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THE CONDITION OF LIFE

IF the conceits of "modern man" could be removed by some delicate psychological surgery, what would remain as the substance of his sense of being, or, as we say, "identity"? Men are torn, today, by the antagonisms between historical progress and the emerging necessities of self-fulfillment. This conflict is real, even though few people are sure, any more, of just what "progress" is, and the idea of individual growth is based more on inchoate longings than on a clear conception of goal. There is a sense in which the acceptance of this dilemma as the raw material of human life is the very essence of modernity, but then we must ask what this acceptance has to do with time. Why should "modern" be used to describe the coming in upon human beings of feelings of metaphysical struggle? Can we say that to be "modern" is to be unable to turn away from such questions?

If so, then the word modern is not without meaning. It is the real, not a specious, present. It characterizes a dawning realization of the constant factors in the human situation. But there is more—for one thing, the fact that this realization always occurs against a background of pseudo-certainties, in an epoch of general human commitment to finite goals. So a man's sense of "modernity," when he talks about it, is mixed up with the superficial dress of a very finite moment of time. And by all those who are not making similar discoveries, he is inevitably misunderstood. Yet they cannot ignore the intensity of his vision. The glow of his yearning, if not his perilous balance, gets through to the world. Publishers seize what he says and rush into print with it. So vision is converted into a product, a finality for the times. This turns the problem of "modernity" into a question of whether there is a general rhythm in this process of surge, followed by containment. Paring away modern conceits might, just possibly, give a fleeting glimpse into the essence of the modern.

For example, what is more improbable than the suggestion that Louis XIV was a pioneer in the idea of general social responsibility? The elegant Sun King? The waster in war of his people's substance? The symbol of every vanity the revolution of the eighteenth century put a stop to?

Yet in a little book just issued in Canada—*Canadian Society During the French Regime* (Montreal: Harvest House, paper, $2.50, printed in both French and English)—W. J. Eccles shows that Canadian society is now gradually returning to ideas of public responsibility which for Louis were the foundation of his administration of French possessions in the New World. The account of what Louis believed and did is somewhat chastening to any reader who has supposed that the dawn of all social decencies came with passionate regicide and the democratic politics of "the general welfare." Mr. Eccles writes:

> It is frequently stated that the principal institutions of New France were feudal in origin. This is a term that obscures more than it explains, particularly when it is used in a pejorative sense. In fact, the word feudal was not coined until the late eighteenth century, after New France had ceased to exist. Instead of dismissing these institutions by attaching a label to them it would be far better to examine them closely to discover their purpose and the extent to which they achieved it. When this is done it becomes apparent that the intent in New France was to establish quite a different type of society to that which was established in France after the [British] Conquest. Oddly enough, one also becomes aware that the changes presently taking place in our social values and purpose are bringing them more and more to resemble those that prevailed in Canada under the French regime.

> One of the dominant features of the older society was the deep-rooted sense of social responsibility that permeated it at all levels; the belief that the state must safeguard the legitimate interests of all ranks in society, not just those of the propertied class. Today, despite opposition from some quarters, we are well on the way to accepting the basic concepts of the welfare state. New France, on the other hand, from the moment the Crown took it over, was a welfare state. This was a fundamental principle accepted by all without question, hence without discussion. The Minister of Marine put it succinctly when he informed the Intendant, Jean Bochart de Champigny, "the rich must nourish the poor." And in the instructions issued to the intendants the concept of social responsibility—condemned by nineteenth-century historians with the expression, "paternalism"—was clearly spelled out.

The social blessedness instituted by Louis XIV was not just on paper. The details of what he did, how social measures were enforced, and how Louis sacked administrators who were not sufficiently conscientious—form the body of this book. Care of the poor, of foundlings, of the sick, was much in the mind of the monarch. So were social abuses that weakened France, and which he determined to prevent in America. Mr. Eccles comments:

> Throughout this period service to the Crown, that is, to society as a whole, was regarded as the proper end of the individual and Louis XIV fostered this concept with considerable finesse. It was worthy of note that this social philosophy stands in rather striking contrast to the values imposed on society after the British conquest, based as the latter were on the belief that if every individual pursued his private advantage to the best of his ability, the general good would somehow result. . . . Eventually ... the values and aspirations of the mercantile element came to dominate. Men's worth came to be measured mainly by the success they achieved in the market place. The bleak philistine society that this produced is in marked contrast to that of the old regime. It also contrasts with the society that is coming into being today. Present-day values are becoming more akin to those that prevailed in the mid-eighteenth century Canada as they react against and reject those of the nineteenth. It may well be that historians of the future will regard the Canadian ethos of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as merely a lengthy aberration.

