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Is there anything new under the sun?, 1930.

"IS THERE ANYTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN?"

GIVEN BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

AT THE TEMPLE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30th, 1930

An eminent author once discussed this subject of human progress before an audience and was rather pessimistic about the possibility of human progress.

After the address one woman in the audience who was very much perturbed about the whole subject, asked the question: "Well isn't there any progress at all in the world; isn't there anything new under the sun?" And he is said to have made the reply; "It is clear lady that you have never had a child or you never would have asked the question - 'is there nothing new under the sun?'" For as regards the individual, the mind - anything is new, his birth, his growth, his being in itself is a new miracle. His early age when his mind opens to the first impressions of the outer world, is new. Its newness, every sight and every sound, everything which his senses perceive come to him as a new revelation.

And as he gets older there is newness for him in store in his books, in his contacts, in other people, the friends which he makes.

Later on in life there is a world of exhilarant in his ambition, in his striving after objectives and goals. In fact throughout his life man can enjoy

the intellectual spirit of setting for himself consistently new objectives to attain and new ideals.

But our question this morning friends, does not deal with newness in the individual life of man, but newness of mankind.

Of course the knowing ones among us will smile when the question is put, 'is there anything new under the sun?' "What," they will say, "how can you ask such a question in an age which has witnessed wireless, radio, television, Zeppelins crossing the ocean, an age in which new miracles are born daily in our chemical, physical and medical laboratories?" Why our age tolerates nothing but what is new. If you want the newest thing in psychology, philosophy, in literature, in pedagogy, in morals, in music, only that which is really new has any authority in our midst. A thinker must speak in terms of the day after tomorrow to have any reverence in our midst.

Art is not only dissatisfied with the past but even in the present. Art has to be futuristic to be up to date. Tradition, - that is to say that which is handed down and Conservatism, - that is to say that which is conserved out of the past are suspect in our midst.

And so they smile when the question is put, these knowing ones. They point to human progress of man, rising from the man-ape in the jungle to the present twentieth century homo-sapiens. They point to

the long road which is ahead of the human race, the endless road which will bring man to the undreamt of heights of perfection.

What, therefore, can a person mean when he asks the question is there anything new under the sun? And yet even these romanticists of progress are some times disconcerted. Especially when they come upon facts and movements which are strangely reminiscent of ideas and movements which carried hundreds of thousands of years ago among peoples and civilizations long since dead.

Thus, for example, in the realm of economics - the bread lines are certainly nothing new, the soup-kitchens and giving caste-off clothing to the poor, that is not a creation of the twentieth century. We had this kind of unemployment and poverty in ancient Rome, in ancient Athens, in ancient Judea, along the banks of the Nile and the Ganges, just as we have it today along the banks of the Hudson and the Ohio; the same age-old struggle between the masses and the classes, between the rich and the poor; between those who have and get more and those you haven't and get less. Where is there the newness in life?

You read about monopolies and mergers and speculations. They knew of these things in Egypt three thousand years ago as they do today in Wall Street. You talk about Socialism and Communism and you think ^{you} ~~we~~ have hit upon something quite peculiar to the twentieth century and yet the merest off-hand reading of history will indicate

to you that mankind has experimented with these economic systems ages ago, - Socialism, cooperatives, Communism.

There was Communism among our own people in Judea before the Christian Era. There were many communistic sects in Europe during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries, especially in the ages following the Black Plague of the Fourteenth Century and the Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century. Russia is only the last link in a long chain of communistic experimentations which have gone on in the world for millenniums - for thousands of years. What is new?

And when we find ourselves appealing, for example, in 1930, for the poor, the dispossessed, and when we find ourselves today pleading for the poor, the property-less, the hungry and the naked, and against oppression, we catch ourselves in a the echoes of the phrases that Jeremiah spoke and Amos over twenty-five centuries ago; the same problem, the same approach, practically the same .

When you enter into the realm of politics, then you think you are in a new world which belongs specifically to our own age. Here, too, there were democracies in Hellas, in ancient Israel, in ancient India. Every conceivable form of political organization, monopoly, dictatorship, democracy, anarchy were experimented with by some people and some race in the world.

And as far as graft is concerned and corruption, corrupt jurists, rackets and racketeers, prohibitions,-that is an old story. The literature of any people is replete with connotation of all of these political aberrations which we think are peculiar to our day. What is new under the sun?

You come into Pedagogy, child study. Some fond mothers who go from one lecture to another, are led to believe that this is quite new. People up to this day knew nothing about child rearing. In fact the rearing of children must have been some incident in the lives of people up ^{to} the last decade.

