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THE COMPULSION OF THE TIMES

THE question of how, and how much, reading books affects human life is wholly unsettled and will no doubt remain so for many years to come. Even the question of what, and how much, is best for people to eat remains unsettled in this scientific age, despite numerous foundations and specialists working on the problem. It is at least possible that what a man reads is considerably more important than what he eats, but most people are still a long way from adopting this hypothesis.

Yet, through the centuries, the issues arising from man's capacity to write and read books have generated a quality of impassioned discussion which never occurs in connection with arguments about food. More than three hundred years ago, John Milton declared: "As good almost kill a man as kill a good book: who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye." This is strong language—the sort of language likely to be used by men who find what they read and think to be more precious than what they eat. Milton argued further that to attack a good book "strikes at the ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself; slays an immortality rather than a life.

What did Milton mean, here? He meant that man's mental activity, represented by books, is the quintessential element of his life which completes him as a human being. This idea has its origin in Pythagorean philosophy and appears in one or another form throughout the Western Idealist tradition, from Plotinus on. It must be admitted, of course, that such conceptions have in recent years been regarded as the vagaries of enthusiasts and visionaries, but this was not Milton's view. Milton was himself too much of a Neoplatonic philosopher to regard the life of the mind as some sort of accidental addition to man's organic being. The mind for him was the stuff of human reality—man's access to a transcendental existence. Fortunately, there are men alive today who share this conception, although their vocabulary differs somewhat from Milton's. Lewis Mumford, for example, said in *Faith for Living,* (1940):

> Man's chief purpose. . . is the creation and preservation of values: that is what gives meaning to our civilization, and the participation in this is what gives significance, ultimately, to the individual human life.

Men might possibly continue to create and preserve values without books, but without books these values could not join to generate the common flow of culture and civilization. The literature of an age declares its values in a thousand different ways, and it is by means of books that these values gain currency, are examined, wondered about, questioned and developed, coming at last to saturate and give distinctive identity to the age. Books also contain the memory of other ages, so that men can compare the literature of their times with that of the past, thus gaining perspective on themselves.

In the present, the novel most effectively embodies the values men hold. Ours is an age without any coherent philosophy, with the result that the issues men are able to recognize are usually issues of personal relations, or personal situations, with which novels deal. As Aldous Huxley put it, the novel, or Fictional Man, keeps "tremendous ideas *alive* in a concrete form." If, then, you take fiction-writing in general, you have a collective indication of where thoughtful men are finding the contemporary issues.

Where is that, today? It is significant that the books which have excited the most attention in recent years are war novels, and that in almost every case the issues which get attention in these

books have comparatively little to do with winning or losing wars. What they look at is individual human beings trapped in the war situation, or in situations created by war and by the kind of societies which make war. Stripped down, these books are about men who feel compelled to do things they hate to do, about their sufferings and occasionally their resistance to what they must do. Put in another way, these books search out the plight of human integrity in the environment of war. The books, when they are good, are good because they cleave to the value of integrity.

But what do such books tell us about our age? One thing is certain: They tell us how we have *limited* the creation and preservation of values in our time. Spelled out, this means that we have set the stage for human action under incredibly barbarous conditions. The conditions for finding values, today, are brutal and inhuman. It follows that the values we are able to find and exhibit are of the most primitive sort—those which are possible for tortured, individual man set heroically and fatally against the tyranny of cruelly indifferent and impersonal institutions. The great wheels go round and round, grinding up *people*. The moving books, today, tell you about how brave people feel while they are being ground up.

Where is the action? the novelist asks himself, and he turns to the barracks societies of the army, the navy, and the air force. He gets his action, but with it he gets all the other things that go on in barracks. And he gets the kind of action that life in a barracks society permits. The barracks action infects the larger society, communicating its habits, vocabulary, and code to civilian life. Actually, the pattern is a familiar one. We owe to Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* a clear description of the *milieu* of war as reflected in common behavior. He was writing of the aftermath of the American Civil War, but for a study of these symptoms the aftermath of any other war would probably do as well:

> Habituation to war entails a body of predatory habits of thought, whereby clannishness in some measure replaces the sense of solidarity, and a sense of invidious distinction supplants the impulse to everyday serviceability. As an outcome of the cumulative action of these factors, the generation which follows a season of war is apt to witness a rehabilitation of the element of status, both in its social life and in its scheme of devout observances and other symbolic or ceremonial forms. Throughout the eighties, and less plainly traceable through the seventies also, there was perceptible a gradually advancing wave of sentiment favoring quasi-predatory business habits, insistence on status, anthropomorphism, and conservation generally. The more direct and unmediated of these expressions of the barbarian temperament, such as the recrudescence of outlawry and the spectacular quasi-predatory careers of fraud run by certain "captains of industry," came to a head earlier and were appreciably on the decline by the close of the seventies. The recrudescence of anthropomorphic sentiment also seems to have passed its most acute stage before the close of the eighties. But the learned ritual and paraphernalia here spoken of are a still remoter and more recondite expression of the barbarian animalistic sense; and these, therefore, gained vogue and elaboration more slowly and reached their most effective development at a still later date.

