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THE USES OF HISTORY

MEN study history for various reasons. In his essay, "Historical Past and Existential Present," in *The Dissenting Academy* (Pantheon, 1967), Staughton Lynd describes some of the experiences which brought him to his present view of the importance of history. The three years he spent teaching in a Negro women's college in Atlanta, Georgia, brought home to him the *urgencies* that may attend the study of history. "Here," he writes, "were students with a greater stake than I, not just in entertaining an interpretation, but in *knowing* whether the signers of the Declaration were idealists who failed to carry out their full program, or hypocritical racists who killed Indians and bred Negroes while declaring that all men are equal." Lynd was embarrassed to discover that, like many other historians, he "had tacitly assumed that white artisans and tenant farmers were the most exploited Americans of the late eighteenth century, overlooking the one fifth of the nation which was in chains."

His experience at this college also sharply etched the role of history in shaping a sense of identity:

> For my Negro students it was almost as important to know the true character of their collective past as to be at ease with their personal histories. One brilliant girl described to me the moment when, looking at the photographs in a collection of slave narratives, she realized, "These were my forefathers." After I conventionally began a survey course in American history with the Pilgrims, another excellent student, who had the courage to expose her personal past by inviting my family to her sharecropper father's home at Christmas, was also brave enough to ask me, "Why do you teach about your ancestors and not mine?" Next year I began the course with slave ships, only to hear from a third student, "You are teaching me a special history rather than treating me like everybody else." Willy-nilly I was functioning as a therapist in addition to historian; in reporting the past I turned it, whether I wished to or not, into a medium for the discovery of personal identity.

Just what *was* going on? Were these students moving toward the view, "I am what I am because of my past," or were they attempting to affirm, "I am what I am regardless of my past"? Actually, both conclusions seem to await all human beings who study history, since the path to self-knowledge and to transcendence of environment leads through dark thickets of ambiguity. Coping with this ambiguity is a long and difficult process, and resolution or "achievement," which always seems to be only partial, comes at rare, climactic moments which are spaced out over a long course of effort. The various self-identifications which become manifest in the struggles toward justice and freedom of any aroused minority group illustrate some of these moments. It is not difficult for the reflective student of history to enter into the feeling of any one of them, especially if it has been experienced in his own past. When it lies in his future, feeling-identification with such a moment is likely to prove more difficult.

This view of history—as a means to self-knowledge provides a bridge to what Tolstoy said years ago, almost in contempt of the study of history. In an essay which rejects the modern idea of progress (in *Tolstoy on Education,* University of Chicago Press, 1967), he wrote:

> 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. . . .

It could not have been after reading this that Lenin called Tolstoy a "mirror of the Russian revolution"! While there were times when Tolstoy's humanitarian longings made him preach the founding of a radical utopia, there were other times when the dull constancies of mass human nature impressed him more, as when he said: "Even if that which Marx predicted should happen, then the only thing that will happen is that despotism will be passed on. Now the capitalists rule, but then the directors of the working people will rule."

Tolstoy, one might say, used the depression inspired by historical studies to return the law of progress to the individual, where he thought it belonged. There is a sense in which Staughton Lynd does this, also:

> Thus I arrived at a conception of history which has much in common with that of the eighteenth century. Just as Jefferson found virtues to emulate in Plutarch and mistakes to be avoided in the story of Republican Rome's decline, so I would have the young person of our time (supposing history to interest him at all) encounter Jefferson (or Malcolm X) with the question, "What can I learn about how to live?"

This "living," however, is for Lynd a question of one's relation to contemporary history. He has his own sense of urgency, which grows out of discoveries made in the practice of his profession. What then is the duty of a teacher of history, concerning the uses of history? Prof. Lynd writes before his final summing up:

> I have been trying to show that professional historians, whether Marxist or non-Marxist, tend to view history from the sidelines, to give too little weight to that ethical dimension which is critical only for the man who must make decisions, to regard as historically determined what is merely historically past, and in sum, to do violence to the sense of reality of the historical actor in the present moment. I hope that I will not be understood as believing that there are no "historical forces," that historical causation does not exist, that anyone can do anything he wants in history at any time. The point, rather, is that whereas to Marx or Sartre human energy and striving are, as it were, *at the service* of impersonal historical forces, for the man trying to make history such forces are merely matters he must *take into account* in attempting to achieve his self-determined goals. The psychotherapist Viktor Frankl, who himself lived through the concentration camps, reminds us that in the most oppressive of situations men still retained a significant ability to decide what would happen to them. To say the same thing in another way, men can be beasts or brothers at any level of technological development.

Now this seems a vigorous, if perhaps partial, support of Tolstoy's view. For what Prof. Lynd writes here could be read as saying that men can be beasts or brothers before the state "withers away," or in *any* historical relationship. At any rate, the theoretical position might be put in these terms, even though, historically speaking, the practical position must take account of circumstances so oppressive that the theoretical position seems virtually unattainable. So, while from Tolstoy's perfectionist stance history seems irrelevant, from the point of view of men in the clutch of oppressive circumstances history goes a long way toward being the determining factor of their lives. What then, will you say about "history" to such men? That they must transcend their environment and find inward peace? There may be some kind of double standard required here. Often, for example, it is grossly inappropriate for a man to say to others what he ought to say to himself. For it might sound like, "See how well I lift and bear my own burdens; why don't you lift yours?"

