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THE HUMAN FRAME OF REFERENCE

IT is gradually becoming evident that the central problem of this age is the discovery of how to think about human beings. We have numerous theories of human life and meaning, but no over-all frame of reference that is dependable for checking our thinking about man. Here, in this article, we propose to hazard a general frame of reference within which to evaluate contemporary thinking about man. To set out the scope of this frame, we shall draw upon two Italian thinkers, Pico della Mirandola and Giovanni Battista Vico—men who, it seems to us, sounded the keynote for the entire cycle of Western civilization. From Pico and Vico, it might be said, may be constructed an unequivocal theory of the role and meaning of Western civilization.

Pico (1463-1494) was a leading figure in that portion of the forefront of the Renaissance called the "Revival of Learning." From him we have a philosophic conception of the human being which became the foundation of classical Humanism. In his famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico distinguishes Man from the rest of Creation as the being with the power to shape his own destiny:

> Thou [Man], constrained by no limits, . . . shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. . . . As maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul and judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.

It is not necessary to be troubled by Pico's vocabulary in evaluating what he says. Human beings do have these powers. All study of man as man, all history, all biography, has meaning only through acceptance of this postulate of Pico's. All literature, all philosophy, all ideals and conceptions of freedom and human good flow from the stipulation that a human being is a being who makes choices and who grows or diminishes in stature by reason of these choices. If there is no being who makes authentic choices, there is no man. This capacity for choice is the *sine qua non* of being human. The study of the factors which exert an influence upon the choices made by human beings is only a study of the environment or the theater of choice. Such study cannot eliminate the fact of choice without destroying its own meaning. This is the first principle of the present inquiry.

Pico, we may say, was a philosopher of the individual. Vico (1688-1744), who came later, concerned himself with the study of societies. He was perhaps the first modern philosopher of history. In a work called *Principles of a New Science*, first published in 1725, he wrote:

> In that dark night which shrouds from our eyes the most remote antiquity, a light appears which cannot lead us astray; I speak of this incontestable truth: the social world is certainly the work of men, and it follows that one can and should find its principles in the modifications of the human intelligence itself.

It is possible to relate all significant modern reflection about the human situation to these two postulates declared by Pico and Vico. All moral philosophy is an attempt to measure the moral responsibility of the individual. *To what extent* are men accountable for what they do? Human behavior is so incredibly various, so unpredictable—sometimes seeming to be merely the offprint of environmental influences, sometimes moving in determined opposition to the established patterns of the cultural mold—that we are unable to find any reliable answer to this question. The satisfaction gained from the finality of a completely determinist interpretation of human behavior is drained away by the discovery that this view also drains away man's humanity, making him a mere cog in the world machine. Further, we soon see that human destiny cannot be left to the mindless functioning of a world machine, so that the mechanistic scientific model of the world is continually being subjected to smuggling operations to somehow put back into the world a moral agent who chooses and is accountable

for his choices. Interestingly, the most dogmatic materialists are usually the most righteously indignant crusaders against what they insist is the evil in the world!

It is impossible, in short, to eliminate Pico's postulate. The principle of human responsibility is as essential to human life as the air we breathe is essential to our bodily existence. The denial of choice can be verbally formulated, but all such assertions are ultimately meaningless for human beings. The choiceless part of life is the non-human part of life, and men are not really interested in the non-human part of life. What interests man is what he does as a man. Every other discipline or study subserves his essentially human purposes. If it does not, it is eventually abandoned because it has no *use*.

Vico's postulate has more complicated implications. To say that the social world is the work of men is to say, in effect, that men can make their world better. But for the two hundred years or so since Vico, the historiographers concerned with the change and reform of the social world have presented us mostly with contradictions—contradictions, that is, in the terms of Vico's postulate. In their attempt to explain the dynamics of history, they studied everything *except* "the modifications of man's intelligence." Buckle studied the climate. Marx studied the economic relations of human groups. The central effort was to take the crucial element of decision in historical change away from the individual and to locate it in some external cause or relation, which would, in turn, *determine* what human beings decide to do. You could say that this was not a study of "the modifications of man's intelligence," but of those forces—physical, biological, historical, economic—which might be said to have the power to *override* man's independent intelligence. Apart from the goal of scientific scholarship, the objective of these efforts was the attainment of the power to so manipulate the causes of human behavior that the "ideal" society might be brought into being. Consciously or not, the men who pursued this objective cast themselves in the role of Jehovah. Not God, but *they* would be the makers of human destiny.

