

# FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

No. 34

35¢

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*Special*

*Feature*

**FREEDOM—**

**A**

**DISCIPLINE**

by Donald  
Bower

An article which presents a different angle on the possibilities of science fiction.



**A** DISCIPLINE is a mode of teaching. Men have chosen to follow the "disciplines" of masters as long as the Earth has nourished the race we call human. Cellini's apprentices—as those of Praxiteles, Rembrandt, or a great modern painter, architect, surgeon, or statesman—underwent similar kinds of experience on the path to virtuosity in their chosen field of labor. Ordinarily, the main procedure of any discipline seems to be spending sufficient time with the "master," listening to him outline his thoughts, testing theories and constructions, feeling out the strength of his gifts, his native genius.

A great man attracts others to himself. Usually, these ones who come to study with him are men who feel their weakness, and they seldom produce work of value equal to that of the master. An instance where this did not follow was the case of Socrates, and of his followers. For Socrates, like some other of the profound spirits in the race history, left no written record signed by himself. But through the efforts of his disciples, we are enabled to observe and listen to the movement of this extraordinary mind. Plato never lost his reverence for his master, and, it would seem, he was never able to forgive the Athenians for executing the teacher of his youth.

In this one respect, Plato did not hear and obey Socrates. For the master had told his beloved friends that he was ready for death, and welcomed it, that it made not a whit of difference to him that he must die now rather than later. He meant to prove the law with his life and his death; and obedience to the law was of more value to him at the time of his death than at any other time. It was the occasion of his greatest struggle, the final test of his knowledge of life, the test of his truth.

In the veriest reality, Socrates wished to have the death penalty invoked, if this were the decision of his fellow citizens. He wanted to note his reactions. He wanted to count his spiritual pulse, as rigor mortis crept along his frame, much as a researcher in medicine might observe the action of a new drug upon his own body. Socrates wanted to know whether he, himself, was satisfied that he knew the truth; and only this manner of death, pressed upon him by circumstances beyond his control, could tell him if he had truly schooled himself to die without suffering of the spirit.

**A**NYONE who reflects deeply about qualities of life will soon come upon this principle: voluntary death, bowing to the necessity of life's cessation before its natural time, is a supreme

test of the faith or integrity of the one involved. There is no struggle with the "self" to be compared with the acceptance of the inevitability of death-with-honor, as against a choice of life-and-dishonor. If we say that Socrates would have kept his integrity by leaving Athens and remaining alive, he would have told us that remaining to accept the decision of the jury would have sustained his honor and integrity in the eyes of all men, but that to leave his city would maintain his good name only among those who knew and loved him. His wish was to be an example of the power to choose, the bodily presence of a disciplined mind, a free soul.

It is because of the free choice of Socrates, to die and give courage to the world, that men are interested in his way of life. For his teachings are secondary in importance to his conviction as to their worth. It is the strength of his conviction, his faith in the goodness of life, that makes us listen when he speaks. But to whom does Socrates speak? As with most great masters, he would speak with the one who gave time for his conversation. That was his only condition. No fees. No material gifts or other considerations. "Stay with me, if you so desire; and we will explore ourselves and each other", was his invitation.

**B**UT WHY was this necessary? Many wise men kept to themselves, as hermits, seeking only the company of their own thoughts. This was not the way of Socrates. He said men must only bear with each other long enough, and they would come to know the Truth. That the questions and answers of one man with another would prove truth to both of them, eventually. We may say that "Truth" meant to Socrates something like this: That which continues without change, or decay, or alteration at the hands of Time and Circumstance. That which endures in genuine security. Of course, he knew that words, or other symbols, could not be "Truth". So "Truth" could not be taught to another, if one had it in his own experience. Men can *talk about truth*, but though talk might bring one to the conviction of truth within oneself, there is no way to communicate it in words to another. Yet, despite this problem, talk is important, for it allows the movement of the mind to be brought more into the open, for better viewing by both parties in this dialogue of truthseeking. Socrates also said that books could not ask or answer questions.

**I** BELIEVE that books can, in some instances, ask the questions that are often in

the mind, and help to suggest answers. And, in the realm of free play of the "imagination", I think that this is precisely what occurs to the writer and consumer of Science Fiction.