Well, they may not have had intelligence tests in the old days but they certainly had intelligence and they applied it to family life, namely the rearing of children. And when you come across a statement like the following, which summarizes the whole philosophy of child rearing (quote)

"Raise a child according to the trend of his nature." That summarizes the whole of modern pedagogy which has any philosophy at all. And those ages knew the whole problem of heredity and environment just as well as Dr. Watson does and they gave to that psychology the same answer that our psychologists do today. In fact all the problems of modern philosophy were known and studied and discussed by schools of philosophy two or three thousand years ago. We have not improved even one iota upon the manner in which those ancients presented the

problem of physics. They did not build a complete field for that but they knew the problem and applied their intellect, which was not more adequate than our intellect in a solution of the problem.

When you come to the realm of art and literature you are a little apologetic about the rule the ancients have set for us as our standard and our model. They knew every form of literature in which we are engaged today and they excelled in them, whether it be the drama or epic or lyric poetry, or writing of history, or biography or auto-biography, an essay, fable, parable, letters or a maxim. Every conceivable form of literary writing was formed in ancient days. We have not improved upon them at all. In fact every sophistication in literary writing was known.

The same is true in other forms of art. And some times the things we assume to be very primitive in Chinese, Indian and Egyptian art, as really the last word in sophistication, marking the end of the larger school development among these people, and what seems to us to be primitive, is really a summary of the whole line of artistic development.

Is there nothing new under the sun?

They loved truth and beauty as much as we do. They sought to establish in their work as perfect a society as we do and perhaps to as well as we did. In fact, I am inclined to think that the individual counted for much more in those days than he does today. There was much more of the quality to human life than there is to it today. Today the hugeness of our sky dwarfs man. In olden days man's literature, his architecture, magnified the spirit of man and exalted him. What is there new under the sun?

Well, Koheleth, that gentle cynic whose book is one of the most intriguing of the Bible; Koheleth who lived probably twenty-two or twenty-three hundred years ago, was a sophisticated individual, a man who had traveled far and wide and knew of the wisdom of his day, - denies that there is anything new under the sun. He challenged the whole concept:

"One generation goeth, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever.

The sun ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where it ariseth.

The wind goeth toward the South, and turneth about unto the North, it turneth about continually in its course, and the wind returneth again to its circuits.

All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is never full; unto the place whither the rivers go, thither they go again...

That which hath been is that which shall be,

And that which hath been done, is that which shall be done,

And there is nothing new under the sun."

That's a crystalized philosophy of the old civilization. That is not the accidental reflection of an individual.

"I have seen of the works that were done under the sun" says Koheleth. And it is his conclusion that there is no progress. Life goes round and round in a circle like those crazy mice that you have probably seen on exhibition. They chase their tails around the cage, getting nowhere not even catching their tails.

Now do you think that Koheleth is an intellectual sport; that his ideas are extreme? Let me call your attention to a great leader whose book has revolutionized the lives of many people, especially in Europe. I am referring to Mr. Oswald Spengler and his great book "The Decline of the West."

Oswald Spengler maintained, and to my mind there is potent logic in his position, that mankind is an organism, - an organism which has a regular structure just like any other living organism; that the history of the world is only the collective biography of a certain ^{number} ~~XXXX~~ of the cultures which have lived in the past, each one of which passed through a definite cycle of infancy, maturity and decay; - of spring, summer, autumn and winter.

In other words, that a culture has exactly the same history as a man, an animal or a tree or a flower - growth and decay. And that a culture must come to the end in death just as irrevocably as a man or a plant must come to the end, - in death, when its full possibilities have been actualized and expressed - when his work is done.

Thus, for example, the oak tree does not keep on growing until it reaches the sky. It has definite limitations. A man does not increase in physical stature beyond a certain height. He grows six or seven feet and then he stops, and his mental development does not go on indefinitely. At some time in his life old age will set in, senility. Sooner or later he will decay and die. That's the law of organism for a man or a plant

That's the law of a culture too, of a civilization.

Now the implication of this is very tremendous. For this means that there is no one order, no one science, that began way back over fifty thousand years ago in the jungle and has continued in an unbroken line to our own day. "Not at all" says Spengler. "There are many orders and sciences belonging to many cultures, each of which lived its life, expressed itself fully and came to a definite end when that culture closed."

Our present day Western culture for example, -"our culture, the culture of Western Europe," maintains Mr. Spengler, "is only one among many and one, for example, which began about the year 1000 A. B., a culture which began in the Middle Ages. That was its springtime, the awakening time, the period of dream-laden life for mankind. And then it passed into the summer period, when the city life began to develop. That period closed about the middle of the Sixteenth Century, according to Spengler. Then it entered the autumn period, the period of rationalism which closed with the French Revolution, with Kant.