Veblen's points obviously apply to the contemporary scene, but his language is too polite. The trend he identifies has today freely adopted the barracks vocabulary and the manners of the bar room and the brothel. The modern writer goes where he can find action, and the action, today, is mainly primitive, involving either men too unsophisticated to know that their lives have been vulgarized and coarsened, or men who willingly revert to a primitive level because they can't find the action they want anywhere else. The speech in modern novels is often the gross jargon of the streets because the people who live outside the main flow of middle-class culture—who are, so to say, "camping" somewhere on its outskirts, or in its interstices—use this speech with the impact of direct communication. The novelist is attracted by its uninhibited color, its simplicity, its lack of pretense and hypocrisy. The writer gropes his way through clouds of conventional unreality,

trying to find people who are *doing* something. If you can't go up to find such people, you have to go down. Nelson Algren's *A Walk on the Wild Side* is a good illustration of this kind of writing.

Writers are not world saviors, or even great reformers (although there are some exceptions, here), so that they tend to look for the substance of reality in the fields of common experience. What more common than the all-male barracks society? Men in barracks usually have but one idea of climactic personal achievement—the kind that happens in bed. As a result, this sort of preoccupation and objective has come to dominate modern literature, through the default of other objectives. (A by-product of this tendency, which may be its only lasting value, is the wearing out of Puritan notions of good and evil, to make room, eventually, for a sounder and more intuitive basis for personal morality.) A comment which appeared in the form of a letter to the New York *Times Book Review* of Oct. 7, 1940, concerned with the effect of war on literature, should be pertinent here. The writer is Emily Barto:

> In the last two generations, the male tempo of this country has been accelerated through its rapidly mechanized civilization, the last World War, the resultant depression and political-commercial transitions, and the threat of greater wars to come. . . The depression is due to the violent, all-male aggression of a war-ridden world of twenty-five years ago, . . . In the field of literature our men have produced much of importance in journalism, economics, and social sciences—all purely masculine subjects, while the novel is that branch of literature where men and women have had the opportunity to rub shoulders, as it were: a sphere of activity which is intuitive and creative, and essentially feminine as well as masculine. Such balance in men and women is not a matter of choice, but a protective law of necessity to meet evolutionary processes.
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> Compare the literature of Theodore Dreiser with that of Victor Hugo, as an extreme example. The first limits his American scene by an all-male view, while Victor Hugo's genius had a depth of understanding of the principles governing his world, not only philosophical, but intuitive to almost a maternal degree. The women of Dreiser are varied, but to the male taste and opinion. His men seem built upon the same mold—purely physical, all-male. One might say built purely for the masculine mind. No man could conceive of Jean Valjean but a man of extraordinary feminine as well as masculine balance. His men are varied, seen through a woman's eyes as well as those of men.
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> Women still think of the earth as a "man's world," and in affairs of government and commerce it undoubtedly is, but man is certainly making a mess of things in Europe, where, generally speaking, a woman's status has not been considered other than purely biological. . . .
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> If the tempo of maleness persists to accelerate revolutionary forces in man away beyond all hope of balance, for a period of decades, women may have to return to their purely biological status to replenish the race and help build what has been destroyed. In such a period the literary, artistic and creative standards of women would naturally be lowered until the intellectual balance is again restored.

Whatever one makes of the particulars of Miss Barto's remarks, there can be but little doubt that she is exploring a sorely neglected region of human experience. She is considering the habitual focus of human attention during war and in the *milieu* of war, and its consequences for literature and culture. What, you might ask, is the spectrum of ideals pursued by men in barracks, and what are the preoccupations of the women they leave behind? You can get fairly accurate answers to these questions by reading the war novels.

In defense of these novels, one may say, "Well, these are the things that people are thinking about. Don't you want novelists to write about real life?" The answer is: Of course we want novelists to write about "real life," but this is not an attempt at literary criticism. We are not blaming the novelists, who do pretty well with the material available. The objection is to the material. Why is it no better, no more important?

