

Creation's Orphans:
Toward a Metaphysics of Artifacts
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The purpose of these pages is to focus philosophical reflection on the humblest denizens of our life world, the lowly artifacts. Nor do I wish to speak of the more picturesque of their kind, crafted by hand and endowed with a derivative humanity by long caring use, the brichen bowl, the long-cherished enamel coffee pot, the teddy bear or the earthenware pitcher in which, as Heidegger would have it, the potter's hand and the fruit of the vine focus the richness of the earth, the vastness of the sky, the glimpse of the holy and the bittersweet awareness of mortality.¹ I am concerned with, so to speak, the "second generation" artifacts, the anonymous objects stamped out in their thousands by automated machines, distributed en masse and discarded in the same manner--plastic cups, rental typewriters, last Christmas' video games and cheap tin ashtrays--that invade our life world like anonymous aliens.

Artifacts in that sense--"objects" in Heidegger's terminology, as contrasted with things--have always posed something of a problem for Western thought. Angels, puppy dogs, trees and boulders, even the products of arts and crafts, are much easier to deal with. In some basic, deeply felt sense, they belong, they have their place in the order of things. To a religious believer, they are our fellow creatures, lovingly crafted by our God to declare his glory and worthy of respect as such. Even to a person for whom God is not a living presence, they remain an intrinsic part of nature--or perhaps Nature--endowed with a function, serving their role, and so belonging. There is something personal about them. But artifacts? Garrish machine-made baubles of chrome and plastic, they lack even the aesthetic justification of a work of craft or art. What of them?

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

Western philosophic thought, if it deigned to notice them at all, always treated artifacts with respect. Heidegger speaks of Zeuge, usually rendered "gear," whose being is exhausted by their being ready or unready to hand and noted only in use, devoid of intrinsic reality of their own.² Gew-gaws, junk, baubles, widgets were not created, they did not grow, they were not even crafted. For the most part, they happened as accidental by-products of human intention, designed and produced not as an end but as a means only. At the same time, though, such artifacts have increasingly come to play an important, at times even a dominant role in human lives. No sooner do humans satisfy their most basic needs for food, shelter and security than they turn, as often as not, to the accumulation of widgets to give a continuing purpose to their lives. In the quaint language of a century ago, it is a "fetishism of commodities." Though we may flatter ourselves that the glory of America is its freedom and justice, empirical evidence suggests that it is the plethora of widgets that the world most envies us: an American ball point pen, not what is written with it, is the status symbol beyond these shores. Nor, closer to home, do the purchasing patterns of American consumers contradict that evidence. Philosophers may be too busy to notice it, but merchants know it well: it is the lowly widget, soon to end in a yard sale or a dumpster, that is the unmoved mover of our society.

Nor is the increasingly prominent presence of artifacts confined to our collections of fetishes. Even more prominent are the artifacts which increasingly displace physical objects in our effective environment. In Milan Machovec's metaphor, we walk on asphalt, not on the good earth, look up at neon, not the starry heaven.³ The current fascination with the idea of an alien invasion may well reflect lived experience. Our life world is being invaded by beings which remain intrinsically alien to us. Here again a metaphor might be helpful. An alien, let us say, is a being whom I cannot address as "Thou," recognize as a fellow being

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

endowed with an intrinsic worth, intrinsic dignity of his--or her or its--own. But the artifacts with which we are increasingly furnishing our world are precisely that. They come into being solely to serve as tools, as means rather than as ends. Increasingly, we live in an effective life-world which is devoid of intrinsic meaning, intrinsic dignity, a world of concrete cubicles arbitrarily lit by artificial light, a world in which only an occasional potted plant or a caged animal serve as reminders of the living world whose part we once were. What is more, there is every indication that, if humankind survives at all, it will be increasingly in man-made environments. To the extent to which philosophy, in spite of the temptation to become a techne, remains the Socratic attempt at understanding, it might face no task more urgent than to formulate a strategy for being human in an increasingly dehumanized context. How do we respond to a world devoid of meaning, anonymous and artificial?