It is fair to say that the projects and revolutions founded on this view of human history have not worked out, but have instead thrown the modern world into a condition of intellectual and moral chaos, approaching what some now regard as the total madness of mankind. Perhaps this is an exaggeration. But we do not *know* that it is an exaggeration. To measure the validity of a judgment of human behavior, we need some frame of reference, some yardstick, something to tell us what world sanity would be like. The fact is that any kind of judgment about human beings, without such a frame of reference, is sheer guesswork, with only our intuitive feelings of either well-being or disaster as a guide.

What we want, or say we want, is of course an "objective" account of human beings. This is the same as saying we want a reliable frame of reference for the study of human beings. Objectivity means an unequivocal definition of relationships. Objectivity is the prime virtue of science. Science provides precise specifications of the relationships of the things it studies. Objectivity also involves a necessary *isolation* of the object under consideration. The scientific object has precise limits, becoming an object through the definition of those limits. When the behavior of the object can be readily described in terms of its properties, limits, and relationships, such that the behavior can be predicted, then we allow that the particular science in question has achieved a measurable degree of maturity.

We should like to have this kind of objectivity toward human beings. We should like to have a reasonably mature science of man. What stands in the way?

We might at first deny any possibility of such a science, saying that man is a subject, not an object. But this is probably too peremptory a declaration to start with.

A compromise may be possible. We could say that man is that sort of an object which contains or is mysteriously related to a subject, that the subjective element in man has its own structure of being, laws and phenomena, and that man as object is continually being altered by the operations of man as subject.

You might think of man as being an object which has a gyroscopic element hidden within him, which element operates to preserve his *freedom.* In any event, its operations are unpredictable.

Man as subject is a being who thinks. He thinks about himself most of all, and in order to do this he thinks about the world and his relations with it. And since man is also an individual—that is, a *choosing* being, as Pico declared—each man thinks differently from other men. All men think differently. This means that they think differently and similarly, since difference and similarity are conceptions without meaning except in association with one another. These similarities and differences make possible the comparative study of human individuals.

We may say, then, that man's thought about himself is an element in man as an object, setting apart one man as object from another man as object. Thus we can say that man's being is made up of his power to choose plus his actual choosing and thinking about himself and the world. When you say *Man,* then, you do not mean a biped mammal, or a "consumer." You mean a being who thinks about himself and the world and behaves accordingly. You must add, of course, that he also *feels* about the world, and that his thinking is subject to all the ramifications of his sense of moral responsibility, his sense of being right or wrong, and his sense of knowing or not knowing.

Here we are trying to summarize, as well as we can, what may be said about man-as-object, without dropping out the reality of man-as-subject in the process.

History is the effort to find out more about man as object by looking at the gross phenomena of events involving the behavior of many men. History can go in two directions. It can go toward the elimination of man-as-subject, in hope of achieving the precise certainty enjoyed by the other branches of science. That is one direction, but a direction which leads history to destroy itself. The other direction eventually transforms history into myth. That is, it leads to generalizations about man-as-subject, which is the fruit of studies undertaken with knowledge of man-as-subject as its goal. The *Bhagavad-Gita,* for example, is a study of history that has become myth—a philosophical treatise, that is, on the nature of man, its "historical" or objective character having been practically lost in the process.

Science is generalization, and what we want of history is a generalization about man which illuminates both the individual and society, without sacrificing the meaning of either one. This means that historical science must set a limit on the power of science to delimit the human being. In the second chapter of *Man and Crisis,* Ortega examines the possibility of a history of this sort:

> If history, which is the science of human lives, were or could be exact, it would mean that men were flints, stones, physiochemical bodies, and nothing else. But then one would have neither history nor physics; for stones, more fortunate, if you like, than men, do not have to create science in order to be what they are, namely stones. On the other hand man is a most strange entity, who, in order to be what he is, needs first to find out what he is; needs, whether he will or no, to ask himself what are the things around him and what, in the midst of them, is he. For it is this which really differentiates man from a stone, and not that man has understanding while the stone lacks it. We can imagine a very intelligent stone; but as the inner being of the stone is given it already made, once and for all, and it is required to make no decision on the subject, it has no need, in order to go on being a stone, to pose again and again the problem of self, asking itself "What must I do now?" or, which is the same thing, "What must I be?" Tossed in the air, without need to ask anything, and therefore without having to exercise its understanding, the stone we are imagining will fall toward the center of the earth. Its intelligence, even if existent, forms no part of its being, does not intervene in it, but would be an extrinsic and superfluous addition.
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> The essence of man, on the other hand, lies in the fact that he has no choice but to force himself to know, to build a science, good or bad, in order to resolve the problem of his own being and toward this end the problem of what are the things among which he must inexorably have that being. This—that he needs to know, that whether he likes it or not, he needs to work to the best of his intellectual means—is undoubtedly what constitutes the human condition.