The question is whether or not we ought to settle for this sort of material as representative of "real" life. Are we ready to agree that the real issues are all rough, tough, desperate, and sexual? Even if that is what the action is like, today, are

we obliged to accept it, like some total Kinsey Report on the human race?

It is clear enough that we are not going to get another kind of literature until human beings somewhere or somehow create another kind of *milieu,* making possible another kind of action. We have a literature in which most of the heroes behave like dead-end kids fighting for the last shreds of their independence and personal integrity, *because* we have given modern novelists a dead-end world to write about.

We really have no business complaining about the comic books and their effects on the young, so long as we keep on supplying the authors of the comic books with so many "real life" situations to copy. We have no business objecting to the smooth fiction of the slick magazines so long as we pay our money to rent houses and apartments in the phony world which the writers for the slick magazines idealize in their all-too-skillful way. Literature, as Milton pointed out, is a reflection of life. If you want to change the literature, you have to change the life.

The trouble is mainly with the people who know better, since they are the only people who have the capacity to bring about a change. When you get to this point in any serious discussion, you have to divide people up into groups—into, say, the people who have the imagination to see where the world is going, and what is likely to happen in the near future, and the people who are led in one direction or another by the people with imagination. This is an unpalatable division since it seems to violate the democratic principle, but the fact is that the democratic principle depends wholly for its survival upon a minority of people who have courage and imagination, and when these people lose their courage and stop using their imagination they deliver the country—any country—to people like Senator McCarthy.

It is not simply the problem of war on which the issue turns. War, in this case, is only the instrument of dark revelation which shows us what happens when people with imagination sell out their fellow human beings by giving them high moral reasons for going to war. The idea of going to war for good purposes and high ends is possible in the twentieth century only for people who have accepted a low estimate of human beings and a merely collectivist estimate of human goals. Here lies the root of the evil.

War, today, is possible on a rational basis only for gross egotists and gross materialists. It is possible only for egotists for the reason that only egotists can suppose that other peoples in the world—the peoples whom they propose to fight—are not really human like themselves. They think that those other peoples do not love "freedom"—or will never get around to loving it and trying to defend it, so they have to be killed. Only egotists would be willing to bomb millions of other human beings on the hypothesis that all those people are determined to destroy the egotists and take away their "good life."

War is possible only for materialists because it is materialism to commit mass murder and to justify it in the name of physical survival. Countless great men—religious martyrs, secular heroes, every sort of man of principle—have gone to their deaths in the serene conviction that the good that they stood for was worth dying for. Only the materialist can justify the incredible crimes of modern war by claiming that it will enable him to "survive." So, to survive for twenty, thirty, or forty more years on a planet that has endured for millions, he will engage in an immeasurable slaughter of human beings.

Death is not such a dreadful thing. Every good man of the past endured it. But murder is a dreadful thing, and the mass murder of modern war is unimaginably dreadful.

We say that we must preserve our "freedom" for our children. But for this we must give them parents who collaborate in the fiendish preparations of the present arms race. Can we think of no better heritage? The ill is not war, but the thought which contemplates it with calm and engineering calculation.

This is the thought that will bequeath to coming generations a literature composed solely of epitaphs. What will they say? "I was one of those who thought of other men as vermin, and planned, and then completed, their extermination." Is that what our children, if any of them live, will put on our gravestones, if there is any granite left for gravestones?

There are some other choices. "I was a grown-up werewolf. I mixed bacterial poisons to destroy civilian populations." Or, "I was a word-polishing Judas. I told the people why it was necessary to do what we did." Then, there might be some which say simply: "I was a good man, and obedient. I did what I was told." "I was loyal, brave, reverent, true. I just pressed the button."

If this is not egotism and materialism, how should it be named?

You do not, of course, do away with egotism and materialism by attacking them head-on. They fight when attacked head-on, like any other primitive jungle creature. The problem is rather to arouse the fifth essence in man—"the breath of reason itself"—and to try to make *its* values the prevailing ones.

This is a task for individuals. The fifth essence—the quality of being human—is never marshalled like an army or dragooned like a herd. Its only mode of action is in freedom. The fifth essence may live in the world, any part of the world—as rocky and forbidding as you like—and in that part it will always exercise its *inalienable* freedom. For some men—for most of us ordinary men, it may be—the fifth essence does not really begin to act until they see that there is nothing else to do. But that, we may argue, is the kind of seeing that is now becoming unavoidable. This seeing, it may be, is the only compulsion which the true spirit of man will respond to—the compulsion which comes from seeing that there is nothing else to do.