Cautiously at best, and often with a distrust tinged with fear. Unless we are prepared to resign our own moral humanity and accept the role of producers and consumers within an automated system, we cannot but feel ill at ease in such a world and seek refuge, in fact or in fancy, in a world that is still God's, nature's and the craftsman's world. "There still is night," I wrote, nearly a decade ago,

"down where the long-abandoned wagon road disappears amid the new growth beneath the tumbled dam, deep virgin darkness as humans had known it through the millenia, between the glowing embers and the stars. . . . Here a human can dwell at peace with his world, his God and himself. . . . In the global city of our civilization, girded by the high tension of our powerlines, we have abolished the night. There the glare of electric light extends the unforgiving day far into a night restless with the

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

erie glow of neon. . . . The world of artifacts knows neither a law nor a rhythm. . . . We ourselves have constructed that world for our dwelling place, replacing rude nature with the artifices of techne, yet increasingly we confess ourselves bewildered strangers within it."⁴

Against that background, it is easy and entirely understandable to link the defense of our personhood with the defense of the natural. Thousands of readers are rediscovering Tolstoy and Thoreau, Annie Willard's Pilgrim at Tinker Creek has gone into its tenth printing, craft shops do booming business and the dividing line between personalism of the human world and personalism of the world of nature grows increasingly tenuous. Not without reason: as Hannah Arendt understood clearly, depersonalization of our life world goes hand in hand with the depersonalization of human relations. The strategy of linkage--reaffirming our personhood by respecting the "personhood," now in the sense of the intrinsic worth and dignity of all creatures--represents a cogent alternative to the strategy which the West has followed ever since the Renaissance, that of the "conquest of nature" and of replacing rude nature with the works of artifice.

Nor is that strategy alien to the spirit of personalism. The core of personalism has always been the recognition, in Borden Parker Bowne's phrase, of "Person as the ultimate metaphysical category." More generically, personalism is an affirmation of the ontological and epistemological primacy of "personal" categories not simply in describing the community of humans, but in describing the ultimate nature of reality.

American personalists have not typically resorted to that idiom, though other writers, such as Max Scheler, often have. Ironically, the clearest delineation of the position may well be

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

in a book whose intent, I believe, was not personalistic, Edmund Husserl's Ideen II, Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution.⁵ Husserl, like Scheler, notes that the contents of our experience are capable of being subsumed under several distinct categorical schemata. One is that suggested by the realm of the inorganic, centered on the metaphor of matter in motion and relying on cause and effect as its basic explanatory categories. Another is that suggested by the realm of living beings, centered on the metaphor of need and satisfaction and relying on teleological explanations. The third is that suggested by the realm of the works and interactions of humans, centered on the metaphor of the Person, the moral subject, and relying on categories of understanding rather than explanation--and an understanding in moral terms, within the context of a moral law. This is the realm that Husserl, Scheler and their spiritual kin designate, interchangeably, as "geistig" or "personalistisch."

Personalism, however, goes a step beyond the recognition of the plurality of categorial schemata. By itself, such a plurality could be simply acknowledged as reflecting the irreducible plurality of symbolic forms, as Cassirer tends to do.⁶ Personalism, however, recognizes that while the rule of pure reason may be "both-and," the demand of practical reason is "either/or." The realms interact, raising the question of the relative ordering of categorical schemata. What categories, for instance, shall prevail in the interaction of humans with the realm of the organic? Should we argue that the vital categories of need and satisfaction here override moral categories, so that efficiency of production--conversion of grains into animal proteins for human consumption--overrides all categories of compassion and respect for our fellow creatures, so that the most unspeakable cruelty is permissible in dealing with "biomechanisms"? Or shall we argue that moral categories are primary and govern human interactions not only with each other but with the non-human world as well?