One further passage about these vigorous people is too good to omit:

> While it is quite true that the government of New France, like that of France, rested on the principle that all power derived from the Crown, it is often overlooked that this trend toward royal absolutism was then regarded as a very progressive step and not at all reactionary. It is also frequently claimed that the people had no say in the administration, merely did what they were told by the royal officials. From this it is deduced that such a system inevitably resulted in apathy and a sad lack of initiative on the part of the people, as compared to that displayed in the English colonies with their representative assemblies. It is, however, rather difficult to reconcile this view with the fact that these apathetic, unenterprising Canadians had voyaged over the vast interior of the continent, indeed, dominated it, before the English colonials, replete with democratic and egalitarian initiative, had managed to struggle across the Alleghenies; and when they did they were promptly driven back by these same dispirited Canadians.

There follows a close description of the various ways in which the French under Louis in Canada gained voice in their own affairs. There is no attempt to suggest that New France was a fine democratic society, but it becomes clear that the general good was made to prevail whenever there was a conflict with private interests, and that decisions were not made in an arbitrary manner. The point is that when a "modern" man thinks about these old times, he automatically assumes that they were intolerably benighted, by comparison with his own progressive era, and it becomes psychologically difficult, if not impossible, for him to identify with the people of any past earlier than the eighteenth century, when the "real" world of enlightenment and progress began. It seldom occurs to him to consider that the harassments and inequities peculiar to the present, to which he has made accommodating adjustments, are in any way comparable to the tyrannies endured in feudal times, or by the peoples of ancient empires. Nor does he naturally suppose that the common man of the past was able to find ingenious securities and pleasant interludes of release from struggle, similar to

those which are available—although in diminishing measure—today. There are, it is true, notable differences between, say, the severity of punishment for violations of the law in the seventeenth century and in the present. Mr. Eccles' account of the offences which brought the death penalty makes the rule of Louis seem pretty barbarous, yet we seldom measure the debilitating psychological pain, hardly prescribed by law, which overtakes those who get caught on the wrong side of modern legal systems. And as for such things as war—we have learned, since 1945, to remain quite silent concerning the "progressive" aspect of modern military activities.

There is, in short, a blinding egotism in ideological pride. The supposition that people were not really alive—had little chance to be fully human—because the political principles under which they lived were different from our own has a peculiarly destructive effect when these principles break down or become plainly ineffective. To feel that *all* important human identity depends upon an ideological system is to invite conquest by nihilist emotion. There is no doubt that the principles declared in the eighteenth century marked a great stride of progress in the affairs of mankind. But that progress was in its declaration of *possibilities.* Freedom is valuable only when its dimensions are filled up with constructive individual action. Left in sterile vacancy, freedom turns into an arena of disorder, making men to seek little cubby holes of private security which, when added up, change the political forms of freedom into conveniences of self-interest.

Now it may be that the idea of the "modern" is better got at in non-political terms. Quite possibly, it needs to be understood by other sorts of feeling. So, let us look at what "modern" may mean for the artist. In his book, *Etretat* (discussed in last week's Review), Manfred Schwartz says:

> I cannot conceive of "modern" as defining a style or a school. In this era of rapid communication, the new statement quickly becomes a convention and is soon institutionalized. But any school or art harbors the truly modern as well as its echoes. The echoes, widely practiced, are easily classified but don't go beyond the establishment.

This seems a plain correspondence with the failure of the "modern" in ideology. People mistake the form for the substance—the time-bound creation for the creative spirit. Mr. Schwartz continues:

> A recent and common usage of the term "modern" connotes an appearance of simplicity as distinguished from the ornamental; in other words, the "modern look." But nature designs its creatures in a variety of ways independent of such classifications. The seal and the panther look very modern, indeed, but the lion looks baroque. The frog, too, is less streamlined than the snail. By these standards, any faithful rendering of the snail will look very modern.
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> The removal of a cornice of a building similarly achieves a more "modern-looking" facade, but does not in the process create modern architecture. The modern encompasses every appearance but does not necessarily reveal itself by its outward aspect.
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> I see modern art as dual in character, traditional on the one hand but resisting institutions on the other. It involves a creative and therefore restless spirit that reacts even against itself and is in a constant state of ferment and renewal.
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> Revolt is meaningless unless it offers a replacement for the order it overthrows. I don't see the modern impulse as *left* in relation to *right* or *middle*, nor as *far out* or *way in.*, but rather a process whose intelligence will seem equally inevitable to the eye distant in time as it does to the contemporary observer.