REVIEW
"THE OBJECTIVE SOCIETY"

IT is a pity that the word "challenging" has become a cliché, since this is the only word that briefly describes Everett Knight's book, *The Objective Society* (George Braziller, New York, 1960). Mr. Knight is a Sartrean Marxist who teaches French studies at the University College of Ghana. Having read the book, we grew a little envious of the students who have daily contact with this ardent, skillful, and very much *engaged* mind.

The book has some comparatively unimportant defects. It too often rises to a level of abstraction somewhat beyond the understanding of the ordinary reader, who is likely to feel that the writer is engrossed in a private soliloquy or addressing a very small minority of his peers. It is an impatient and occasionally emotionally intolerant book—qualities which Mr. Knight plainly suspects in himself, and for which he has explanations, if not apologies.

There are a number of themes in *The Objective Society*. The principal one, indicated in the title, is an attack on the long-established habit of Western thought to make all definitions into definitions of things—objective "things"—and then to feel comfortable about disposing of them with some convenient technological method. Once a man is defined as a "thing," you can do what you like with him. A thing is what it is and nothing more. It has no end of its own. It is something to be manipulated. In Mr. Knight's view, the fundamental reality in human beings is their *intentions*. This is the "self," continually being recreated. Human progress is measured by how we treat our fellows, by how much we respect the subjective intentions of other human beings.

We might identify Mr. Knight further by saying that he is a John Dewey of Existentialism. Dewey aggressively attacked the hierarchical notions of traditional metaphysics and theology on the moral ground that they had been made to justify indifference to human need and human suffering. But Dewey expected concepts of reality and value to grow out of the application of scientific method, and here Dewey and Knight part company. Mr. Knight finds "scientific" objectivity as much at fault and for much the same reasons. Once you have "explained" a happening according to some deterministic scheme, you are entitled to do nothing about it. Science, or what we have made of science, sterilizes action as much as did the old religious orthodoxies. "What is best in the scientific attitude," Knight says, "is also what is most rudimentary in it, a hesitancy to believe just anything."

The question of how to decide what is right and what is wrong does not disturb Mr. Knight very much. For most purposes, he points out, the immediate intuition of right and wrong is sufficient. The problem is rather to close the abyss between thought and act. For example:

> Trouble begins with the philosopher and his definitions. In a philosophical discussion, of course, terms must be defined; but this is because philosophers have a language of their own and one which is not a scientific terminology. Nothing is more superfluous than definitions for everyday language. The word "democracy" may be abused by a given political regime, but everyone knows perfectly well it is being abused, and when the philosopher suggests as a *practical measure* (as he is capable of doing) a more severe attention to what we mean by the words we use, then we can only regret not hearing from him on such occasions as the royal visit to a country which, at the time, was officially designated as the "Republic" of Portugal. It will not do to say that this is a job for the newspapermen. Today we can no more afford to leave these matters to the newspapers than we can afford to leave war to the military.

Mr. Knight returns again and again to his central thesis—that the cult of Objectivity enables people to evade their responsibilities. The urgency of this author's feelings become evident in the following discussion:

> The idea of responsibility is by no means unknown to the objective society, but it is applied to our enemies, never to ourselves. The communists, for example, were responsible for the creation of an oppressive police state in Russia; the very weighty historical circumstances which help to explain this development are seldom dwelt upon. On the other hand, the responsibility of the Kenya "detention" camps, the situation in Cyprus, the Suez war which

> helped decide the Russians to intervene in Hungary and which could have led to a world war, is not ours. The unspeakable degradation in which the masses of the people living in Egypt and the Near East pass their lives is the result of well-known historical "causes"; no one is responsible for it, least of all us. The oil industry is regulated by economic "law," not by men. The communists are responsible for the silliness of social realism in art and literature; no one is responsible for the sustained imbecility of our press, nor for the present spiritual vacuum in Anglo-Saxon countries, least of all the academics. It is vital for us to look for responsibilities behind the evil of communism, otherwise we shall find obvious explanations for it—the dead hand of marxist scientism, the almost medieval backwardness of the Russian people in 1817, etc. For our particular evil, however, there is only one explanation—self-interest; we therefore concentrate our attention not upon responsibility (that would be a superficial view) but upon hard historical fact and economic law.

Now comes a note on the author's personal feelings:

> I can understand the irritation of the reader who, expecting a dispassionate development of an idea, is continually stumbling over these nastily aggressive passages. But, provided it is selfless, the best part of a man is his indignation. It is good that people should detest the Russian intervention in Hungary, that the flimsy fiction of objectivity in the academic should be dropped; what is distressing is that this indignation should be so often limited to communist misdeeds, that it should stop short at Spain and Portugal, for example, at Kenya, South Africa, Guatemala, British New Guinea, A1geria, etc. I admit, of course, that slow starvation makes less noise than Russian tanks.

