For him, Christ stands at the centre of history as, in a sense, a 'tragic hero', with the cross and the resurrection representing the core of a dialectical contradiction between 'nature' and 'grace', rather than a real redemptive act in history, accomplished by God on man's behalf.

Thus, Niebuhr does not finally show us the biblical pattern of Creation — Fall — Redemption being unfolded in real dealings between God and man in history. Rather, he tries to combine perspectives deriving from humanistic, and ultimately Greek, thought, together with some penetrating psychological insights of modern existentialism, with elements of a Biblical vision. In so doing he highlights some important aspects of the problem of 'freedom' and 'necessity' but he fails to resolve it.

Jacques Ellul: An Antithesis?

Jacques Ellul comes from a very different background. He is Professor of Law and Government at the University of Bordeaux, and a Protestant who played an active part in the French Resistance in World War Two. Yet, he too could be characterised as a 'Christian realist' for he harbours no illusions as to the power of pious hopes and moral strictures to influence the 'necessities' of political and social life today. At the same time he is thoroughly uncompromising in his demand that Christians should stand fast on the truth that they believe, regardless of whether it appears unfashionable, negative or utopian. For example, in his provocative book on the timely subject of violence, he states:

> Only one line of action is open to the Christian who is free in Christ. He must struggle against violence precisely *because*, apart from Christ, violence is the form that human relationships naturally and necessarily take. In other words, the more completely violence is of the order of necessity, the greater is the obligation of believers in Christ's Lordship to overcome it by challenging necessity.[22a]

Like Niebuhr, then, Ellul sees two opposing orders in the world; on the one hand nature, sin and necessity, but on the other, revelation, grace and freedom. However, this latter order is not destined to find its fulfilment in history — it will always lead those who follow it, as it led Christ Himself, into suffering.

Ellul is more familiar with the social sciences than Niebuhr, although he is sceptical of many of their claims. He has written detailed studies of politics[21], technique[22] — that is the dominance of the 'technical' approach in so many areas of modern life — and the process of secularisation[23]. This last study analyses new 'sacred' entities which perform the traditional functions of religion, including technique, sex, the nation-state, revolution and the myths of history and science. On the other hand, Ellul has written a number of books which reflect on theological issues and Biblical themes — for example, *The Meaning of the City*[26] which looks at the power of the image of the city in the Scriptures, pointing on the one hand to rebellion (the city that Cain built) and on the other hand to redemption and fulfilment (the New Jerusalem).

The themes of necessity and freedom are implicit in much of Ellul's work and he identifies the source of freedom with God's

Word, rather than with man's creativity — though itself God-given — as Niebuhr tends to do. For Ellul, necessity rules in the ordinary processes of the political and social order, whether they be the dealings of the 'establishment' or of revolutionary groups of leaders today or kings in the Old Testament times. However, God's Word breaks into the chain of necessity with a challenge which often seems irrelevant or outrageous but which nonetheless commands both the attention and the obedience of the believer. Thus, if the Christian seeks to intervene in the social order — and Ellul is convinced that he has a vital role to play in this sphere — his intervention will never fit easily into established patterns and conventional alliances. For example, if he decides he must participate in some violent activity — knowing God's command 'Thou shalt not kill' — he must proclaim this command even as he stands alongside his comrades in the war, the revolution or whatever the situation might be. Thus:

> He ought to be the conscience of the movement; the one who, on behalf of his unbelieving comrades, repents, bears humiliation, and prays to the Lord; the one who restrains man from glorifying himself for the evil that he does.[22b]

Christians should be 'realists' in the sense that they are not to be easily taken in by the glib justifications which the world proposes for its policies; we must be prepared to strip them of their moral justifications and thus to undermine their credibility. Yet we must not do so as cynics, as if we hold to no values at all; rather, we hold to the realities of God's truth, refusing to compromise its message to accord with the cultural climate of the time. As St. Paul says: "Do not let yourself be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom. 12: 21)

Thus, Ellul emphasizes the radical distinction between God and the world, between His Word and the natural order of things. In many ways his vision is allied to that of Karl Barth, for whom God was 'wholly other' — a phrase which Ellul also uses.