Well, is he saying that the baroque was once "modern"? That would be too easy an escape—a light-hearted "camp" solution which ridicules all styles and periods. To be "modern" means to break out of any confinement the moment you see it is a confinement; but the artist has to see this for himself; if he doesn't, but "breaks out" because the leaders are iconoclasts, then he is only contributing, as Schwartz suggests, to a pseudo-academy celebrating ephemera. In this sort of situation people sometimes say, petulantly, but

can't you just *tell* me what is modern and what is not? Couldn't you pass a *law* to settle such things? And then you tell them about Socialist Realism.

Another man, the late Alois Schardt, an eminent art historian, puts the matter in the language of a common human longing:

> Van Gogh one day suggested to Gauguin that they do a painting together. Gauguin laughed at his foolishness. How could it be possible to work together on a painting that is the expression of a single personality? And yet Van Gogh was serious and felt deeply hurt by the derisive laughter of Gauguin. In this suggestion there is something extremely modern. Van Gogh believed in the common spirit of man because he believed in the common spirit of life. Why is it that he could paint wilted and decaying sunflowers which ordinary people throw into the wastebasket? Because he did not believe in decay and death. To him, there exists everywhere the same eternal life—different only in its different states. It must have been a great challenge to Van Gogh to portray this life in a state that ordinarily people call dead and useless. The essential quality of the artist is to relate things, one to the other, to redeem them from their isolated state of ugliness to the beauty of inter-relatedness. To be separated is to be ugly, to be unified is to be beautiful. It is not the Apollinic beauty of the Classicist, but the Dionysian beauty of an all-comprehensive life. It is this devotedness to life that made Van Gogh paint a rickety almond tree blossoming in a meager backyard, or the broken branch of an apple tree in a water glass. His powerful brushstroke shows that life is everywhere! He chooses for his portraits the little people—peasants and petty bourgeoisie. He recognizes very keenly their shortcomings and provincialism; but he neither ridicules nor heroizes them—he shows their natural dignity which stems from their very existence. The most astonishing phenomenon is that Van Gogh in a highly class-conscious time is utterly unconscious of class, because his standards of value come from a new source—it's not so much the private, personal man that counts but the participation in an everlasting life.

This is an appealing vision for the meaning of "modern" and there is fundamental truth in it—but a truth which cannot be stereotyped, which cannot be made "academic," which remains "in a constant state of ferment and renewal."

A difficulty of definition arises here, for as soon as the "modern" gains formal recognition, it must of necessity change. As Ellman and Feidelson (in *The Modern Tradition*) say: "If we can postulate a modern tradition, it is paradoxically untraditional tradition." It embodies "dynamic vision over the static image," with the result that when the modern is regarded in terms of its effects, it always seems to be attacking itself. So, along with its courage, its endless challenge to the customary and the established, it has its other face of "a sense of loss, alienation, and despair." Only the most balanced of human beings are able to maintain continuity with the past, while refusing to be confined by it. So the modern artist, like Camus' rebel, accepts almost Sisyphusian tasks, and thus becomes vulnerable to the mockery of those who see good only in a comfortable stability. And it is true enough that the impulse of the modern, when it loses its way, is often ridiculous; and it sometimes cuts its own tap roots. It follows that much of what men call "modern" is marked by satire, iconoclasm, and desperation. Schardt tells about a young man who visited him in Berlin in 1920, and recited to him two poems, each consisting of the repetition of one word. The poet seemed quite serious, and Schardt was patient with him, discussing why one of the poems might be better than the other. A few days later the young man, who was Kurt Schwitters, brought him a collage made from newspaper clippings:

> The printed words that appeared in the collage were coherent, though very trivial and commonplace. In reality it was composed of sentences taken from an Emperor's birthday speech, a minister's sermon, and a family magazine novel. All of these, orators, writers, advertisers, used the same words with the same implications, the same emotional background of sentimentality—family, fatherland religion, business. Granted that the Dadaists did not achieve any work of great importance; however, they demonstrated what they thought antiquated and of no value with regard to a future organic development of mankind.

Schardt also has this passage:

> It is not the psychology that makes Dostoevsky's novels modern, but his use of psychological insight into the strange relationship between the saint and the criminal—between good and bad. It is this powerful stream of energy that flows through nature and manifests itself by acceptance, resistance, passivity in the single objects. What we call an "object" gains a completely new meaning: The interest of modern man does not lie in his personal achievements and the glory bestowed on him by his fellow men, it lies in his stewardship of talents and energies entrusted to him by the world for the world—not ownership but trusteeship.

So there is this idea of unity which has to be achieved, but never by indulging or submitting to conformity, and out of which, in imperfect human practice, endless paradoxes arise. The only true "moderns," one might say, are those who understand this difficulty and reconcile themselves to its inevitable failure and pain. The failure, they know, is only a failure of form, which is a condition of life.