The level of "improbability" has been altered so much in the last fifty years that we expect wonders, in the "physical" world; we do not expect a lack of them. And one of the most valuable contributions to the sum of mental disciplines is, I believe, Science Fiction. The writer tests himself, in his capacity to conceive in this kind of labor of the intelligence. And the reader tests himself, also, striving to match the creator of the work with freedom of thought sufficient to accompany the writer along the path to his goal.

And what is the goal? I am sure it is not simply to entertain, even though this would be enough, for relaxation of the kind afforded by Science Fiction is of inestimable value to modern man.

Solomon said there is nothing ever *new* under the sun. Yet, in the realm of ideas, at least the mode of expression may be new; and the experience of participating in ideas is always new. It is like a woman, refreshingly different in each change of dress, and not alone because of appearance. She knows that she has expended effort to create a new harmonious pro-

jection of her inner self... a new pronouncement of her being. This shows in her actions and secret joy as she parades before you with her symphony of color and line. She knows she is a different woman, and hopes you will see it, too. But she knows it, all the same.

**I**T IS THE same way with ideas. It does seem as though one runs into the same ideas over and over again. Nothing is now that was not formerly, even the theory of atomic structure—which must be dated at least 1000 BC. Men knew of the small sub-structure in the material things of life, by the sheer power of thought alone. No laboratory is necessary, if you have the power to think freely. The laboratory enables you to check your findings in one more way, that is true. But, in conceiving the nature of Reality, one checks every conclusion along the path; and no laboratory is necessary for the philosopher, who concerns himself with the problem of the nature of Life and Thought. For these are not material substances, though they have everything to do with the material things we see all about us.

To return to the products of Science Fiction: I see this as one of the finest Discipline of the Mind ever to be employed by mankind in its search for a better instru-

ment of understanding the Reality of life and the universe. In making such a statement, I realize that I have suggested that intelligence is universal, and that all minds are part of this one Intelligence. Whether one holds this view makes little difference as to the effect of the Science Fiction venture into enlarged consciousness. When I say that man searches for a better conceptive and creative instrument, I mean that all men participate in the growth of this general and universal instrument, that as each individual grows and develops in his apprehension of what is Real, he advances the general and unified level of the grasp of Reality, the Truth, which we all seek. (I believe that we seek it in ways unknown to us in ordinary conscious knowledge.)

**S**CIENCE FICTION is a group therapy of enormous size, in numbers of participants, if by this we mean that men are aided by this form of communication of constructions of the mind. One might call physical exercise "therapy". Massage of the body is used on both the strong athlete and the person not enjoying good physical health. In both instances, the desired results are the same: better levels of function.

The stretching of the mind that occurs in writing and reading Science Fiction is highly effective, as I see it,

for one principal reason: No strings are attached, no particular goals are set. Each reader gives what he is able to give, and receives accordingly. It is not true to say that only excellent quality in literary effort is productive of good results, for, if the reader carries on an analytic procedure while he reads, he not only "enjoys" the work, but he is aided by this analytic function, better to see his own shortcomings, and correct them.

This is the situation with writers, and creative workers in any field of endeavor. Each one notes with great care what is currently in the market. He observes its weak points, and the points of strength and beauty. One writer sees that another has gone ahead in some direction, but that probably there will be poor reception of this step taken toward greater sensitivity. The reader gets what he wants, and is able to use. Progress is always slow, so far as a better form is concerned; but never is creativity slackened, so far as meaning of the expressions. The writer knows he must hold his thoughts in some semblance of order, to make his meanings clear.

**B**UT THIS is not a shortcoming of the effort, a drawback of the written word. Not at all. For, really, the writer works to clarify his thoughts unto himself, as much as to express them to others. And, if his thoughts are not more profound than their ordinary written expression, they are not worth reading, they are not of value to others. His thoughts must always run ahead and more deep than the words in which they are carried. If not, they do not carry far, nor effect the reader strongly. It is the potential power felt in written expression, the wordless message hidden in the words, but revealed in the synthesis of the reader's understanding.

Science Fiction is good precisely because it does not pretend to be *authority*. I see now that this is the point of my attempt, in these sentences. As Roger Bacon, the first modern Western Man, said, "Authority may impel belief; it cannot enlighten the understanding." Science Fiction gives powerful encouragement to *the attempt to understand*.