By now it should be fairly clear that we selected Ortega to speak on this subject for the reason that he

provides a brilliant contemporary synthesis of the postulates of both Pico and Vico. The study of man is not simply the study of "objective" man, but the study of man *thinking*, since this activity is the essence of his being. Whatever we say about man remains irrelevant to central questions unless it includes—indeed, focuses upon—*man thinking*. Thinking is what differentiates men from one another, not their measly dimensions or what they get by contract or conquest from one another. What a man gets from himself—which means, from his thinking—is what makes a man what he is. Ortega continues:

> Man cannot be defined by listing the talents or the skills on which he counts unless at the same time it is said that those talents, those skills, achieve what their names indicate, and that therefore they are adequate to the frightening task into which, whether he likes it or not, man finds himself thrust. Or to put it in another way, man does not busy himself in learning, in comprehending, simply *because* he has talents and intelligence which enable him to know and to understand, but on the contrary; for the very reason that he has no choice but to try to comprehend, to know, he mobilizes all the abilities of which he stands possessed, even though for that necessity these may serve him very badly. If man's intelligence were truly what the word indicates—the capacity to understand—he would at once have understood everything, and would have no problem, no laborious task ahead of him. So then, it is not said that man's intelligence is actually intelligence; on the other hand, there is no doubt about the task in which man is irremediably engaged, and therefore it is surely the task which defines his destiny.
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> That task, as we have said, is called "living"; the essence of living is that man is always existing within an environment, that he finds himself—suddenly and without knowing how he got there—projected into and submerged in a world, a set of fixed surroundings, into this present, which is now about us.
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> In order to sustain himself in that environment he is always having to do something. But this something is not imposed on him by the surrounding environment as is a phonograph's repertoire by the disks it plays, or as the line which a star traces is imposed by its orbit.
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> Man, every man, must at every moment be deciding for the next moment what he is going to do, what he is going to be. This decision only he can make; it is not transferable; no one can substitute for me in the task of deciding for myself, in deciding on my life. When I put myself into another's hands it is I who have decided and who go on deciding that he will direct me; thus I do not transfer the decision itself, but merely its mechanism. In place of deriving the norm of my conduct out of that mechanism which is my own intelligence, I take advantage of the mechanism of another's intelligence.

Let us end with this quotation. This is the case for adopting the postulates of Vico and Pico. We have not made a big argument, but have presented the views of men who seem sensible of the living reality of our self-conscious existence, who render an account of how we ought to regard ourselves and give a generous light on the judgment of our undertakings. The confirmation of what they say lies in our own intuition of the meaning of our lives and in the bitter lessons of current events. Is there any enduring good for man, we must ask ourselves, apart from the good here described?

Well, what are the most obvious objections to this view? One could say, for example, that here the problems of ordinary men have been rarefied beyond any ordinary understanding; that the world is confronted by desperate emergency; that the cries against injustice are as loud as ever; that the subtle considerations of this sort of philosophising can promise little immediate benefit, if any at all, to the great mass of men.

We can reply that there is little in recent history to entitle us to think that we are in any position to "fix up" the world with the ordinary means at our disposal. However desperate the emergency, we still have to know what to do, if we are going to be of any help.

Consider what we have learned in the past few years. For one thing, we have discovered, or ought to have discovered, that there is no use in trying to put down the bad people. We don't really know who the bad people are. And they don't stay down, whoever they are. We speak in abstractions about the "good people"—the "little people," everywhere—who are innocent of the crimes of their leaders. But we feel constrained to kill the good little people

because they do what their bad leaders or governments tell them to do. Meanwhile we know that some of "them" are getting ready to kill us. This goes on and on, and while we begin to recognize that the problem doesn't get solved by killing people, we don't know what else to do. What we want is that other people should understand *us* and appreciate *us*. Meanwhile, all the world is asking the questions phrased by Ortega, "What must I do now?" "What must I be?" The way men answer these questions determines what they do next.

The simplest common sense should tell us that there is no way around these questions. They cannot be ignored in the name of some "emergency." The answers to these questions have created all the real emergencies mankind has ever experienced.

When we " deal" with human beings, we are dealing with beings who always have these questions foremost in mind. So we have need to know how people are thinking about these questions. We need to understand how they are answering them, and why they are answering them as they do.

What hope is there that very many people will concern themselves with the study of these questions, of how men choose to answer them, and why?