REVIEW
ICONOCLASM AND RECONSTRUCTION

IT seems likely that serious questioning about education will do more to disclose the fundamental problems of modern society than any other form of inquiry. The reason for this may be quite simple. Teaching brings the habit of unselfish response to human need, and this leads to lucid understanding of human beings, which is what we are after. The break-throughs of contemporary humanistic psychology—discoveries filled with excitement and promise for the thoughtful men of our time, and which are fertilizing dozens of practical regenerative activities—have come in a similar way. Years ago Henry Murray pointed out that the psychologists—mostly psychoanalysts—who devoted themselves to trying to alleviate actual human *pain*, could not help but become involved in passionate search for understanding. So, in various ways, they made discoveries—mainly the discovery of human potentiality—an awareness which has lately flowered in the work of such men as Carl Rogers and A. H. Maslow, Viktor Frankl, and, of course, many others. Another perspective on this profound awakening—it should be recognized as nothing less—is provided by Ira Progoff's book, *The Death and Rebirth of Psychology* (Julian Press, 1956), which traces the transformation of psychoanalysis from a somewhat mechanistic enterprise, seeking to "objectify" various aspects of the psyche in terms of Freudian categories, into a very different undertaking. As Dr. Progoff puts it:

> . . . the net result of modern psychology has been to reaffirm man's experience of himself as a spiritual being. Despite its conscious intention, the discipline of psychology recalls the modern man to an awareness of his inner life, thus re-establishing the ancient religious knowledge that man's fundamental accomplishments began within himself. This is a paradoxical outcome of the work of Freud, and it has the broadest implications for our time.

Why did anything like this happen in psychology? The only reasonable explanation is that psychoanalysis brought men of goodwill and intelligence into direct encounter with human suffering. They could not change the circumstances of the sufferer so they concentrated on showing the sufferer how to help himself. As a result, they discovered rich human potentiality. This is the root of the humanistic stance, and the break-throughs, you could say, were inevitable.

Why should they be inevitable? Because, it is reasonable to say, of the desperate need involved. Desperation produces intensity, and intensity sometimes results in singleminded, heroic search.

A similar desperation now attends the inquiries of serious educators. This is illustrated by three featured articles on education in the *Saturday Review* for May—"Culture, Politics, and Pedagogy," by Jerome S. Brunner; "Freedom and Learning: The Need for Choice," by Paul Goodman; and "The Myths of Educational Technology," by Anthony C. Oettinger. Brunner and Goodman need no introduction; we don't know anything about Mr. Oettinger, but what he says makes sense. These articles deserve careful study, and while they will probably come out in books, later on, there is a particular value in reading them together, in the *Saturday Review*, along with Edward Eddy's review of *The Academic Revolution* by Christopher Jencks and David Riesman. Just about all the major problems of education get attention in these contributions. There is this, for example, in Brunner's first paragraph: ". . . if the past decade has taught us anything, it is that educational reform confined only to the schools and not to the society at large is doomed to eventual triviality."

From this truism one could go to the files of the *Social Frontier* (in the 1930's) to see what happens when teachers organize themselves to reform society as well as the schools. You get the impression, in time, that campaigning with a hot and ardent social righteousness is not the best way to "change" society. One effect of this approach is described in *That Men May Understand* by Harold Rugg. You sympathize wholeheartedly

with Mr. Rugg, but somehow, somewhere, the teachers may have forgotten what Goethe said about all educational projects:

> The original teachers are still conscious of the insoluble core of their project, and attempt to approach it in a naive and flexible manner. The successors are inclined to become didactic, and their dogmatism, gradually, reaches the level of intolerance.

This does not, of course, alter Dr. Brunner's conclusion. The reform of society is necessary, if we are to have better schools. But the direction, pace, and dynamics of the reform are still uncertainties. We have to find out how to dissipate ignorance, not how to manipulate it in order to reach some environmental goal. Few men have the patience for this; but, on the other hand, few men except educators can be expected to admit the need.

Paul Goodman is an iconoclast with a practical program. He seems to be talking to our political managers and to school administrators, but he is really addressing individuals out in society, since the reforms he proposes can be tried by individuals and are unlikely to interest people bound by their jobs to the status quo. He starts out:

> The belief that a highly industrialized society requires twelve to twenty years of prior processing is an illusion or a hoax. The evidence is strong that there is no correlation between school performance and life achievement in any of the professions, whether medicine, law, engineering, journalism or business. Moreover, recent research shows that for more modest clerical, technological, or semi-skilled factory jobs there is no advantage in years of schooling or the possession of diplomas. We were not exactly savages in 1900 when only 6 per cent of adolescents graduated from high school.
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> Whatever the deliberate intention, schooling today serves mainly for policing and for taking up the slack in youth unemployment. It is not surprising that the young are finally rebelling against it, especially since they cannot identify with the goals of so much social engineering—for instance, that 86 per cent of the federal budget for research and development is for military purposes.