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

Personalism represents nothing less than the affirmation of the ontological, epistemological and ethical primacy of "personalistic" categories. While Western thought since the Renaissance, if it acknowledged the legitimacy of moral categories at all, treated them as a special case theory appropriate to a special realm only, the noumenal for Kant, the emotional for Schleiermacher, personalist thinkers like Scheler affirm them as fundamental. Describing the world in "personalistic" categories of value and meaning, governing its interrelationships in terms of respect and compassion, represents, for personalist thinkers, not a special perspective on an ultimately meaningless reality, but an articulation of the ultimate structure of reality itself. It is the categories of the natural sciences that present a partial, special perspective. Reduced to an aphorism, personalism could be said to be the view that ethics is the general, physics merely a special science. Or again, to speak of the cosmos as a community of persons is a factual description, to describe it as an aggregate of matter in motion a special perspective from a particular viewpoint.

So defined--and it is, admittedly, the most radical definition I could muster, short of doing outright violence to the tradition--personalism does indeed yield a perspective continuous with the recent rediscovery of the moral sense of nature. In a barest outline we could say that the cosmos is a society of Persons governed by a moral law: the command of compassion and respect between beings of intrinsic moral worth. We become aware of it, thanks to the double gift of reason and empathy, in our relationship with our fellow humans, but it governs our relationship to all created beings. It is in recognizing the intrinsic personhood of all creation that we affirm and fulfill our own personhood.

A reading of recent intellectual history and our present predicament follows from that basic perspective. The decision of the Renaissance to substitute a strategy of conquest for respect and

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

compassion, reducing the non-human world--in the age of colonialism, even non-European humankind--to a reservoir of raw materials, humans transformed the community of humans from an intrinsic part of a meaningful world to an untenable anomaly in a meaningless one. As step by step they--we, really--have substituted artifacts, devoid of intrinsic worth and dignity, for natural object, they created an illusory image of themselves as the makers of all things and the source of all meaning. Technology fulfilled a part of the serpent's promise, "Ye shall be like Gods"--for, in a world of artifacts, that is the role humans assume. But the burden has become too great, the situation too anomalous. There is no room for a moral subject in a world of artifacts and so, increasingly, humans have sought to resign their humanity and to conform to the ways of their anonymous, impersonal products, the artifacts.⁷ The strategy for reversing the trend is thus appropriately one of "back to Nature," rejecting the anonymous world of artifacts and rediscovering the moral law and our own personhood in the context of natural beings, endowed with intrinsic dignity.

There is, I believe, enough truth in such a reading that it must be taken most seriously. Yes, I believe, this is ultimately a cosmos, a community of beings endowed with an intrinsic worth and dignity, and governed by a moral law. Yes, I believe, it is in recognizing our fellow beings, human or not, as Persons that we become aware of the moral law, thanks to the double gift of reason and empathy. Yes, in a world of artifacts, devoid of a dignity of their own, we become blinded to the moral law and acquire a wholly distorted vision of ourselves--and it is the world of natural beings that can recall them to us. All that appears to me true, for good and sufficient reason, and, in the language of the Prayer Book, "worthy of all men to be believed."

And yet I find the romantic conclusion that condemns the world of artifacts as a work of the devil and commends a return to "nature" as the

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

sole strategy for preserving our personhood deeply problematic, and that for several reasons. One is historical: American personalism, especially in the writings of Borden Parker Bowne, did not include any clearly defined ecological ethic. Bowne fully shared the "technological optimism" of his age: though a farmer's son, he was a man of the city, not a ruralist, and welcomed the precipitous technological change of his time--which he witnessed at its most horrendously rapacious--as "progress." The non-human world appeared to him as less than fully real, and he was fully prepared to integrate his personalism within a Renaissance strategy of a "conquest of nature." Bowne clearly saw something that we do not see.

A second, related problem is ethical. For all the problems it has brought on, technology has clearly improved the lot of humans. There is something deeply disingenuous about the romantic image of the mediaeval peasant or the eighteenth century craftsman. Their lives, for the most part, were not poems of harmony with Nature. They were nasty, short and brutish: human life had little value and that of animals none at all. Both the peasant and the craftsman were ruthless--albeit relatively inefficient--exploiters of the natural environment, driven by exploitation they suffered. Technology has humanized--as well as dehumanized--our lot.