Since he identifies God with freedom as against a natural order of necessity, Ellul is open to the possibility of the Holy Spirit working in unexpected ways. This gives much of his writing a refreshing, even provocative, character. However, he is far from rash:

> Christian realism demands that a man understand exactly what he is doing, why he is doing it and what the results of his doing will be. The Christian can never act spontaneously, as though he were an illuminist ... contrary to widely held opinion, faith in the Holy Spirit does not mean that we act imprudently, close our eyes and refuse to think; rather, it means that we must use our heads and try to see with clarity.

> True, the Holy Spirit — who is clarity itself — may propel us into the greatest imprudence; but then we shall know it.[22c]

What Ellul's work seems to lack in its emphasis on the paradoxical relationship between God's Word and the world into which it is spoken, is a recognition of the creation order which His Word brought into being. The Bible teaches us that, in spite of man's radical Fall into sin, which must not be underplayed, some residual 'fit' still remains between man, the universe, and the God from whose hand both proceeded. (Cf. Rom. 1: 18-21) As he focuses on the freedom which God's word in the gospel can give from the binding 'necessities' we seem to experience in our lives, this leads him to undervalue the 'sustaining grace' whereby the creation order is upheld and evil is restrained from its worst possible excesses. From this perspective man does not seem to face such an implacably hostile world of 'necessity', though its traps for the unwary are no less real. There is certainly no excuse for Christians to remain content with the *status quo* — a trap into which the Church has too often fallen — and the need to unmask man's attempts to 'sanctify' the order he attempts to impose upon the world from his own self-seeking perspective remains as strong as Ellul suggests, but the predominant pessimism which often seems to colour his vision could perhaps be thus allayed.

Summary

The three writers whose work we have discussed here have all been aware of an increasing emphasis on order and control in the modern world and they have been concerned to search out areas for the operation of human freedom in an attempt to combat this. Sartre sees the potential source of such freedom in the irreducibility of the cultural order to the natural order. Niebuhr and Ellul, however, are both too aware of the corruption of the cultural order to found freedom there. For Niebuhr, human creativity gives a promise of freedom but this promise remains unfulfilled because of the binding necessities of the 'natural order' and of sin. For Ellul, freedom can break into the world through God's Word, but this appears to be radically opposed to an abandoned world of necessity.

We are thus left in the end with the familiar modern view — typified by contemporary science — that the universe is a 'closed system' governed by laws of necessity, and in spite of himself man has been sucked into such a system in his social and political life. If there is to be any place for freedom, and if God can act into the system at all, it is only in extraordinary ways.

Conclusion

In conclusion we should like to draw attention to some practical implications of the freedom/necessity dichotomy as it affects contemporary social policy and the political choices we face today. In doing so we shall, to some extent, be following Ellul's advice to Christians to face contemporary issues critically and from a perspective of real commitment to God's truth.

As we look at the world around us it is obvious that the freedom/necessity issue does not only arise in theoretical thought but also has real consequences for action. For example, even a cursory glance at the programmes of the two major political parties in Britain reveals evidence of the power of this conflict.

On the one hand the Conservative Party identifies itself as the party of the 'free market economy' — and never was this more clearly seen than at the last General Election. Together with the emphasis on a free market we find an insistence on certain individual freedoms — for example, freedom of choice for parents regarding their children's schooling and freedom of tax-payers to decide what to do with their own money as opposed to high levels of taxation by the state with money channelled into public projects. At least, these freedoms were proposed in the party's manifesto even if they have not been fully implemented yet in practice.

At the same time, however, the Conservative Party also emphasizes 'law and order' in a commitment to increased control over certain sorts of behaviour which are regarded as undesirable. This policy embraces both the notion of harsher treatment for young criminals (Mr. Whitelaw's arguments in favour of a 'short, sharp, shock') and also the government's thinking on industrial relations, comprising measures to place trade unions under stricter legal controls. This type of thinking derives from the 'necessity' pole of the dichotomy we have been discussing, and it stands in uneasy tension with the party's ideas of freedom, sometimes adding fuel to the flames of accusations about the party's class bias.