Well, what are these undeniable truths presented by Mr. Goodman bucking?

They are bucking, first of all, against the inherited pride of nearly every American in the public school system of the United States—a plainly patriotic emotion. It is an emotion which also *lets* us approve the spending of 86 per cent of the national research budget for military purposes—since we believe that we must preserve from alien wickedness the institutions which Mr. Goodman—rather persuasively—now tells us aren't worth saving.

Goodman is indeed a very confusing man. Next he focuses on a fact that conservatives and other unprogressive people have been whispering to each other for generations, in order to justify their indifference toward the educational potentialities of common folk. But Goodman has another reason for repeating this fact—he wants to refute the idea that the only kind of intelligence that should be honored and fostered in our society is intellectual, academic intelligence. He writes:

> In the adolescent and college years, the present mania is to keep students at their lessons for another four to ten years as the only way of their growing up in the world. The correct policy would be to open as many diverse paths as possible, with plenty of opportunity to backtrack and change. It is said by James Conant that about 15 per cent learn well by books and study in an academic setting, and these can opt for high school. Most, including most of the bright students, do better either on their own or as apprentices in activities that are for keeps, rather than through lessons. If their previous eight years had been spent in exploring their own bents and interests, rather than being continually interrupted to do others' assignments on others' schedules, most adolescents would have a clearer notion of what they are after, and many would have found their vocations.

Goodman proposes what he calls mini-schools—"an elementary group of twenty-eight children with four grownups: a licensed teacher, a housewife who can cook, a college senior, and a teen-age dropout." These people would find out what the children want to do and learn, and help them to do it. At their age, the children don't

need what we try to teach them. No facts, but only cultural myths and parental expectations stand in the way of accepting and then doing what Goodman says:

> School methods are simply not competent to teach all the arts, sciences, professions, and skills the school establishment pretends to teach. For some professions—e.g., social work, architecture, pedagogy—trying to earn academic credits is probably harmful because it is an irrelevant and discouraging obstacle course. Most technological know-how has to be learned in actual practice in offices and factories, and this often involves unlearning what has been laboriously crammed for exams. The technical competence required by skilled and semi-skilled workmen can be acquired in three weeks to a year on the job, with no previous schooling. The importance of even "functional literacy" is much exaggerated; it is the attitude, and not the reading ability, that counts. Those who are creative in the arts and sciences almost invariably go their own course and are usually hampered by schools. It is pointless to teach social sciences, literary criticism, and philosophy to youngsters who have no responsible experience in life and society.

One sees why Mr. Goodman is popular only with the young. How many parents are ready for these revolutionary revelations, and for the responsibilities which they entail? You might as well tell them to keep their children out of school! However, Mr. Goodman has excellent plans for reform at every level of learning. Of higher education he has this to say:

> By and large, it is not in the adolescent years but in later years that, in all walks of life, there is need for academic withdrawal, periods of study and reflection, synoptic review of the texts. The Greeks understood this and regarded most of our present college curricula as appropriate only for those over the age of thirty and thirty-five.

Obviously, the youth who are making trouble in the schools are not just "ungrateful." They are desperate human beings who have been mistreated and are intended to be misused. We have had no confidence in them; we have not listened to their inclinations; and now they have no confidence in us. Goodman concludes:

> Every part of education can be open to need, desire, choice, and trying out. Nothing needs to be compelled or extrinsically motivated by prizes and threats. I do not know if the procedure here outlined would cost more than our present system—though it is hard to conceive of a need for more money than the school establishment now spends. What would be saved is the pitiful waste of youthful years—caged, daydreaming sabotaging, and cheating—and the degrading and insulting misuse of teachers. . . . Since the growing-up of the young into society to be useful to themselves and to others, and to do God's work, is one of the three or four most important functions of any society, no doubt we ought to spend even more on the education of the young than we do; but I would not give a penny to the present administrators, and I would largely dismantle the present school machinery.

Well, Mr. Goodman has probably thought of it, but he ought to read the question borrowed by Mr. Oettinger from Harold Benjamin—a question "which a democratic society may ignore only at its deadly peril." The question has two parts:

> How much uniformity does this society need for safety? How much deviation does this society require for progress?

We can't really answer these questions, but this is all the more reason for asking them. Meanwhile, individuals are free to put all of Mr. Goodman's extremely practical suggestions to work. The only objection one could have to this would be that we are paying *taxes* for something we now have to do for ourselves. Well, Goodman's proposals, let us frankly admit, are "revolutionary." But they are far better than bloody revolution and may be the only way to prevent bloody revolution. And why should anyone expect to be put on a salary or given a grant for revolutionary activity? This may happen now and then, because the existing establishment is really too big to know what it is doing, and is better in some ways than others, but it is unrealistic to count on grants, and somewhat ridiculous to demand them.