A third problem is metaphysical. What, finally, would a "return to Nature" mean for humans? A return to the technology of crafts and subsistence agriculture?!? The problem is not that the human has, throughout his history on this earth, been a maker of artifacts, a homo faber, but that, as free, the human is intrinsically an "un-natural" being. Knowledge and decision stand between him and nature. Even nature's moral law he does not obey "naturally," instinctively, automatically: he must recognize it through reason and empathy, and choose to obey it. Whatever return is called for--and however nature can aid it--it cannot be simply a return to nature.

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

And, finally, there is the practical problem. Though the Renaissance turn may have been unfortunate, it has become irreversible. Short of a global catastrophe which would wipe out all but a handful of the human inhabitants of this earth, humankind, in its present numbers, can survive only as a race of city-dwellers, calling upon the resources of ever more sophisticated technology and, consequently, living in an ever increasingly "artificial" world. Were the only solution to the dehumanization of technological civilization a return to nature, the problem would be insoluble.

All these are serious problems, and especially so because I believe that the problems which the nature-oriented component of personalism seeks to address are real and critical--and that its basic analysis is sound.

Let me start with the Renaissance turn that today appears, to writers as diverse as Emanuel Radl and Peter Singer,⁸ as almost the original sin of modernity but which did not appear problematic to Borden Parker Bowne. On Radl's and Singer's interpretation alike, that turn appears as a bolt out of the blue, an explosion of hybris which drastically altered the course of civilization from one of symbiosis to one of conquest. I, too, have so interpreted it, yet such a reading is problematic. The Renaissance, finally, was in a real sense a rebirth, a rediscovery of themes present earlier in the history of Western civilization. In this case, it was a rediscovery of a Stoic motif. The late Roman Stoics, Marcus Aurelius as an example, anticipated the motif of a deep seated conflict between humans and nature. They conceived of humans as bearers of the divine logos, of reason, and of nature as dark, threatening and fundamentally irrational. The metaphor of struggle or battle appears not infrequently in Stoic writings, and is given a moral significance: the task of humans, the bearers of reason, appears as one of subduing nature's irrationality and imposing reason's rule upon it. In making straight the road--and the Stoics built with a vengeance,

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

roads, bridges, hospitals--humans conceived of themselves as imposing moral rules on nature's chaos. Given the technology available to them, their impact was minimal and was soon wiped out by the invading Goths and Vandals--was that a return to Nature?!?--but their theme was one of conquest--and its motivation eminently moral.

When the men of the Renaissance took up that motif, their motivation was still the same, fundamentally moral, though their technology was different. That technology, though, did not spring full-grown from the forge of Vulcan. Only in nineteenth century fantasies do "means and modes of production" determine social development: in reality, the order is reverse. What the Renaissance had that the Stoics lacked was centuries of Christian heritage, with its insistence on the intrinsic worth of concrete, individual, embodied humans. After all, the Christians believed that this created world, though marked by passing and perishing, was so precious that God gave his only begotten Son for its sake, and Himself became incarnate. To the Stoics, Reason may have been precious, but individual human lives were not and so the idea of labor saving would have held no particular appeal to them. The men of the Renaissance, steeped in Christianity, saw it differently. To them, sparing needless human drudgery appeared as a moral command. Undoubtedly, motifs of human greed contributed powerfully to the momentum of the technological development, but those are perennial motifs. The distinctive Renaissance combination was that of rationalization and labor saving, giving the distinctive Renaissance direction to the perennial human striving for the goods of this world.

