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SOME THINGS DON'T CHANGE

Has human nature changed over the past thousands of years? Those who lack a sense of history may not know the answer to that question. In an age when everything seems to be changing at a rapid pace, they ask, why not human nature?

The technological marvels achieved by science over the past 100 years are truly astounding. Arthur C. Clarke once said, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Today, the prevailing attitude in some quarters is that, given enough time, there is no problem science cannot solve. With regard to the material world, this may be so, but what about basic human nature? Are the universally recognized flaws of human nature amenable to technological solutions? Only the most naïve would think so.

Reflecting upon the human condition, H. P. Blavatsky said, "Civilization may progress, [but] human nature will remain the same throughout all ages" (*Collected Writings*). Despite the "magic" of modern science, the age-old vices such as avarice, laziness, and vanity continue to flourish. In some cases, technology even facilitates bad behavior, as demonstrated by the proliferation of salacious videos found on YouTube, the obsessive texting on cell phones while driving, and the sometimes uncivil and vulgar Web postings by legions of anonymous bloggers. Speaking of bad behavior, the following observation seems to describe the cult of celebrity that is so typical of our times:

The person who lives extravagantly wants their manner of living to be on everybody's lips as long as they are alive. They think they are wasting their time if they are not being talked about. So every now and then they do something calculated to set people talking. Plenty of people squander fortunes, plenty of people keep mistresses. To win any reputation in this sort of company you need to go in for something not just extravagant but really out of the ordinary. In a society as hectic as this one it takes more than common profligacy to get oneself talked about.

If you wonder whether human nature has changed over time, you may want to consult history. And in case you didn't recognize the above quote, it came from the writings of Seneca, a philosopher who lived some two thousand years ago.

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