COMMENTARY
HISTORY IN SERVICE TO HOPE

STAUGHTON LYND has contributions in both *Towards* a *New Past* (see Frontiers) and *The Dissenting Academy* (also Pantheon, edited by Theodore Roszak, reviewed in MANAS for March 13) which deserve special attention. Mr. Lynd is a historian who has asked himself the sort of questions which led Mr. Roszak to edit his book—questions resulting in a regenerated conception of the role of scholarship. In *Towards a New Past* Mr. Lynd writes a criticism and a refinement of Charles A. Beard's economic interpretation of the Constitution of the United States. In *The Dissenting Academy* he explains why such problems interest him.

The historian, he believes, should not be only a passive spectator because the past he studies cannot be changed. He may be a scholar, but he is also a man. He ought to try to answer the question: What can knowledge of the past contribute to the existential present—in which we have to *choose?* As he says:

> . . . the historian's business with the future is not to predict but to envision, to say (as Howard Zinn has put it) not what *will* be but what *can* be.

Current history, he thinks, should not be left to scholarly specialists:

> . . . chronicling and envisioning are functions which might be as well or better done by many persons in part of their time than on a full-time basis by a professional few.

Concerning the charge that today's young radicals neglect history, he says:

> Many rebellious young Americans have profoundly mixed feelings when they confront our country's history. On the one hand, they feel shame and distrust toward Founding Fathers who tolerated slavery, exterminated Indians, and in all their proceedings were disturbingly insensitive to values and life styles other than their own. On the other hand, there is a diffuse sense that the rhetoric of the Revolution and the Civil War spoke then and speaks now to hopes widespread among mankind. Thus in November 1965 Carl Oglesby, then president of Students for a Democratic Society, asked an antiwar demonstration gathered at the Washington Monument what Thomas Jefferson or Thomas Paine would say to President Johnson and McGeorge Bundy about the war in Vietnam.

Actually, it is nonsense to argue that scientific research ought to be morally neutral.. Honesty and objectivity do not depend upon having no vision in respect to what *might* be. Pretending that they do only turns social science into a covert instead of an open argument; or, if this is not intended something worse happens—history becomes a brief for the impotence of man in relation to historical events, which pours the only human importance of the study of history down the drain. Staughton Lynd's "Historical Past and Existential Present" should be paired with Louis J. Halle's paper on writing contemporary history, in the Autumn (1967) *Virginia Quarterly.*

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
TOLSTOY ON MISEDUCATION

THERE is something of a paradox in the claim of Reginald Archambault that Tolstoy, with his school for the children of peasants, was "a precursor of A. S. Neill, who came to strikingly similar conclusions to Tolstoy's in his experiment at Summerhill." Perhaps the difficulty in seeing similarities between the severe Russian moralist and the permissive Englishman results from comparing their opinions rather than their practice with the young.

In the book, *Tolstoy on Education* (University of Chicago Press, 1967, $6.00), there is a long essay by Tolstoy on the idea of progress. It is a polemic directed against a critic of Tolstoy's ideas about education and his school at Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy believes that the advantages of "progress" are mainly a preoccupation of intellectuals and people for whom the modes of technological advance are a source of profit. His argument suffers, today, from the enormous growth of the middle class—making the participants in progress far more numerous—and his claim that the peasant has little need for literacy and gadgets seems extremely dated. But Tolstoy is not really defeated by his bad illustrations. And he is not really against material "welfare," any more than Gandhi was. He is only opposing the "welfare" theory of the meaning of human life.

The discussion takes the form of an attack on the "historical" argument of his critic, who urges that the task of education is to bring the young into admiring and submissive relation with the ideas and needs of their time. Tolstoy objects to the absorption of the young in contemporaneity. There must, he says, be something more fundamental to teach than this "last word" version of existing culture and education. His critic is plainly exasperated. What *else* is there to teach? he seems to be saying.

It is easy to see how Tolstoy offends. He simply does not believe that history, in itself, reveals primary reality. He thinks that the progress by which men mark off history is largely illusory. The fact is, however, that Tolstoy has a different conception of progress, although this comes out in only one place in his essay. He says:

> I, like all people who are free from the superstition of progress, observe only that humanity lives, that the memories of the past as much increase as they disappear; the labours of the past frequently serve as the basis for the labours of the present, and just as frequently as an impediment; that the well-being of the people now increases in one place, in one stratum, and in one sense, and now diminishes; that, no matter how desirable it would be, I cannot find any common law in the life of humanity; and that it is as easy to subordinate history to the idea of progress as to any other idea or to any imaginable historical fancy.
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> I will say even more: I see no necessity of finding common laws for history, independent of the possibility of finding them. The common eternal law is written in the soul of each man. The law of progress, or perfectibility, is written in the soul of each man, and is transferred to history only through error. As long as it remains personal, this law is fruitful and accessible to all; when it is transferred to history, it becomes an idle, empty prattle, leading to the justification of every insipidity and to fatalism. Progress in general in all humanity is an unproved fact, and does not exist for all the Eastern nations; therefore it is as unfounded to say that progress is the law of humanity as it is to say that all people are blond except the dark-complexioned ones.