The reader should be made aware that while Mr. Knight proclaims himself a Marxist, he is by no means offering a fully developed political program, but only the rudiments of a philosophical analysis of the human situation. His motive is plainly a feeling of human solidarity. His conception of man is as a purposive intelligence. His idea of truth is "that truth is those arrangements or patterns of things which man 'exists,' which man as a purposeful activity has brought into being." Man, by thinking about experience in a certain way, constitutes the reality of his experience in that way. Reality is therefore an *unfolding* affair which cannot be predicted or condemned to some Procrustean mold:

> Progress in man's treatment of man appears to be very closely associated with the slow break-down of all positive identifications of the nature of the universe. Between the earliest times and the Enlightenment, progress was slight, but it becomes easily perceptible during the age of *criticism*, the great rationalist age . . . which could devote so much of its energies to the destruction of a system because it was unencumbered by one of its own. When rationalism did eventually acquire a system in marxism (as the result of a *malentendu*), it lost no time in becoming oppressive.
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> Man's inhumanity to his fellows seems to depend upon the extent to which he can succeed in regarding them as objects—objects which, in certain historical circumstances, may come to be identified with precision and which therefore may be manipulated. This is one of the functions of religious and political Absolutes, to make it possible to govern by the manipulation of objects rather than by the consultation of subjects.

Mr. Knight's judgment of Marxism is in this context:

> The nineteenth century was full of intelligent "lawmakers," but their thinking grew almost exclusively out of other thoughts, while the thought of Marx grew like a tree out of the soil of immediate problems of human welfare which it is always tempting to ignore because they introduce such hellish complications. The source of the wealth of nations, according to Marx, is unpaid labor. We are dealing here as much with a created truth as with a discovered law, a lever with which to move the earth, and things will begin to go wrong because Marx's disciples imagined that they had been equipped with a "law" rather than with a tool. Error crept in in proportion as marxism became an entirely objective discipline, in proportion as it substituted a historical determination for historical possibilities and perspectives inspired, as in Marx, by a *subjective* experience of human needs. . . . Communism resembles fascism to the degree in which it uses its ideology as an infallible means of distinguishing the "good" from the "bad" (as a means of defining) rather than as a program.

It should be clear that Mr. Knight's philosophical position affords him almost unlimited freedom for criticism, and the criticism he takes the

greatest relish in making is directed at the academic world. The withdrawal of the professor behind the protective shield of "objectivity" is in this book condemned as outrageous irresponsibility. The doctrine of objectivity, he maintains, is total nonsense. Study of the past has only one significant purpose—to tell us what to do next in the present. And the future, which will grow out of the present, can never be predicted because it depends upon what men choose to do now, what they decide to *create.*

The author has this to say concerning the barrenness of contemporary Western intellectuality:

> Today, thinking in our part of the world exists exclusively by opposition to stalinism. Thus we have "pluralism," which instead of being an attempt to rethink government in the light of contemporary history is simply a restatement of democratic principles offered as an edifying contrast to communist totalitarianism. In the same way, revulsion from dictatorial interference with private life has brought about the rediscovery of the preciousness of the individual as a corrective to mass behavior and mass values. Such was the ideological gift of the West to the rest of the world: freedom of speech to those who can neither read nor write, the dignity of the individual to people who live half naked in the shadow of famine. As for the material gifts, no one is grateful for charity but only for instruction as to how to become independent of charity, and capitalism is of no help in a situation where intense overall planning is absolutely indispensable.

As criticism, this no doubt needs to be said, but as the final word it is obviously inadequate. The chief obstacle to the kind of help that is needed from capitalist countries is obviously the preoccupation of the Western democracies with their preparations for war. Mr. Knight does not address himself to the problem of war—a neglect which tends to make his own thinking academic. Also, the idea of "overall planning" needs close attention. It is true enough that the underdeveloped countries are finding it necessary to jump from somewhere in the Middle Ages into the age of nuclear power, and the haphazard growth which typified the capitalistic expansion of the West is hardly adequate for this sudden transformation. On the other hand, the "planning" that is needed might easily involve a lot of the "pluralism" which Mr. Knight implies is of negligible value.