Seen against this background, the Renaissance turn to "conquest of nature" appears in a different light, no longer simply as an expression of human rapacity but as the acting out of a moral impulse as well. It was this latter aspect of the industrial revolution that enabled even thinkers like Bowne, keenly aware of the primacy of the

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

personal, to perceive the explosion of technology as "progress"--in spite the wholesale devastation it also entailed. There may be, as the success of the Amish testifies, a yet more excellent way, but the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw around itself a mankind altering what for millenia had appeared unalterable, famine, pestilence, poverty, drudgery and all that condemned the majority of humankind to the short, nasty and brutish life of precarious drudges. The luxury of concern for the environment and the personalistic quality of life was bought for us precisely by the technology which successfully challenged the dark, dehumanizing aspects of nature of which the Stoics had been so keenly aware. The plight of the third world should serve as a reminder of what our own lot had once been. Though it might be possible to argue that the strategy of restricting needs and rationalizing agriculture, acted out by the Amish, would have been preferable had humankind followed it consistently since the early seventeenth century, the fact is that it did not. Today, the reversal of that strategy--wholesale abandonment of technology--would produce nothing short of a disaster for the vast majority of humankind.

Nor--and that is the metaphysical problem--would it be easy to argue that the generation of artifacts represents a betrayal of authentic humanity. Rousseau's claim that "a thinking man is a depraved animal" may have been useful for its shock value, but it would be hard to defend. What we see around us suggests far more that it is the unthinking man, his life no more than a series of conditioned responses to random stimuli, that is the depraved animal of his species. The mindless mob, the consumer wholly absorbed in the lock-step of need and satisfaction, extended by easy steps to the level of greed and gratification, that is what depersonalization is all about. Human freedom, which is precisely what transforms all human acts into artifice, product of free choice and responsible decision, is the definitive aspect of human nature, of human being as Persons. Rousseau's romantic conception of "return of nature"

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

as a return to a putative pre-personal, pre-moral, instinctive level of being human would represent not a return to but a dramatic denial of such nature as we can attribute to humans. The ways we choose to use our power of artifice may be deeply problematic, but the power itself is not: technology, however alien it may have become, is also an authentic expression of being human.

And so also the last point: though the direction of our technological development may be susceptible to rechanneling, though we can set different priorities for our technological striving than the mindless quest for ever greater surplus affluence for a particular, rather limited community of the privileged, it is no longer within our power to reverse it. The original Renaissance decision was not the original sin of technological civilization, solely an outburst of arrogance and greed held in check in previous centuries by the Church. It was a moral, morally oriented decision addressing intensely human problems which the mediaeval Church had ignored. The development which flowed from it, for all its flaws, had also an ethical value, holding out a promise of freeing humankind from the bondage of drudgery and disease. It was not "unnatural" but an expression of something definitive about the "nature" of humans: their ability to respond to ideal stimuli and to envision and produce alternatives to the ageless state of humans and societies. Nor, finally, is it a decision that we can reverse, even if we should want to. It is something we must live with--and, given its ethical aspect, can live with. . . .

Unfortunately, even though all this may be true, it does not change the reality of the problem. If anything, such considerations make the problem more acute because they point out that humankind cannot escape the consequences of its technological turn by a romantic return to nature with which it had comforted itself ever since the problems of technology made themselves felt in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. Still the problem is

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

real: humans living in a world of artifacts, of dead objects devoid of worth and dignity, devoid of a life and a rhythm of their own, easily lose the sense of the dignity of being and of the moral law that governs it. It is reason reflecting on the empathic identification with the Other that opens us to an awareness of that moral law. In a world in which the Other is an "it" and reason becomes the servant of technology, that awareness becomes exceedingly difficult. It would be easy, as Scheler--or, if you wish, St. Francis before him--saw, to be a personalist in a world of nature: the only argument needed would be, circumspice! In a manmade world, a technologically produced world that is not God's but "man's," that argument would support depersonalization.

Should we then give up the attempt to remain Persons, moral subjects in a morally ordered cosmos, as a left-over of an earlier, pre-technological era? Or, as the existentialists of a generation ago, defiantly assert our personhood against the impersonality of our world? Looking over the literature of the past fifty years, those appear to be the options for dealing with technology--either reject technology and return to nature, metaphorically, the Thoreau option, or defy technology in a Promethean grandeur, the Sartre option, or finally to surrender to technology, becoming anonymous machines ourselves, the Watson option. Personalism represents a significant contribution not in aligning itself with one of those options, though both "the Thoreau" and "the Sartre" lend themselves to it, but by presenting a distinctive option of its own, that of the personalization of the world of artifacts.