It is true enough that most human beings encounter these questions at a quite primitive level of existence. The urgencies of food and shelter and survival color the answers of the great majority. But the initiative of a change for the better does not lie with the billions of comparatively helpless people whose lives are in a very real sense controlled by the powerful minority. The hope for a better world lies with those who, in this age, have the capacity and the means to affect the thought of others. What must happen is that those with this capacity and these means will recognize that there is no future at all for mankind except in the quality of individual life and thought. Everything else is but instrumentality to this supreme good. There is no mass or manipulated solution for the problems of the world. There is no way of "controlling" men into a good life.

For man, in order to *be* man, as Pico suggested, must always be engaged in *becoming* himself. There is no surcease from this round of decision. There is only the relief and release that come from recognizing the nature of the human situation. Once a man does this, he begins to see and fulfill his destiny. In the words of Ortega:

> When we meet a neighbor it does not take great perspicacity to note how he is guided by that self which he himself has chosen, but which he never sees clearly, which always remains a problem to him. For when each of us asks himself what he is going to be, and therefore what his life is going to be, he has no choice but to face the problem of man's being, of what it is in general that man can be and what it is that he must be. But this, in turn, obliges us to fashion for ourselves an idea, to find out somehow what this environment is, what these surroundings are, this world in which we live. The things about us do not of themselves tell us what they are. We must discover that for ourselves. But this—to discover the self of things and of one's own being—the being of everything—this is none other than man's intellectual business, a task which is therefore not an extrinsic and superfluous addition to man's life, but a constituent part of that life. This is not a matter of man's living and then, if it falls out that way, if he feels some special curiosity, of busying himself in formulating ideas about the things about him. No; to live is to find oneself forced to interpret life. Always irresistibly, moment by moment we find ourselves with definite and fundamental convictions about what things are and we ourselves are in the midst of them; this articulation of final convictions is what moulds our chaotic surroundings into the unity of a world or a universe.

REVIEW
THE QUALITY OF LIFE

MUCH of my reading, these days, makes me think of MANAS. The latest is the book, *The Greatest Problem and Other Essays*, by F. L. Lucas (Cassell, London). The Greatest Problem today, according to Mr. Lucas, is population growth. He assembles enough statistics to point out that the population of the world has been increasing faster than ever before, in recent years. But what struck me was why Mr. Lucas prefers the world to have a smaller, instead of a bigger, population, even if it were possible to make any number of millions live comfortably with the help of science. "Most writers on the subject," writes Mr. Lucas, "seem to assume that *if* by filling men's bellies with 'the green mantle of the standing pool' sweetened by synthetic sugar made from sawdust, the globe can somehow be made to sustain billions, then there is no more need to worry, and all is well. But is it? Are all these billions desirable, even could they be permanently feasted on champagne and caviar? Do we really want the earth turned into a human ant-heap, conurbanized or suburbanized from Calais to Vladivostok, with its wild disfigured and defiled, and the individual feeling himself more and more an impotent drop in a vast, but perhaps far from pacific, ocean of humanity?" He continues:

> Both psychologically and politically, it may be suspected that man is seldom at his best in large masses. Even at social parties, or at meetings, the amount of intelligence shown seems often to vary inversely with the numbers present. . . . For full development even the humble cabbage likes elbowroom; the average gardener constantly tends to defeat himself by greedily planting his seeds too close; and England full of neglected spinneys and copses with miserable little trees all stunting one another. In fine, the worth of human beings like the worth of paper money, can be quickly cheapened by over-production.

While to me, at least, this seemed to be a new line of thought on a vexing and much discussed problem, Mr. Lucas makes it known that the ancient Greeks thought along such lines:

> Greek thought (which is often worth weighing still) felt all this intensely. Barbarians, they considered, might swarm in tribes and hordes and nations—Scythians, Thracians, Medes; but the good life required a city state. Thus Plato in his *Laws* fixed the ideal number of adult male citizens at a mere 5040—an eighth of the size of his own Athens. And that number, he said, must not grow. With women and children, aliens and slaves, this suggests a total community of under 100,000—something like the size of Cambridge.
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> Aristotle went further still. To him even Plato's 5040 seemed excessive. His ideal city was still smaller; and its numbers, he insisted, must be controlled, when necessary, by abortion, at an early stage before sensation was reached. Clearly a most wicked man!