He is really at his best when devoting his incisive intelligence to free-wheeling criticism of Western culture:

> For the moment, however, what is important to remark is that the western individual, while opposing integration on the Russian and Chinese models, not only accepts the herd values of his own society, but has invented psychoanalysis to prevent him from straying from them. Here is a remarkable example of how "objectivity" works in a society of "individuals." The stresses that modern life often produces in sensitive and intelligent people are no longer considered to call for a change in society; it is the individual who is wrong, and he consequently becomes neurotic, not a revolutionary. No more remarkable device than psychoanalysis has ever been devised by a society for preventing its superior citizens from giving it pain. Even when, as in the case of a Karen Horney, the values of a society are disapproved of, it is suggested that the best course open to the individual is to conform, to integrate himself with the mass, to accept. If he follows the advice of a Moreno, he will learn to "play roles" adapted to the types of the company he keeps, and so become a nonentity several times over rather than only once. Happiness in our individualistic society has come to consist in being as much like other people as possible. During the Korean war, the Chinese managed to convert to communism a few American prisoners who, upon their return home, were treated as mental cases. This, surely, is to be numbered among the greatest achievements of science, in the past men could only believe that their enemies were mistaken or corrupt, they can now look upon them as abnormal or insane.

Well, as we suggested, this book is a "challenge." We suspect that it has not been widely reviewed, and certainly not widely discussed. Yet the fact may be that what is wrong with this book is mostly a consequence of the failure of the West to pursue unafraid discussion of the issues Mr. Knight raises.

COMMENTARY
A DANGEROUS CENTRIFUGAL FORCE

MANY evils grow out of the fear of war, but one of the most disheartening effects of the anxieties felt by Americans in the present is the sealing off of open discussion of social and sociological issues. Edmund Wilson tells (in *A Piece of My Mind*) of the man who, applying for American citizenship, was asked forbiddingly if he thought it was possible "to make the world a better place to live in." To favor any sort of change is apparently tantamount to blanket endorsement of our cold-war opponents, and hence regarded as a kind of disloyalty. We know of a young man whose dossier in the personnel department of a large West Coast manufacturer contained a note to the effect that at college he had "majored in political science"—a point which, taken with other considerations, led to his discharge.

Now it happens that of all the public issues before the world today, political matters hold the least interest for the editors of MANAS, for the reason that other questions seem far more decisive, in the long run, for human welfare. But when broad questions of political philosophy can no longer be openly argued because people fear to listen to such discussions, to say nothing of taking part in them, then the cultural health of the entire community is in danger. Good men who want to talk about these matters are driven from the public forums into the ranks of dissident political fractions, with the misfortune that they are never again heard from by the great majority, except by ugly rumor, or in the context of "suspicious circumstances."

When mass psychological conditioning of this sort continues for a number of years, the people are slowly rendered impotent for any effective self-government. In desperation, critics of the situation are likely to go to extremes, while an apathetic conformity tends to be the rule for all the rest. No thoughtful observer needs to be told that a democratic country which seeks its security in mindless conformity will soon lose the very virtue which in the past made it superior to its totalitarian opponents—the capacity of the citizenry to think and to choose in the light of national and international issues publicly discussed.

Every large population has its due proportion of insistently free men, and when the compulsions to conformity become sufficiently menacing, the free men are driven from the center to the periphery of the society. On a small scale, a change of this sort occurred recently in California, when the State University tried to exact a loyalty oath from its professors. It has often been pointed out that some of the best professors *left* the University at this time. The men who refused to sign were later vindicated legally by Supreme Court decision, which was a victory for the constitutional rights of all Americans, but did little to redress California's loss of distinguished teachers.

Such men supply the nation with its intellectual and moral vigor. If they are suppressed or put out of action, there will eventually be little to distinguish "democracy" from the political systems which are ruled by dictators or an autocratic elite.

What gives cause for alarm in the present is the studied neglect of this fact. We don't know whether Everett Knight (see Review) ought to be identified as an American professor who has been driven from the center to the periphery by sheer disgust at the monotonous conformity in American education, but he certainly speaks for the ones that have.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

A READER in the Monterey (Calif.) area has sent information about still another independent educational effort, in this case at the "higher learning" level. Pacific Grove, Calif., now boasts a small academic center called Emerson College, with a faculty of less than ten. The founders of Emerson have developed courses featuring breadth of interpretation—precisely what conventional universities fail to supply, save for seminars, chiefly in graduate work. For example, the first course listed, presented by three teachers of differing backgrounds, is called "Utopias: Historical solutions and evasions of the problem of society, wherein they failed, the possibilities of success."