Here it behooves us to tread carefully, since "personalization of artifacts" all too easily conjures up images of painting faces and flowers on cruise missiles--and that is not what it is all about. Rather, much as the ecological movement in philosophy needs to generate a metaphysics of non-human living beings and an ethics of dealing with them, so a personalism of urban life must generate

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

a metaphysics of artifacts and an ethics of living with them.

For far too long, we have treated artifacts as creation's orphans, and not without reason. If we set aside for the moment the special class of the products of craft, artifacts are indeed beings which have no prima facie root or place in the scheme of the creation--or, if you prefer, of nature. They were not created, neither did they grow or were crafted. They happened as the side effect of a specific intent. A carver may have intended this carving in itself, as an end, not as a means merely, and I may have appreciated it as such. No one, though, intended a computer or a cheap tin ashtray "an sich." The intention may have been data processing in the first case, litter control in the other. In either case, the artifact is a means, with no being, no intrinsic dignity of its own.

Or so it would seem--though it is not altogether so. Though for more than a century and a half humans have now fancily applied the term "creation" to their production, the usage is inaccurate. Humans do not create: creatio ex nihilo is a privilege reserved to the Almighty God. The most humans can manage is to reshape, to mold a creation they receive as a gift. Their products are not creations, materialization of pure human intent. They embody and reshape other beings, even if it be no more than copper ore and fossils burned for energy. Artifacts, we could say, are uses to which humans put the created world--or, if you prefer a secular metaphor, "the bounty of nature."

That metaphysical recognition has an ethical consequence. Artifacts are not only products but also gifts, be it of God or of Nature. Their being has been bought at a price, be it of animals slaughtered, trees felled, ore mined. A gift, though, requires gratitude as a response. It is surely one of the most elementary prima facie obligations to treat a gift with respect. Though

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

I might ordinarily ignore dandelions except as raw material for a salad, when a child hands me a wilted dandelion with an eager smile, "look, beautiful flower, I brought it for you," I experience an immediate obligation to thread it in my buttonhole or place it in a glass with water. Though artifacts were neither created nor grown nor crafted, humans yet owe them the respect due to a gift.

It might, to be sure, sound farfetched to speak of my moral obligation to an aluminum beer can discarded by the road side, yet that obligation is real. That aluminum, embodying both a prodigious amount of labor and a part of God's creation--or, in a secular metaphor, a non-renewable natural resource, is a gift. Though it might be my privilege to use that resource, that gift, it is immoral for me to waste it. Though in individual cases a calculus of utility might be relevant, in principle I do have a moral obligation to the discarded beer can to pick it up and deposit it in the recycling bin. I have an analogous obligation to the neat yellow-lined pad of well-made paper, to use it well, not to waste it, or to the coat in my closet, to wear it and care for it.

That recognition should lead to a related recognition--that I have an obligation not to neglect the artifacts that I have brought into my life-world. The reason has to do with the first metaphysical aspect of artifacts we have mentioned: artifacts are the uncreated beings, neither created nor crafted nor grown. They are wholly dependent on humans, their makers, for their meaning, and in producing and acquiring them humans undertake a responsibility. I can neglect a tree growing on my land: that tree has a life of its own, its own agenda. Though abandoned by me, it is not bereft. An artifact, the long-unworn coat in my closet, has no life except that which I give it through use and care. To leave it hanging there, unused until moths reduce it to rags, is, to be sure, immoral, not only because somewhere there is a person who is cold without

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

it, but more fundamentally because I have taken of God's gifts or Nature's bounty not for use, but for waste. There is, though, a more far reaching consideration still: having no life of its own, the artifact not endowed with life by use and care becomes "dead" matter, impersonal, alien. It need not be that: it could become a friend of years of use--I have such coats, tools, pots. Unused, uncared for, however, it becomes alien and impersonal.