Perhaps there would not be many *individuals* left in masses and mobs—whether they be the dirty, ragged and hungry peoples of Asia and Africa of today, or the well-fed, purring, human animals in a utopia of tomorrow from which Science has abolished poverty. Mr. Lucas is concerned with the quality of men and their minds. Elsewhere, writing on the side of humanities as opposed to science, he limits what science can offer to power, wealth and comfort. "But these," he says, "are not sufficient ends in themselves; they are merely means—sometimes very dubious means—to a satisfactory life." The limitations become painfully clear when he writes:

> And now our civilization is still threatened, perhaps more than ever, by vulgarity, barbarism, fanaticism. Science enables us to hear round the world—but largely things it would not be worth crossing the street to hear. Science enables us to see across continents—but largely things it is not worth turning one's head to look at. We are B.B.C.-sick. As if we had already reached the Termite State, our very houses sprout foolish antennae. The other day, typically enough, when a bevy of modern damsels were questioned on television, a few of them, it turned out, *had* heard of Eisenhower, but thought him Prime Minister of the United States; a few *had* heard of Nehru, but thought him a Russian; *all* had heard of a jiggling gentleman called Elvis Presley; but not one had even heard of Mr. Khrushchev.

Mr. Lucas has had sufficient practical experience of science and scientists to know that "Science does not always give sense" and that one cannot always safely assume the soundness of scientists' judgments on issues at stake in the world today. What is more disconcerting is that perhaps scientists do not think they should exercise judgment over or assume responsibility for matters outside their province, however vital to humanity. Mr. Lucas writes bitterly:

> . . . though science has revolutionized our lives, it remains very curious how little, so far, scientists have succeeded in actually dominating mankind. On the

> contrary, our age has repeatedly seen scientists become like captive djinns, either imprisoned in bottles, or forced to scour heaven and earth on the errands of some tetchy and whimsical despot. Hitler was no scientist—he naïvely believed in astrology. By temperament he was a tenth-rate artist. But because he was an intuitive master of one thing—the psychology of mobs—and devoid of any prudence or any scruple, he soon had the scientists of Germany slaving as his docile drudges, and feeding from his bloodstained hand. Stalin was no scientist—he was an ex-theological student, reader in a Tiflis seminary where they discussed such scientific topics as the precise language talked by Balaam's ass when it launched into human speech. Yet, because Stalin too was pitiless, unprincipled, and a past master of intrigue, he called the tune for the scientists of Russia. . . .

Too much of science does clearly no good to the human goose and Mr. Lucas names the resulting sickness—"test-tuberculosis." He also gives some thought to the question of happiness—a condition which a humble man often reaches more easily than persons of eminence known to Mr. Lucas:

> . . . one of the happiest-seeming people I have known was our city rat-catcher. He was an elderly ex-game-keeper, apple-cheeked, hale and young for his years; he was active, he was useful, he was interested and interesting. (How many professors can say as much?) He spent his time matching his wits against enemies that he respected and admired (I am not sure he did not even rather like them and pity them); he told extraordinary tales of their cleverness, and when he appeared at intervals with a couple of grey bodies from my garden-shed dangling in his hand, I could see in his eyes the satisfaction of a poet who has just mastered a sonnet. Maybe he had, too, a pleasanter sense of usefulness. For, after all, if no more sonnets were written, would it matter? There are more in the world already than any sane being has time for. And immortal rats would provide mankind with a much more serious problem than immortal sonnets.

Being apple-checked, hale, and young for his years was largely responsible for the rat-catcher's happiness—an essential which this writer stresses without losing sight of others. It may be permissible to grope while trying to find out what makes for happiness even with Mr. Lucas as the guide, but one gets hold of something at last. He writes, that before she died, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's last words—after what most would have considered an unhappy life—were, "It has all been very interesting." She never ceased to be fascinated by what Mr. Lucas calls the "eternal strangeness of life."

There are well-meaning people in the world, who wish that the world were a happier place and feel it their mission to strive to make it so. Mr. Lucas writes of them in his essay on the purpose of life. Without their knowing it—or they knew it only too late—these prophets became a menace. They believed passionately and violently that the world ought to be changed were it to become a happy place—leaving aside the absurdity of seeking happiness with so many contrary emotions, the simplicity about change that they assume never strikes them as unjustified. Writing of the change of heart that the prophets seek, Mr. Lucas says:

> The agelong, desperate cry of prophets for a change of heart only shows how little they knew the human heart, and how little the human heart can really change—in anything less than the slow lapse of centuries.

Mr. Lucas makes use of the life of Tolstoy to illustrate how happiness ever eludes the idealist and the genius. He seems to suggest that when one seeks a purpose or meaning in life—as Tolstoy seems to have done there can be only unhappiness and pain. It is not clear to me whether one should mind such pain and unhappiness. What strikes me is Mr. Lucas' suggestion that while life may hold a purpose or meaning, it is not very sensible to seek it within the three-dimensional span and sequence (these are my words and not Mr. Lucas') in which one seems to know very little of such things.