This could be a fascinating undertaking, covering the diverse material found in books such as Edmund Wilson's *To the Finland Station,* Carl Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers,* Arthur Morgan's *Nowhere Was Somewhere,* and V. F. Calverton's *Where Angels Fear to Tread.*

A brochure giving the aims of Emerson College makes this statement:

> We want, and we want our students to penetrate to the central concerns of our time, to understand even if not agree with the motives of our age, and to better it by fostering the best elements of our culture.
>
> In pursuit of our aims, and in recognition of our resources in staff and facilities, we are undertaking a program that will offer the student a unique focus on the concerns of an academic community and an opportunity for direct participation in the affairs of the college.

Following are the requirements for those applying for admission to Emerson:

> Applicants to the College will be expected to be fairly self-reliant and capable of working with the faculty without having to be led or prodded. As a test of these qualities (a test on which there are no right or wrong answers) applicants should immediately answer the following:
>
> 1. Who or what has influenced you most?
> 2. In what period of history, other than today, would you like to have lived?
> 3. Discuss a book you have liked and one you have not liked.
> 4. Describe any active experience you may have had in one of the following fields:
>
> (*a*) literature, religion, philosophy, history, psychology, natural sciences, mathematics.
>
> (*b*) music, the theatre, the dance, painting, sculpture, writing.
>
> 5. What do you want to know more about?
> 6. What will you do after college?
> 7. Have you ever had a job?
> 8. Write a short autobiography.

After our own four years of university experience we concluded that the only examination worth anything to the student would be one for which the professor passed out reams of paper and said, in effect, "Put down everything you think you have learned in terms of what you think it means." Every high school graduate would benefit from fulfilling Emerson's "application for admission," regardless of whether he ever reached Pacific Grove.

* * *

Conventional educational opinion favors a standardized regimen at the university level and extremes of permissiveness during the childhood years—in accordance with a theory of human nature which seems to us entirely unwarranted. Regularity, discipline, and an early introduction to the problem of what knowledge is and how it may be obtained will often awaken in the young child the sort of "fire of the mind" upon which all learning ultimately depends. But at some point in the trip toward maturity (as the founders of Emerson College seem clearly aware), youths need encouragement to push forward on their own. For an example of the opposite extreme—an insistence that young children should "play" in the way their teachers prescribe—we quote from *Time* (Aug. 29) an item titled "Mud Pies & Water Play." Last Fall the California State Department

of Social Welfare ordered a Berkeley nursery school called Melody Workshop to close its doors. The reason given was that the daughter of a Los Angeles school official, who ran the school, believed that young children would be less bored and happier if they were encouraged to stretch their learning capacities. Time summarizes:

> A geologist's wife and mother of five, Teacher Joralemon began the school three years ago in her big Berkeley home, and used every minute of each 2½-hour school day to teach. Bouncing from piano to blackboard, she taught letters with rhymes ("A,B,C,D,E,F,G/ Alphabet for you and me"), soon had tots answering the roll in alphabetical order. At midmorning lunch, she used the French words for utensils, picked a "mother" and "father" to police manners at each table. Instead of wasting the legally required rest period, she said: "Now we are pigeons, and we make a little nest on the desk with our arms." Then she played hi-fi classical records, hoping to spur "appreciation for music throughout later life."
>
> The kids loved it. "It's not drudgery or boredom to them," said one delighted mother. But last fall came trouble: a visit by a lady inspector from the State Department of Social Welfare, which regulates all California day nurseries on the theory that they are not educational establishments. A "play school" devotee, the inspector expressed shock at Melody Workshop's "regimentation." She ordered the school closed, cited technical violations, *e.g.*, the inadequacy of play space. No sooner had Mrs. Joralemon measured her play space (and found more than enough to meet the law) than she was charged with an illegal shortage of toys. Among dozens on the required list: "Loose dirt for mud pies," "tubs for water play," and "soft cuddly dolls, boy and girl."

The parents of the children attempted to save Mrs. Joralemon's nursery school, but to no avail. Welfare officials insisted that teaching tots the alphabet too early might lead to "acne and personality problems in adolescence." Evidence of how the children feel about it is so conclusive that none of Mrs. Joralemon's opponents has argued that the children do not actually *want* to continue the regimen. Instead, her critics are theorizing *for* the children in a manner which seems to contradict completely their supposed interest in "freedom."

Naturally, we hope that Mrs. Joralemon eventually wins her battle. If she does, perhaps some day she will feel a parallel need for encouraging such experiments at the university level. After all, when a mind is trained and alert, it is ready to do something with its freedom, such as participating in the creation of knowledge instead of memorizing predigested material.