Well, the "mysterious East" has since been bitten by the bug of progress, and is producing evidence which might support other of Tolstoy's arguments, although it undermines this one. Still persuasive, however, is his contention that we know too little about the total history of mankind to make dogmatic statements about the achievements of the present.

It is when Tolstoy exposes eager submission to "the way we do things now" as the obstacle to genuine education that this essay becomes most effective. First, he makes a positive definition. Education, he says, seeks equality between learner

and teacher. When the man who understands arithmetic has taught a child all he knows about arithmetic, the child must then find someone who knows algebra, and become his equal in it. This, Tolstoy maintains, is the basic relation in education, and a practical account of its fulfillment. He then moves to an analysis of education which is startlingly like what present-day critics are saying:

> Outside of the chief foundation of every education, which springs from the very essence of the activity of education,—the tendency toward an equalization of knowledge,—there have arisen other causes in civil society, which urge on toward education. These causes seem so persistent that the pedagogues keep only these in view, losing sight of the chief foundation. Considering now only the activity of him who is being educated, we shall discover many seeming foundations of education, besides the essential one which we have enunciated. The impossibility of admitting these foundations can easily be proved.
>
> These false, but active, foundations are the following: The first and most operative,—the child learns in order not to be punished; the second,—the child learns in order to be rewarded; the third,—the child learns in order to be better than the rest; the fourth, the child, or young man, learns, in order to obtain an advantageous position in life.

This critique is developed:

> These foundations . . . may be classified under three heads: (1) Learning on the basis of obedience; (2) learning on the basis of egotism; and (3) learning on the basis of material advantage and ambition. . . .
>
> By admitting that the equality of knowledge is the aim of the learner's activity, I see that upon reaching this aim the activity itself stops; but by assuming obedience, egotism, and material advantages as the aim, I see, on the contrary, that however obedient the learner may become, however he may surpass all the others in worth, no matter what material advantages and civil rights he may have obtained, his aim is not reached and the possibility of the activity of education does not stop. I see, in reality, that the aim of education, by admitting such false bases, is never attained, that is, the equality of knowledge is not acquired, but there is obtained, independently of education, a habit of obedience, an irritable egotism, and material advantages. The adoption of these false foundations of education explains to me all the errors of pedagogy and the incompatibility of the results of education with the demands, inherent in man, made upon it, to which these errors lead.

Tolstoy now turns to the educational establishment—representing, one might say, the "progressive" society at large—and shows that it has a good thing going for itself in fostering these incentives:

> Let us now analyze the activity of the educator. Just as in the first case, we shall find, by observing this phenomenon in civil society, many various causes of this activity. These causes may be brought under the following heads: the first and foremost,—the desire of making people useful to us (landed proprietors who had their manorial servants instructed in music; the government which trains officers, officials, and engineers for itself); the second,—also obedience and material advantages, which cause a student of the university, for a certain remuneration, to teach children according to a given programme; the third,—egotism, which urges a man to teach in order to display his knowledge; and the fourth,—the desire to make others participate in one's interests, to transmit one's convictions to them, and, for that reason, to impart one's knowledge to them.

Tolstoy goes on to demonstrate how the use of these incentives perpetuates *control* of the people, through their motives, which are first indoctrinated, then manipulated, by the administrators.

Well, nothing much has changed. For evidence, see Hal Draper's critical analysis of the Multiversity, Theodore Roszak's volume, *The Dissenting Academy,* John Holt's *How Children Fail,* and various other books on what is now wrong with education. But Tolstoy, unlike most modern critics, pursues the diagnosis further in psycho-moral terms and invites attention to misconceptions which he believes lie at the root of all these problems. Tolstoy is often a prickly writer; his "extremism" often annoys; but he is often right.