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COMMENTARY
THE GREAT MINORITY

Two books we happened to be reading lately turned out to be sources of encouragement, and these are days when encouragement is needed. One is *The Great Quotations* by George Seldes, published recently by Lyle Stuart ($15.00, 225 Lafayette St., New York 12), the other a translation of Plato's *Republic* by Francis Cornford (Oxford University Press, 1955).

Anthologies of quotations are handy things to have around in an editorial office. Most editors will have both Stevenson and Bartlett. The Seldes book, however, is noticeably different. The selections reflect the compiler's personal interests and commitment, giving the book a definite character. You tend to *read* this book as well as look things up in it. You come across fascinating comparisons, as, for example, between the young Mussolini's and the old Mussolini's opinions. You discover things you may not have known about—such as Abraham Lincoln's passionate concern for the rights of the working classes.

But most of all you get a feeling of encouragement from discovering that there have been *so many men* who have cared profoundly about the good and welfare of other men. *The Great Quotations* introduces you to an illustrious company. Reading it is like moving into a town where everyone thinks intensively concerning human problems and, on the whole, the thinking is by people for whom the world of moral and intellectual vision constitutes the primary reality.

These people did not give up. They kept on thinking and writing and acting and it seems likely that, whenever the world has changed for the better, they were responsible.

Prof. Cornford's book is encouraging mostly because Plato is encouraging, but also because his rendition of the *Republic* is a luminous one. In his introduction, he says that the thesis of the book—

> rests ultimately on the conviction that materialistic egoism misconceives that good "which every soul pursues as the end of all her actions, dimly divining its existence, but perplexed and unable to grasp its nature with the same clearness and assurance as in dealing with other things, and so missing whatever value those other things might have." To possess this good would be happiness; to know it would be wisdom, to seek the knowledge of it is what Plato means by Philosophy.

It is Plato's view, borne in upon him from personal experience, "that the human race will never see the end of its troubles until political power is entrusted to the lover of wisdom; who has learnt what makes life worth living and who will 'despise all existing honours as mean and worthless, caring only for the right and the honours to be gained from that, and above all for justice as the one indispensable thing in whose service and maintenance he will recognize his own state'."

Following, according to Prof. Cornford, is the essential problem of politics as Plato saw it:

> So long as knowledge is valued as the means to power, and power as the means to wealth, the helm of the ship will be grasped by the ambitious man, whose Bible is Machiavelli's *Prince*, or by the man of business, whose Bible is his profit and loss account. It is Plato's merit to have seen that this problem looms up, in every age, behind all the superficial arguments of political expediency.

The *encouragement* to be found in Plato grows from his unrelenting struggle to meet this problem in the only way he thought it could be met—by trying to increase the sum-total of human knowledge and intelligence.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

NOTES IN PASSING

PHILIP MARSON'S *A Teacher Speaks* explains on the basis of personal experience why exacting teachers of English in preparatory schools deplore the oversimplification of exercises and examinations. Mr. Marson has taught for many years in the famous Boston Latin School, but even here, where rigorous discipline is the keynote, he finds that alterations in college requirements have weakened education in English. The following are sobering paragraphs:

> No course in English worthy of the name can omit the writing of at least one composition per week and the reading of good books in the four major types of literature—drama, fiction, verse, and nonfiction. Yet even the boys preparing for the examination balked at the inescapable assignment. After all, *the objective test for which they were being groomed in English composition did not call for the writing of one complete sentence*, let alone a series of connected paragraphs. *Nor were they asked to name even a single book read in the secondary school, to say nothing of discussing their reading.* Therefore, however eloquent my plea or insistent my demand, they refused to consider the work seriously or to put time and effort into carrying out the assignments that I had always believed the backbone of any English course. Why should I insist on this procedure while other masters were spending all their time on specific preparation for the coming tests—due in January or March? Finally, did I not realize that by reason of my assignments their grades were bound to be lower, their standing in the class would then go down, and their chances for prizes and scholarship aid would be jeopardized.
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> I was thus placed in a position that was not only vulnerable, but impossible to defend. Their claims were factual and valid. My way out is indefensible from the standpoint of educational principles and ideals but unavoidable under present conditions. To teach my classes, according to sound philosophical theory and practice, had become impossible. The school year had been shortened by at least three months; for after the final round of tests had been given in March, it was a losing battle to get any serious work done. Therefore, I had two choices, both of which made my position humiliating: either I give up my proven methods of teaching English by eliminating reading and writing assignments; or I sacrifice my integrity as an honest man by raising grades in order to place boys in my sections on a par with those in others. I took the latter alternative as the lesser evil, but I was frustrated and unhappy. For at least the last ten years of my tenure, I was prevented from performing my function as a teacher in the way that I knew I could and should; and I was miserable in the realization that I was an unwilling party to the tragedy that was taking place.