Here, I believe, we are at the core of the matter. Contrary to Rousseau's romantic intuition, we do not find ourselves strangers in a world invaded by aliens simply because we have utilized our God-given--or "natural"--ability to produce artifacts but because we have failed to live up to the responsibility which this ability entails. We have produced and abandoned our products, we have acquired and abandoned our acquisitions. It is in being abandoned that they have become alien, impersonal, in turn threatening our own being as persons, rendering it anomalous. A well used, cared for artifact does not become impersonal, and in turn does not depersonalize its user. It can, like my well worn coat, enhance the quality of his personhood. It is the unused, uncared for, abandoned artifact that becomes anonymous and depersonalizing.

Perhaps a metaphor might underline the principle. It is not the Christmas tree, lovingly decorated, around which a family gathers, that is an alien in the world of humans, even if it is of the spring-loaded, aluminum variety. It is the Christmas tree discarded in an alley, blown by the wind, that become that. It could have been cut up for kindling, shredded for mulch, or used amid that underbrush to provide shelter for small animals. Only as abandoned did it become alien litter. It is not the use we make of the world but the disuse, the overflowing dumpsters and crowded closets, that are symptomatic of the decay of our civilization. We suffer not from production but from neglect.

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

Might that not, though, be a distinction without a difference? Might not our incredible waste, our voluminous production of useless surplus of artifacts, be an intrinsic feature of a technological civilization, built into its very nature? After all, a generation ago, in the 1950's, it was a commonplace to argue that waste is the pillar of affluence, that it is built-in waste, the disposable item, that fuels the economic cycle--and that to repair instead of discarding is to stand in the way of "progress!"

If that were so, it would be a damning indictment of our civilization. I do not, however, believe that it is so, at least not necessarily. To be sure, living amid American affluence, it is difficult to imagine how we could possibly do justice to the flood of artifacts with which we surround ourselves to "keep the economy functioning." We have so much more than we can possibly hope to use and care for. We are not, though, alone: we can get help. The few hundred million who "have everything" are an island in the midst of billions who have practically nothing. We can get help: there are more than enough naked humans in the world to empty our closets and provide every one of our disused coats with someone to use and care for it. Our surplus of widgets might pose more of a problem, but where is it written that widgets are what we must produce? Could we not choose to use our resources to produce, say fuel efficient cooking stoves for countries where shortage of fuel threatens to become a cause of starvation?

Of course we could, but here the argument becomes circular, since the word, "choose," introduces a new dimension. We could choose, but then our choices could not be the unthinking result of the interplay of unintended economic equations but of a personal, ethically guided decision. At this point, the ethics of living in a world of artifacts becomes directly continuous with the ethics of personal being as such, and the argument returns to the basic personalism.

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

Still, the circle was not in vain. Having traveled from the personalism of the community of persons through a personalism of nature to a personalism of artifacts and back we can no longer avoid the recognition that personalism cannot restrict itself to issues of personal growth and interpersonal relations. That may well be the starting point: the recognition of the central theme of the growth of humans to the full stature of Persons, or moral subjects, as a central theme sui generis, not reducible to psychological or somatic considerations alone. That theme, central to the early years of American personalism and still its intrinsic part, leads directly to the broader issue of the growth of human communities into societies of persons, governed by a moral law of which we become aware in reason and empathy--in the recognition of our fellow human as a Thou, as a Person endowed with an intrinsic worth and dignity, and in the rational and critical articulation of this recognition and its normative consequences for human interaction.

The recognition, familiar already to Kant, that we cannot preserve our own moral personhood if we are not willing to allow it to our human Other--if, in familiar words, we are not prepared to treat humanity, whether in our own person or in that of another, as an end and not as a means merely--leads to the theme which began to emerge in personalism in the 1970's as much as the consideration of social ethics emerged in it in the 1930's--that we cannot hope to preserve the moral personhood of our individual and social being if we deny it to the created world around us. To recognize living nature as a society of persons and our relations to it as governed by the law of respect no less than our relation to our fellow humans is not only a condition of our physical survival, but of our moral survival as well. Cruelty to animals is no less dehumanizing than cruelty to our fellow humans. Yes, there is a food chain--though it is worth nothing that the vision of the lion and the lamb lying down together is as old as Isaiah--but the food chain

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

does not justify disrespect. For there are, ultimately, no asymmetrical relations. The callousness required to treat the other, be he human or animal, in no sense as an end but as a means merely deforms the perpetrator as well as the victim. Resorting to Martin Buber's terminology, there are no "I-it" relations: in any such relation the I also becomes an it.