And today, maintains Spengler, we are actually in the winter period of the cycle of this culture period which is characterized by the big city civilization, the metropolis period, which is un-religious, un-philosophic, in which the force of spiritual energy is becoming extinct; a period which is reminiscent of another culture, namely the second or third century in the Roman culture, - uninspired, practical, decadent.

And so Mr. Spengler maintains that the West is declining; that it has come to the close of the cycle of its culture and while we can not

prognosticate what the future will be in detail, we can, maintains Spengler, foretell the destiny of every culture.

Thus the future of our present day culture is not a limitless tending upwards and onwards for all time towards our present ideals, but a single phenomenon of history, strictly limited and defined as to form and duration which covers a few centuries and can be viewed and, in essentials, calculated from available precedents.

In other words there is nothing new under the sun. What is happening in our present day Western civilization happened in a previous culture, in many previous cultures. Hence we are reminded of what seems to be startling in our cultures as something which happened in China.

It is logical that it should be so for they have passed through and we are today passing through a similar experience in our culture and every phase in a given culture corresponds to a given phase in every other culture.

That gives you a new philosophy of history if Spengler is correct.

I believe that there is something new in our world today which did not exist in other cultures. Perhaps nothing new qualitatively, but certainly something new quantitatively.

There were sciences in ancient days, especially mechanical sciences. The ancients knew a great deal about the laws of mechanics, the laws of hydraulics. They knew a lot about mathematics.

They knew extensively about astronomy. And thus our culture, even the winter of our culture, according to Spengler, has produced one thing, namely power, - steam power and electric power. And they have revolutionized life because the ramification of these newly found powers had not even been glimpsed by man.

Now it remains to be seen, of course, whether this newness of scientific discovery will prove a blessing or a blight to mankind. It has not at all been demonstrated that they are working for man's good. It may well be found, as Freud said:

"It may produce a state of things which man will be unable to stand." That man will be destroyed by the very thing which man is today producing for his comfort and his advantage. For remember friends, that science is not civilization. Science is organized knowledge. But civilization, which is the noble art of community life, requires much more. It demands beauty, which is art. It demands faith which is our religion. A real civilization, a real culture, requires not only intellectual values but artistic and spiritual values as well.

It is possible that our age will spoil and leave mankind bereft. So that I venture to say that a real scientist, when he is confronted by this question - is there anything under under the sun - will pause

The doctrinaire scientist, of course, has become very purse proud in our day and is evidencing the qualities of the nouveau riche, so much of the wealth which science has brought to the world, that he looks upon religion and art as sort of a poor relation because they have not progressed as rapidly as science has.

But in reality art and religious philosophy can not progress as rapidly as science can. You see, man has but yesterday, so to speak, become acquainted with his outer world. He has but yesterday learned to investigate scientifically the actual structure of the world, the laws of the universe, and he finds himself like a child in a toy shop. There are so many things to be seen. And he wants to try out every new toy. He is surrounded by newness. All the time his eyes are wide open because of the vast number of things which are to be seen, weighed and tested.

But as far as reality is concerned, and art and philosophy with the inner world of man, not with the outer world, why that inner world has been known to man for thousands of years. It has lived with him and man has investigated almost every crease in his character. Perhaps at times not very scientifically but nevertheless he has known his inner world.

Man has lived in society for thousands of years and every quality of social adjustment have been known to him. They wrestled with the problems of the universe as courageously and frankly as we do today and in their moral and spiritual upreaching have to definite peaks and beyond the peaks you can't go. With all your trying you can not improve upon the perfected work of a Homer, Phideas. An artist who attempts to do that would be attempting to paint the lily.

That which is perfect, is perfect. You can not add to perfection. You may

Instead of building a classic Temple you may build a Gothic church. But

you can not improve upon perfection. That's a peak beyond which mankind can not go.

And so I make bold to say that as far as the basic inventory of human ideals, of religious values, is concerned there is very little new that we can add.

What can you add to "love thy neighbor as thyself." What can you add to "Justice, justice shalt thou pursue." You may develop a more perfect technique for the realizing of these ideals. They are there for all time. They will hold good a hundred years from today. You can not improve upon the Ten Commandments because mankind does not need a new Ten Commandments. They remain forever the ten digits of mankind and so the man of faith will not be put out by the fact that his needs are old, that he is still quoting which lived centuries ago.