If we turn to the Labour Party, however, we find a similar contradiction between ideas of necessity and freedom, but in a different form. Labour party policy emphasizes the role of order and planning in the economy, where we find a strong emphasis on public ownership and accountability, planning and government control. Hence the idea of a wages policy has been influential and Labour governments have been much more willing to intervene in the industrial life of the country to safeguard what they have seen to be vital areas of our economic life, than have Conservative administrations.

On the other hand, the politics of the 'left' have been associated with a greater emphasis on civil liberties than those of the 'right', as seen, for example, in a readiness to espouse the causes of disadvantaged and minority groups; whether they be immigrants, women, homosexuals, or one-parent families.[27] It is in this area that we see the influence of the 'freedom' side of humanistic thought.

It is instructive to note that the differing emphases on necessity and freedom which characterize our two main political parties are related to different ideas of justice in society. While Conservatives see curbs on the free market as an unwarranted interference in individual liberty, Labour's economic policies claim to aim at greater economic justice for the community as a whole. On the other hand, Labour's defence of Trade Union rights, for example, is construed by Conservatives as an unjust distribution of power allowing union 'barons' to run the country.

Each position can be understood in relation to the history of the respective parties' ideologies, social bases and sources of electoral support, but the one-sided view of justice which each programme demonstrates can surely be related to the failure of humanism to establish a satisfactory basis for social and political ethics. This failure is intimately related to the oscillation of humanistic thought between the two poles of freedom and necessity.

In his book *How Should We Then Live?* Dr. Francis Schaeffer argues persuasively that with the loss of a Christian basis in Western society freedom veers towards chaos while order can only be based upon 'arbitrary absolutes'.[28] We are open to the tyranny of the majority ("the 51% vote"), which can opt for one set of values today and another tomorrow, or the tyranny of a technocratic elite, such as that predicted by American sociologist Daniel Bell.[29] Most ominously of all, perhaps, such an elite would have available to it the sophisticated tools of modern electronics and the mass communication media, allowing it to manipulate the opinion of the majority more or less as it wished. Schaeffer predicts a slide towards authoritarian government which will be accepted by the majority so long as the shoddy values of personal peace and affluence are not threatened.

Although we may differ with details of Schaeffer's argument, Christians must surely be concerned about such a prospect and it is incumbent on us to explore the real possibility of a positive Christian alternative to such authoritarianism. The three thinkers whose work we have discussed in this paper were aware of similar dangers and they were all vitally concerned to preserve a real role for freedom and the value of persons amid the overwhelming contemporary acceptance of the 'necessities' imposed by technology, the media and other similar forces. Yet, as we have seen, their attempts to achieve this aim themselves fell into the necessity/freedom dichotomy, which tends, in the end, to relegate freedom to the sidelines where it can only play an 'extraordinary' role.

The Christian knows from the Scriptures not only that freedom can only derive from God — as Niebuhr indicated and Ellul emphasized — but also that the true source of law and of orderliness is God Himself, who has made man, and the world in which we live, according to His will. Thus, man and creation both have an inherently normative character, that is to say they are subject to a law which is not ultimately that of impersonal necessity, but of God's Word.

This understanding should provide us with a radically different perspective on law from that of humanism. For example, the 'laws' of science do not derive from a blind necessity, but from the character of the created order upheld by God. Similarly, moral law relating to personal ethics, and law in society in the widest sense — for example, social and economic justice as well as civil and criminal law — must both be derived at root from the righteous character of God Himself, in whose image man has been made, and from God's commands to man;[30] as opposed to our own utopian or 'scientific' schemes.

Such a perspective also reveals to us the true place of human freedom within the circle of God's law. This was something which Niebuhr recognised, as we saw earlier, and he also acknowledged that man's proud attempts to claim an autonomous freedom lay at the root of the contradiction we now experience between what we suppose to be 'freedom' and external 'necessities'. In a fallen world the harmony between God's law and man's liberty has been lost, but God has remained faithful to His creation and we see in the promises given to Israel, in the work of Christ and in the new way of living seen in the early Church, that God is at work to restore in the kingdom, that which was 'very good' in the world that He created. Through Christ's saving work we are able to enter into new life, and in living that life we should see God's rule as extending over every area of human activity.[31] We know that we shall never see that rule perfected in this present age, but when Christ returns to fulfil the promises and institute His glorious reign, will He find the way prepared, even in the social and political order, by those of us who claim to be His disciples?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Dooyeweerd shows how the 'ground motives' which characterise successive periods of Western thought, though distinct from one another, yet reflect residues of earlier themes. For example, the nature/grace ground motive characterising the medieval period reflects residues of form/matter dualism