That is what leads to the next step: if we are to survive as Persons, I's, in a world of artifacts, it is urgent that we not content ourselves with treating the world as a realm of its, of entities which are means merely, devoid of all end value, of all intrinsic dignity and not worthy of respect. It becomes literally a matter of Personal survival to approach the world of artifacts with appreciation, care and respect, to endow it with quasi-personal value much as the child does with a teddy bear. It means recognizing the value of the artifacts as embodying a part of God's creation or of "Nature." It means recognizing the obligation--and the need--of responsibility for humanizing it. To have is not only a privilege: it is also an obligation.

That recognition suggests a different strategy than the one of the mindless multiplication of artifacts we have hitherto followed. Affluence appears not only as an abundance of possession but also as an abundance of responsibility, and needs be weighed carefully. Can we live up to the additional responsibility of adding yet another widget to our crowded world? Every time we displace yet another part of nature with a mechanism of our own designing, we are taking on yet another responsibility: think of the responsibility we took on when we replaced the rhythm of going forth and of resting marked by the day and the night with the arbitrariness of flicking a light switch! Are we ready for yet another responsibility? The answer is not inevitably negative, but the point is that the question must be asked. If it is not, if we continue to treat our products as a means and not also as fellow beings, we imperil our own humanity

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

as well. Personalism cannot be selective: either personal categories are in truth fundamental and universally applicable--or they become untenable even among persons. If you doubt that claim, circumspice! Any philosophy that establishes a category of beings exempt from moral considerations can always include subcategories of humans within that exempt category, and invariably does.

Technology, enabling us to produce a secondary reality of entities that neither grew nor were crafted, entities that were not created, fulfilled a part of the Serpent's promise: we have, within that world, become like gods. We can survive only by being like God in the crucial respect--that God is love.

Notes

¹I am referring to Martin Heidegger's evocative description of the immediate encounter with the thing--in Buber's terms, as a "Thou," in Heidegger's in der Nahe--in "Das Ding," Vortrage und Aufsätze, (Pfullingen: Gunther Neske, 1954, 1978), especially pp. 158-63, written in the solitude of the Schwarzwald.

²This description reflects Heidegger's earlier, urban perception in Sein und Zeit (Tubingen: Neomarius Verlag, 1957), pp. 66-76.

³Regarding Milan Machovec, see my The Embers and the Stars (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. x, 225.

⁴Ibid., pp. ix-x.

⁵Husserl's excursus into personalism appears to have been occasioned by his reading of Max Scheler's Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die Materiale Wertethik. It appears only in the second volume of Ideen, Phänomenologische Studien zur Konstitution (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), in the second and third part of that work. Husserl's intent appears to have been to describe

THE PERSONALIST FORUM

three "regional ontologies," as correlates of natural, psychological, and human sciences respectively, but in adopting the terminology of "personalistic" for the third he, perhaps unintentionally, gives it a special status. I have dealt with it in a paper delivered to the 1984 meeting of the Husserl Circle, "Husserl's Personalism in Ideen II", in press.

⁶Cassirer, in his Classic, An Essay on Man (New Haven: Yale, 1944, thirtieth printing, 1979) does, I realize, present science as the symbolic form par excellence (pp. 207ff), but the point is that this is accidental to his basic claim of plurality, stressed throughout his work.

⁷Cf. detailed documentation in The Embers..., pp. 3-26.

⁸Radl's slender volume, Utecha z filosofie (Praha: Cin, 1946) remains unpublished in English; Peter Singer's work, The Expanding Circle (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1981) is readily available.