FRONTIERS

"War is an Outmoded Idea"

WHILE reading a review of F. S. C. Northrop's *Philosophical Anthropology and Practical Politics* in the Sept. 10 *Saturday Review*, we were reminded of a passage in a better-than-Hemingway novel concerned with the situation created by the American arms sold to the Batista government. A free-lance American involved in an uprising against Batista has the following conversation with a Cuban patriot during a battle:

> They looked back to watch the planes make a fourth pass at the slope above the truck, this time lacing it with machine-gun fire. The men admired the grace with which the planes moved and the beautiful destruction they left behind them.
>
> "You Americans build good planes," the sergeant said.
>
> "And we provide them only for the protection of friendly countries against invasion by an aggressor."
>
> "You would not, for example, sustain a dictator?"
>
> O'Brien said, "Not for one small moment."
>
> "Or meddle in the internal affairs of any country?"
>
> "That, last of all."
>
> "It comforts me to hear this," the sergeant said. "Otherwise, I would believe my eyes."
>
> Watching the planes, O'Brien had seen them return to pass once more over the road. The manner in which they did it was clearly a salute. O'Brien knew they would not be saluting the dead men—Batista's pilots were not known to be sentimental.

The title of this book is *Kings Will Be Tyrants*, and it seems to us that the author, Ward Hawkins, penetrates some of the complications of civil war more deeply than did Mr. Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls.* The two stories, however, are very much the same in presenting a Lincolnesque American dedicated to a Thomas Paine kind of warfare: "Where liberty is not, there is my country."

Reviewing Northrop's extensive volume for the *Saturday Review,* James Warburg describes the author's dislike of the hypocritical self-righteousness which too often characterizes United States policy:

> Application of the author's philosophical-anthropological approach, as well as the chapters on Asia in general and Ceylon in particular, draw upon a wealth of firsthand observation, and evidence the author's rare gift of emphatic understanding. In dealing with United States policy and its makers in recent times, Professor Northrop is less compassionate, heaping not only objective criticism but angry scorn upon such "black-letter lawyers" as former Secretaries of State Dean Acheson and the late John Foster Dulles, as well as upon such preachers and teachers of the Hobbesian school of power politics as Reinhold Niebuhr, George Kennan, and Hans Morgenthau.

Mr. Northrop is an American scholar who is not reluctant to face the truth that neither money, power, nor misapplied tradition can save the human race. The reviewer summarizes:

> The author's quarrel with the exponents of power politics is less personal than theoretical. He considers the doctrine of absolute national sovereignty enforced by physical power not only obsolete but self-defeating, as indeed it is; but he is equally concerned with the less obvious fact that the Hobbesian concept of the all-powerful nation-state is incompatible with the basic Lockean-Jeffersonian principles upon which the nation was founded. He views the intrusion of Hobbes's "Leviathan" into the stream of American political thought as a stultification of America's significance in the world and as destructive to this nation's power of attraction.

The moral of all this is clearly, once again, that we can't "fix" any sort of economic or political impasse by force, least of all by planes to Batista, lend-lease to Franco or Chiang Kai-shek, or by attempts to dominate the missile market. What Mr. Warburg calls "this nation's power of attraction" is rooted in a philosophical tradition which must be renewed and again defined in terms of what Paine called "an army of principles." The problem is how to get *them* into orbit.

In the same issue of *SR*, Norman Cousins presents a frightening view under the heading, "Special Delivery Systems for War." From this

careful study we learn that the interception of a thermo-nuclear missile, even at 150,000 feet, could set off fantastic conflagrations on the earth below. As Mr. Cousins has in various ways tried to make clear, when you win in the nuclear age, you also lose, and just about as much—which is everything.

The last few paragraphs of "Special Delivery Systems for War" raise psychological and philosophical considerations:

> What is most significant about the new dimensions of force is that they are the product of *break-through.* That is, the scientific and engineering problems involved in the development of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles had previously been considered beyond the reach of human intelligence. They were solved only because the governments concerned were absolutely determined to solve them, no matter what the effort and cost. Necessity on the military level swept all difficulties before it.
>
> The most painful commentary on the human situation in our time is that the fashioning of a durable peace had no such break-through drive. The fact that man has never before been able to invent an enforceable peace with justice may indicate the size and complexity of the problem. But the fact remains that a real solution has never been attempted. Nothing on the scale of the crash programs behind nuclear weapons and ICBMs has been tried in the field of peace.
>
> For related to the revolution represented by the nuclear-tipped missile is another contemporary revolution that has to do with national security. Security today depends on the control of force rather than the pursuit of force. This in turn requires a world organization with peace-making and -enforcing powers as far beyond the present U.N. as the hydrogen bomb is beyond the fission bomb.
>
> The creation of such an organization may be the most difficult task in human history. But it is still within reach if enough people decide there is no more important business before our generation.