Mr. Marson provides a basis for such criticism as may contribute to a more reasonable relation between the preparatory school and the university. The "new education" theories which have brought many benefits to children in the elementary school seem to get out of hand at the level of "the higher learning." Harvard requirements, for example, have been completely revised in favor of the most loosely-organized electives. Protesting such changes, Mr. Marson continues:

> English (in any of the three aspects of the subject—grammar, composition, and literature) is no longer a prerequisite for admission to Harvard. The candidate has complete freedom as to which three subjects he will elect for his one-hour achievement tests. A boy with even a grain of common sense will choose the trio in which he can achieve the highest grades; and a sympathetic teacher will advise him to do so, although it may mean that he takes tests in Latin, French, and German or any other unbalanced combination. In view of the nature of the objective tests, subjects which depend merely on memory are obviously the most popular choices.
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> Where does that situation leave the teacher of senior English? Completely out of the running. For obvious reasons, most boys would prefer to prepare for tests in almost any other subject. The only students in my class preparing for Harvard who might present English as a choice would be a talented few, at most six or seven of thirty-five members. Obviously, in such a class, whenever the work became specific preparation for the test, four-fifths of the group was not interested; for all that we could do was the most elementary hackwork in composition, such as drills in the mechanics or exercises in the correction of faulty sentences—the kind of thing we used to do and still do in the first and second years of

high school. What alternative was there? From a practical point of view, none. Those who were headed for the test wished to do nothing else; the others were concentrating on the three subjects in which they were to be tested.

The problem here is really one of overcoming certain traditional attitudes, while renewing disciplines which once produced better readers and speakers. From this standpoint, it is easy to understand the dedication of the "progressives" and "new educationists" who felt that coming generations could no longer be in emotional tune with a tightly-ordered and prescribed system of instruction. On the other hand, there is much depressing evidence to show that young men and women who have presumably been favored by the best collegiate training are still far from being genuinely literate. We have witnessed "democratization" of the whole educational process, occasioned in no small part by the fantastic population growth of the past fifty years. Since children are born much faster than teachers are made or discovered, teacher-training requirements, of necessity, are relaxed, while the general plan of university training is hastened. For this reason it is easy to see the importance of the concern often expressed in the last few years—that the "gifted" or exceptionally intelligent child may easily outstrip not only his classmates but also his instructor.

In the meantime, what is a normally intelligent parent to do when he realizes that the best most schools can offer is less than the challenge needed by his teen-age youngster? It seems to us that we have come full circle back to the situation of the frontier days when adequate schooling was so hard to attain that fathers and mothers had to contribute it themselves. Nothing is more important today than a raising of the level of conversation in the home, and no one can accomplish this except the parents. Those who attend Great Books discussions or those who direct their private reading toward an educational goal will naturally tend to generate insights on all questions which may stimulate the minds of the young. This is the sort of "democratic" approach which offers some hope of improvement—not the joining of pressure groups within the community, guided by enthusiastic detractors of the public school system.

And the process works both ways. Because, granting that more intelligent and better-educated teachers will produce better-educated children, it is also true that we shall have better teachers when elementary, secondary, and college students ask better questions in class, and demand more from their instructors.

FRONTIERS

"Breaking the Thought Barrier`'

JEROME D. FRANK has already been extensively quoted in MANAS, and there is little doubt that the procedure will be repeated in the future. For, in our opinion, Dr. Frank is one of the most usefully prolific psychiatrists of our time. His "Breaking the Thought Barrier: Psychological Challenges of the Nuclear Age," which appears in *Psychiatry* for August, is a profoundly important paper. At the outset we recommend that interested MANAS readers get this issue of *Psychiatry*, since the article should be read in its 21-page entirety. All we can do, here, is to show briefly how Dr. Frank approaches the idea of non-violence as the only practical "break-through" for a world caught in a circle of psychotic reactions. First, a few paragraphs from his introduction:

> My purpose in this paper is not to offer solutions to the political problems of our times, since these must in the last analysis be devised by politicians, but to bring together information and ideas arising out of my own area of interest which may stimulate thought and discussion about these problems. As a psychiatrist, I have been struck by an analogy between the behavior of policy makers today and the behavior of mental patients. That is, they see a problem or a threat and then resort to methods of dealing with it which aggravate it. The leaders of the world agree that nuclear armaments pose or soon will pose an insufferable threat to the existence of humanity. This is reflected in the unanimous United Nations resolution of November 2, 1959, that "the question of general and complete disarmament is the most important one facing the world today." Yet the preparation for war goes on feverishly.
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> The dilemma is sharply pointed up by two items which appeared in the same issue of the New York *Times.* The first was a statement by President Eisenhower: "No other aspiration dominates my whole being as much as this: that the nations of the East and West will find dependable, self-guaranteeing methods to reduce the vast expenditure for armaments."
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> In the same issue appeared the following news item: "United States armaments manufacturers have begun to pour massive amounts of capital and technical experience into the reviving West Germany arms industry. The motive . . . is the widespread conviction that the Bonn republic is destined to become a major weapons producer."
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> The psychiatrist will recognize here a pattern similar to that of the patient who has insight into his problems but is unable to act on it—for instance, the alcoholic who drinks in order to relieve himself of anxiety and depression, even though he knows that this will ultimately prove disastrous to him. He says, in effect, "I know this is killing me," as he takes another drink.

The question of responsibility for atomic or nuclear detonations has been many times discussed, but never, we think, from a more startlingly realistic point of view:

> As a psychiatrist, I am especially impressed with the dangers inherent in the steady diffusion of power to fire modern weapons. The diffusion among countries is bad enough; even worse is the spread within countries. As nuclear weapons multiply and the warning time for retaliation decreases, the power over these weapons filters further and further down the chain of command. At this point individual psychology is certainly relevant. Every population contains a certain number of psychotic or profoundly malicious persons, and it can only be a matter of time before one of them comes into a position to order the firing of a weapon which in a flash will destroy a large city in another country. This danger is aggravated by the fact that a large proportion of the generation now coming to adulthood spent its formative years under conditions of unprecedented chaos in refugee camps and the like. Disorganized conditions of living and unstable human relationships in childhood may leave serious scars in the adult in the form of anxiety, bitterness, and emotional instability. The conditions following the last war were worse than those in Germany following World War I, which produced Hitler's followers. It is persons like these who will have the power to set the world on fire.

In these passages we encounter some clarifying statements concerning common misunderstandings of nonviolence: the aim of nonviolence is to prevent the violent situations from arising, "to inhibit the use of destructive force by the person who possesses it. The achievement of this goal requires a very high

degree of initiative, activity, and courage." A devotee of nonviolence need not hope for the elimination of conflicts in the world. The goal is simply to develop the nonviolent means for resolving conflicts when they do arise. Dr. Frank has gathered suggestive evidence in behalf of nonviolent methods of defense. He points out, for instance, that when a nonviolent revolt of East Germans broke out in 1953, a number of Russian soldiers had to be shot by their commander because they refused to fire on the demonstrators. Dr. Frank attempts to state the theory of nonviolence in a fashion that will enable it to be discussed realistically. Speaking of its possible success, he says: "Although it is clear that a nonviolent campaign against a dictatorship might be very costly in lives and difficult to maintain, it is not a foregone conclusion that it could not succeed."

While what follows may be arguable—is, indeed, in the form of argument—and while some of its implications may arouse instinctive protest, Dr. Frank nonetheless undertakes the sort of *open* examination of the subject that the emergency of the times requires:

> If our renunciation of force tempted an enemy to impose a military occupation on us, the question would be: Can nonviolent methods prevail against a dictatorship by a group which does not highly value human life? First of all, it is an oversimplification to say that Gandhi's methods worked in India because of the British attitude toward human life. When the Mau Mau in Kenya used violent methods, they were met with extreme forms of violence by the very same British. But the most powerful argument, at least from an emotional standpoint against the success of nonviolent methods opposing a dictator is the fate of the Jews in Germany. There are many flaws in this argument. First, there are some situations in which no method of fighting would work, and this was undoubtedly true of the plight of the Jews after World War II was under way. Incidentally, the murder camps were set up only after Germany was at war; whether even the Nazis could have perpetrated such atrocities in peacetime is problematical. The Jews had three choices, none of which could have saved their own lives: violent resistance, nonviolent resistance, and fatalistic acquiescence; and so all they could do was to die in the way most compatible with their own self-respect and most likely to win sympathy for them abroad. Most of them did not resist but simply acquiesced apathetically in their own destruction. There are many moving anecdotes of Jews who, having received a notice to report to the police station, would go to their non-Jewish friends and say farewell, without expressing any thought of attempting to escape. No one knows what might have happened had the Jews resorted to nonviolent methods of resistance early in the Nazi regime. Suppose, for example, in organized fashion they had refused to wear the stigmatizing arm bands and forced the police to publicly drag them off to prison. This would at least have made it more difficult for the German people to pretend they did not know what was going on. One cannot know what effect this might have had.