FRONTIERS

The Importance of History

IF, following Wilhelm Dilthey, Ortega is right in saying that man is himself plus his circumstances, and that these circumstances must be understood through the study of history if he is to create a better life—"invent" it, Ortega would say—then such diverse projects as Barton J. Bernstein's (as editor) new book, *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (Pantheon: $6.95), and Operation Bootstrap in Watts, which plans to build an African village on Central Avenue in Los Angeles, are both important undertakings. In an announcement of Bootstrap's plan, Rosana Wright says:

> We, the Black people, are becoming more aware of our heritage. As we grow in this awakening, we would like to share our valuable treasures with all people, disregarding color and the inhumanities that cause racism. We are very sincere in our efforts as we call upon the brotherhood of all mankind to assist us. . . .
>
> The village, a cultural center, will feature restaurants with African foods, boutiques and motifs with arts and crafts from Africa. . . . The village will bring racial pride as well as jobs into the community, that will enhance in our struggle for equality and respect more rapidly than all of the cities burned during the long, hot summers of the past, present, and future.

This sounds like a "living history" project that can do nothing but good. (Those interested in helping should write Rosana Wright, at L'Tonya's, 1038 West Santa Barbara Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. 90037.)

Hardly by coincidence, several of the essays in *Towards New Past* deal with attitudes toward race and are richly informing concerning the aftermath of the Civil War. The book's main contribution, however, is its attack on stereotypes about the past. The first thing you find out is that historians have all these problems created by other historians. This sets a special problem for the reader, since historians all seem quite bright, and have read a great many books and also done "original research." How is the reader to know who is correct, except by becoming a historian, himself? And even that would be no sure thing, as this book sets out to prove.

The first contribution, "The American Revolution from the Bottom Up," by Jesse Lemisch, gives evidence that what a historian picks out to write about as history depends upon what he decides is "real" in historical events. Mr. Lemisch thinks that the story of the Revolution as we know it ignores the contributions of common folk and has left undescribed their capacity for organization and action. About the only surviving hero, for Mr. Lemisch, is Tom Paine, although the Quaker resolve to oust from membership in the Society of Friends anyone who owns slaves, and other Quaker attitudes honoring all men, regardless of race or property, receive the praise they deserve. Basically, Mr. Lemisch thinks that many of the famous revolutionary leaders shared the Loyalists' idea of the nature of man, which was soon reanimated in the new nation's policies. He concludes:

> The American Revolution can best be re-examined from a point of view which assumes that all men are created equal, and rational, and that since they can think and reason they can make their own history. These assumptions are nothing more nor less than the democratic credo. All of our history needs re-examination from this perspective. The history of the powerless, the inarticulate, the poor has not yet begun to be written because they have been treated no more fairly by historians than they have been treated by their contemporaries.

"The Antislavery Legacy" by James M. McPherson is a lucid account of how the Civil War failed to bring justice to the Negroes, and shows the bewilderment of the liberals when they began to realize that the war had not really done what they expected of it, and that the struggle would go on and on. The brutal policies of the 1890's, when lynching bees became common in the South, made admirers of Booker T. Washington realize that "evolution" wasn't working and led to what in those days was a radical step—formation of the NAACP.

There are valuable papers dealing with economic determinism, imperialism and anti-imperialism, and Manifest Destiny. The editor contributes an evaluation of the New Deal, which he finds to have been an essentially conservative device to save the Capitalist system. The NRA favored big business and the bank moratorium gave the banks back to the bankers instead of leading to a take-over on the part of the Government. The inadequacy of the New Deal as a not very effective patch-up job becomes what seems an argument that Mr. Roosevelt *ought* to have openly turned the country into a welfare state along socialist lines, when he had the chance. Instead—

> Sensitive to public opinion and fearful of radicalism, Roosevelt acted from a mixture of motives that rendered his liberalism cautious and limited, his experimentalism narrow. Despite the flurry of activity, his government was more vigorous and flexible about means than goals, and the goals were more conservative than historians usually acknowledge.

Well, this is another case of the enormous difference between knowing what is wrong and knowing what would have been right. Very nearly every theory of political economy has been tried out in the modern world in recent years, and not one of them has turned out to be very appealing. On the other hand, the "muddle through" solution has even fewer admirers, these days. On paper, the contention of Dwight Macdonald that what we should aim for is "to get the decisions politically and socially down to the smallest possible unit where people know each other and where they can control their own fate, instead of up in these big abstractions of President, and so on"—on paper, and in theory, this may sound like a proposal for muddling through in a crisis like the Bank Holiday—yet nobody really knows where we would be today if a Strong Man had seized that revolutionary opportunity. Another contention would be that so long as historians formulate as "crucial moments" critical situations so complex that only very learned and astute men can understand them, just so long will genuine democratic government remain impossible, since only the experts will be able to tell us how to think and what to do. And one could argue that it doesn't really matter much *what* we do, if we have to be *told* to do it. This claim is probably too imaginative to ask for a historian's comment, yet dissent in scholarship might reasonably aim in this direction—toward the redefinition of problems so that we can really get *at* them without devising some new political prison for ourselves.