He will remember that mankind passed through the endless ages, accumulated a vast amount of wisdom which is expressed in religious conviction and in moral ideals. He will cling to them confident that when the intoxication with science will have passed away, as it is bound to, as it is beginning to, and man will realize how much of an aching void there still remains in life, speed and quick movement, how little they really have increased the harmony of the inner life of man, that man will come back humbled to the wells of the fathers, as in the old days, their souls thirsting for God, for the living God.

- Sermon 336
1. One Squires - How can you raise such a question? - In the age of wireless, radio, airplanes, transatlantic flights - television - and when every day brings you a new miracle performed in chess, play, record, laboratory?
- (a) But put away things which are not new as without much authority among us - We want the latest & the newest in psych, in pedagogy, in morals, in music, & literature. In art we are not alone dissatisfied with past but even with present. We demand futurism - a theater must be way ahead, five ages, to have any respectability among us - Tradition - that which has been handed down, conservatism - that which has been conceived, the past - are distinctly suspect.
2. And so they smile when one is so naive as to ask "Is there anything new to the S.C. since Jesus' paper - man has advanced uninterruptedly gaining new truth & new insight steadily. And before man the flocks the wider road & further, unobstructed progress. Man has explored and will continue to explore indefinitely. What, then, does your mean when you ask the timeless question "Is there anything new?"
3. Still, there are moments when even their spontaneity & fervor are disconcerted. Especially when they turn from their opt. dignities to history, or when they come upon facts & circumstances in their day where hunger re-emerges, dead day, war, catastrophes
- (1) Economics - Certainly nothing new in our bread-line & poverty - glaring disparity bet. rich & poor - Bread-lines in ancient Rome - in Athens, in Jerusalem - the Bible & the Talmud as by the Hudson & the Ohio saw through all ages old wars vs. classes properly less
- (2) That one arises and pleads for peace, for peace for hungry, crushed, & against oppression, one finds himself being the key words of ancient Scripture - an echo of Isaiah's prophecy
- (c) Energy - Speculation - covering the market with world rumors in Wall St.
- (d) Socialism - Communism - Corporatism - Wanders over the same scenes, 1000s of years ago - Just what is new!

Circumstances

To ancient China. Dr. Moh. Tessa -

There was a Circumstances set in Judea - Ann. Ch. Ch. - Circumstances
There were many Circumstances set in Europe during 14-15-16c.
Esp. following Black Plague of 14c. & Refers. in 16c.



The ^{power} machine is new - but the ^{con-} ~~problem~~ ^{sequence} created for man by the machine - are not new - all exper. in ~~var.~~ ^{var.} times

well (2) Politics - ^(a) ~~democracy~~. Unusually, objurgatory dictatorial graft corrupt judges & ^{spurious officials} justices, rotations & prohibition were well ^{& fearfully} known to our ancestors centuries & centuries ago —

(3) Pedagogy - ^{child training} 1930 to 50's, a recent summary indicating a renewal of European, Education. They just had no experience. But they had intelligence - and used it. Now when has it been established that mental cap. is an inherited thing. By an inferior to us - know the problem of Hereditary - Environment.

(4) Marriage - Confederation - Civilization - Free-Comp-Proc-ess
Our morality is not new, we are in morality.
State-farm for children - Plato.

(S) Ant. - like a two.

English form ~~not~~ literature - poems to general drama, lyric
poetry, fable, picaresque, romance, children's story, thesis, essay, letters -
epic, vision, autobiography, ballad, narrative, ode, sermon, scientific

- It is we excelled! Every sophistication in art was known to them - and what we regard as primitive as Chinese or Egypt art is

#6) They lived humbly as poor & wif' joyful Leith & paunting.³ Worked for
producers as well. In Ream - Pytkomun - for Wobbe Livers - for nobility.
- Char'dy - Tith - - 71st 71st 71st -

4. Whole concept challenged by Kakeleth - perhaps gentle dignity - man was more machine - on 8th 18th dwarf man - their attitude exacted man

6. In any way we made rad. immunities - Technical Service - Max.
Sitting & looking papers has been revolutionary. Power, position & water.
to remain to be seen

whether it will bless a physical movement still remains to be seen -
I trust it may produce a state of things where no one will be asked, "where?"

(1) Clues are the factor in analysis - It is up them. But

Analysis - beauty - and faith & moral aspect. It needs art. & sp. makes
a wall as well.

So that Definitely Secret must pass before "the" - "a well as well"

Starches used as coverings in physics - rare - plants - Influence
Phidias - Homer - Empirics - Liby - & the Vespers of better - (over)

We can resist a machine - But not in spirit as we were.
They are yesterday. ^{Today} Stumbling upon - Toy shop - But art -
& religion - Inner world - intimately - love in
society - adjustment - A vast account - accumulated
They proceed as frequently - ~~but we have no~~
~~nothing~~ - little that is really new - basic necessity
of relationship - Inner thy neighbor -
Better journey - quartercentury Fresh.
Progress - not discovery - but fulfillment.