but transformed by the Thomistic synthesis of Greek and Christian thought. Similarly, the necessity/freedom ground motive reflects secularised elements of the nature/grace theme. See: L. Kalsbeek, *Contours of a Christian Philosophy*, Wedge, Toronto, 1975.

2 The example given in this section is derived from Kalsbeek, Ref.1, Ch.5.

3 R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, 1960, Harmondsworth ed. 1965 p.29. On Laing see also J.N. Isbister, this JOURNAL 106, 23.

4 For example, compare: Laing, H. Phillipson & A.R. Lee, *'Interpersonal Perception'* 1966 with R.D. Laing, *'The Politics of Experience'*, Harmondsworth, 1967.

5 F.A. Schaeffer: *Escape from Reason*, IVP, 1968; *He is There and He is not Silent*, 1972.

5* For the Puritan view of science, which showed a greater influence of Biblical thought, see: *Jour. of Christian Reconstruction*, 1979 6(1). [Also Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration*, 1975.- Ed.]

6 B.F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, 1972. See also: F. Schaeffer, *Back to Freedom and Dignity*, 1972.

7 This was in contrast to a movement which, loosely, identified itself with Christianity.

8 J.P. Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism.

9 J.P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 1968; (a) p.21; (b) Pt.2, Ch.1, Sect.3 and Conclusion.

10 S. De Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, Harmondsworth, 1965.

11 See, for example, J.P. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, 1962.

12 J.P. Sartre, *Iron In The Soul*, 1963, Penguin p.225.

13 J.P. Sartre, *In Camera*, (*Huis Clos*, Paris 1965).

14 J.P. Sartre, *Search for a Method*, Vintage Books, NY, 1968, (a) p.23; (b) p.57.

15 Notably in works on Flaubert and Genet. For brief accounts, see: Ref.14 and R.D. Laing & D. Cooper, *Reason and Violence*, Tavistock, 1964.

16 R.D. Laing & A. Esterson, *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, Harmondsworth, 1970.

17 Esterson, *The Leaves of Spring*, Harmondsworth, 1972.

18 R. Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History*, 1956. (a) p.56; (b) p.16; (c) p.30-31; (d) p.92, (e) p.202; (f) p.56.

19 Niebuhr's formulation of this definition seems to owe more to Kierkegaard than to the Biblical emphasis on man made in the image of God — a definition of man which certainly implies the relationships highlighted by Niebuhr but which does not make them constitutive of man's identity.

20 R. Niebuhr, *"The Nemesis of Nations"*, *'Discerning the Signs of the Times'*, SCM, 1946, p.64.

21 R. Niebuhr, *Introduction to 'Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 1932.

22 J. Ellul, *Violence*, 1970: (a) pp.127-8; (b) pp.141-2; (c) p.82.

23 J. Ellul, *The Political Illusion*, Knopf, NY; 1967.

24 J. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, Vintage Books, NY, 1970.

25 J. Ellul, *The New Demons*, Oxford, 1976.

26 J. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1970.

27 It should perhaps be noted, however, that not all minorities are championed by the 'left' and this policy can be quite selective – for example, the rights of the unborn child have tended to be subordinated to the 'rights' of women, while those of workers with conscientious objections to joining a trade union have also been overlooked in favour of the interests of organised labour.

28 F.A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, Revell, New Jersey, 1976, Ch.11.

29 Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, 1973.

30 'Command' is here used in the sense that everything in creation is subject to God's law for it, and accordingly, law is not in opposition to, but the condition for authentic freedom. See, for example, Kalsbeek Ref.1 and R.J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, Craig Press, USA, 1974 for two different developments of this position.

31 For an application of this to the social and political order see A. Storkey, *A Christian Social Perspective*, IVP, (1979).

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