1). Man of faith - disrupted - venerable -
When great intricacies - & man will discover -
he will return - to the world which the father
desperately he said threatening -

8. In our life there is all "newness". ~~For him~~ ~~inhabited~~ ~~anything~~
is new - The birth of a new world is a new miracle. & to the child
every thing in order, world comes as something new. new -
As we grow older there is newness in knowledge, in books, in friends,
in tasks we set ourselves - Throughout life we are renewing
ourselves through new ideas, goals -

Each culture has its own formulae of self-expression
which arise, ripen, decay, and even return. There is
no one scripture, no poetry, no mathematics, no physics
but many, each with its own essence different from the
other, each limited in duration & self-contained, just
like a species of plant has its peculiar blossom & fruit. There is
no art or science which began in the
dim distance of mankind. They continued to develop
more or less of how progress to this day - without
day as the culmination of all that has preceded.

On present-day Western culture is but one among
many which began in the ^{early-awakening, dream, prayer} for the Middle Ages - at about
the year 1000 - passed through the summer of early city life
and crucial things ^{and} reformations by the end of the 17th C.

Entered the Autumn of stout intellectual activities
& rationalism, of pol. revolution ~~by the time which~~
closed with Kant & the Fr. Revolution. And now is
in the winter of its cycle, in the big city civilization,
where all creative sp. forces are becoming extinct -
an unhygienic, unphil. corrupt civilization, - like the
Roman Cent 2 or 3rd C. uninspired, practical, despicable,
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which have lived in the past, each one of which passed through a definite cycle of infancy, maturity and decay; of spring, summer, ~~XXX~~ autumn and winter. In other words, that a culture has exactly the same history as a man, an animal or a tree or a flower - growth and decay and that a culture must come to the end in death just as irrevocably as a man or a plant must come to the end - in death, when its full possibilities have been actualized and expressed, when his work is done. Thus, for example, the Oak tree does not keep on growing until it reaches the sky. It has definite limitations. A man does not increase in physical stature beyond a certain height. He grows six or seven ~~feet~~ feet and then he stops and his mental development ~~XXXXX~~ does not go on indefinitely. At some time in his life, old age will set in, senility, sooner or later will He will decay and die.

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that began way back over fifty thousand years ago in the jungle and has continued in an unbroken line to our own day. "Not at all" says Spengler.

"There are many orders and sciences belonging to many cultures, each of which lived its life, expressed itself fully and came to a definite end when that culture closed. Our present day Western culture for example, our culture, the culture of Western Europe, maintains Mr. Spengler, "is only one among many and one for example which began about the year 1000 A. B., a culture which began in the Middle Ages. That was its springtime, the awakening time, the period of dream-laden life for mankind and then it passed into the summer period, when the city life began to develop. That period closed about the middle of the Sixteenth Century, according to Spengler. Then it entered the autumn period, the period of ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

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covers a few centuries. (Inst. p. 39)

WRHS



Oswald Spengler - "The Decline of the West"

Mankind is an organism -

It passes thru definite, pre-ordained -

The history of the world - biography

A culture has exactly same hist. as man

Every C. has def. org, limits + must end

An oak -

There is no one art -

A West. Eur. C. - newly-awakened

All cultures, ancient + modern, resemble

all creations in art - fulfill us
and die down Contemporary

Thus while we cannot predict future -

1/ "It is clear that you never had a child"

2/ One smiles - wireless - miracles - We want best
in art - future's - thinkers - Tradition.

3/ And so they smile - Point to Progress man-made
road sketches - evolved - What can

4/ Still - moments -

① Economics - Bread - hunger - Rome - Althaus -

Rich and poor -

② When we appear

③ Mergers,

④ Socialism -

What is new?

5/ Politics - democracy etc.

graft - prohibition.

6/ Pedagogy. ed. xiv 200 - No. Infall. Tests -

Hereditry vs. Environment. State-Farmer

Knew all our philosophy

7/ Art-literature - Every form - Excelled?

Every sophistication

8/ They loved Beauty - Charity. Life had greater
objectivity.

9. Ksheth

10. Oswald Spengler

11. Radical Denunciation - Screener - "It may produce
a state of things which - will be able to stand"
Screener not Civilization.

12. Wortsmann & must pause - Pursuer
- we can make a machine
- Toy-shops
- Basic Inventory . for the key bln.
- not necessary - Fulfillment

13. Man of Faith