Yet the principle of bearing one's own burdens may be a crucial discovery for all human beings. If so, the principle ought not to be concealed. Sartre, for one, would not conceal it. Even though the coefficient of adversity is insupportable, a man, he says—

> must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it, for the very worst disadvantages or worst threats which can endanger my person have meaning only in and through my project; and it is on the ground of the engagement which I am that they appear. It is therefore senseless to think of complaining since

> nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are.

Perhaps history ought to be written as a chronicle of the varying circumstances through which men strive to reach this position of absolute personal responsibility. And perhaps it ought never to be written in a way that would encourage men intent upon making history to ignore personal responsibility or let it seem unimportant. For when history is made without attention to the idea of individual accountability, only some kind of system-dominated social environment can result. So the history of man must also be the history of philosophy—concerned with whether or how the environment *can* be transcended, and with what might be the identifiable condition of man when transcendence is really achieved! Utopian ideals, in short, may be indispensable, even though Utopia seems unattainable.

But history is about many men, not just one man striving to make his personal contribution to Utopia. History, as Staughton Lynd says, is what we can know of what was in the minds of men in the past—it amounts "to a rethinking of what human beings have thought before." When they think more or less alike, they create "times," and the objective stuff of history begins to appear.

In all history-writing, a process of selection is necessary. And if history-writing is conceived to be a service to people who are bent on history-making, then what should be selected from the thought of men of the past? What *they* thought about history-making?

One could do this, and many historians have, but it might be important to add what they thought about transcendence, or to notice *if* they thought about it. Were there any Tolstoyan thoughts of any strength in the past under consideration? Were there people who believed, like Tolstoy, that the law of progress is written in the soul of the individual, and "is transferred to history only through error"? For if there were such men, they may have had at least some small, discernible effect on the men who were out to "change" history. Gandhi, for example, exercised this sort of influence on history-makers, enabling us to say that both system-thinking (concerned with the outside "historical forces") and thoughts about individual responsibility were in the minds of some men, in uneasy tension with each other.

This is a case of the ends-and-means problem, usually settled in terms of a compromise between moral feelings and practical considerations. We live in a world where the practical usually overrides the moral, and system-oriented history encourages the erosion of individual moral responsibility, which now reacts only to extremes. Men have existential rather than historical reasons for being unwilling to incarcerate other men in concentration and death camps. There may be expedient, historical or "progressive" arguments against putting enemies—or subversives—or people of alien ethnic descent—into concentration camps, but existential resistance to such policies is by far the most noticeable, when it occurs at all.

Yet historical experience can serve a man's moral intuitions. When Malcolm X saw at first hand the reality of men of all colors joined in brotherhood during his visit to Mecca, he quickly adopted an anti-racist position—the intuition of his heart. He no longer accepted as final the historical evidence he had experienced against a natural existential longing. In his words:

> If Islam can place the spirit of true brotherhood in the hearts of "whites" whom I have met here in the Land of the Prophets, then surely it can also remove the "cancer of racism" from the heart of the white American, and perhaps in time to save America from imminent racial disaster; the same destruction brought upon Hitler by his racism that eventually destroyed the Germans themselves.

This seems a form of general human self-discovery in which the brotherhood of Islam is the agent. It concerns transcendence of difference, unity without caring about diversity, and recognizing the same human essence in all men. The occasion, it can be argued, illustrated "the law of progress" as "written in the soul of each man," and the experience had a decisive effect on

Malcolm X's idea of how to *make* history, as those who talked to him after his Pilgrimage discovered.

So there might be another sort of writing of history—a history of the ideas that deeply influence the way men go about changing their environment, and which determine what they are willing to risk or sacrifice in order to do it. This means, put simply, that the active moral attitudes of men are the decisive factor in what they do about making history. It need not mean that strong existential values bring no participation in history, as Tolstoy virtually implies, but that the *stake* in wanting to change history varies directly with the prevailing existential values.

Let us turn the idea of making history around. Suppose the historical objective is to get "other people" to change their views about certain minority groups. Here, the matter of the double standard again comes up, illustrating in another way the difference between what a man may demand of himself and what he feels able to demand of others. Speaking of a Jewish League against anti-Semitism, Sartre asks: "But can such a league be really effective?" He continues:

> Many Jews, and some of the best among them, hesitate to participate because of a sort of modesty: "That's biting off too much," one of them said to me recently. And he added, rather clumsily but with undoubted sincerity and modesty: "Anti-Semitism and persecution are not important."
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> It is easy enough to understand this repugnance. But we who are not Jews, should we share it? Richard Wright, the Negro writer, said recently: "There is no Negro problem in the United States, there is only a white problem."

This is an existential evaluation. The white man's idea of himself is twisted by the historically-rooted conceit of white supremacy and by the habits and traditions which have made this delusion seem "natural." It is white men who must do the changing; therefore, *they* have the problem. This does not mean that Wright will do nothing, himself, but that he ought not to have to; and he states the problem as it really exists. Sartre continues:

> In the same way, we must say that anti-Semitism is Jewish problem; it is *our* problem. Since we are not guilty and yet run the risk of being its victims—yes, we, too—we must be very blind indeed not to see that it is our concern in the highest degree. It is not up to the Jews first of all to form a militant league against anti-Semitism; it is up to us.

This is a "nothing human is alien to me" basis for the making of history. Could this attitude be more widely spread, the very conception of historical progress might undergo a great change. Such a realization may be statistically unlikely, but should the goal, therefore, remain undeclared? Does not the idea of historical progress amount to "empty prattle," without it? How historical movements fall short of this goal may be the most important subject-matter for a humanistic scholarship to examine.

Sartre discusses the proposal of a militant league to oppose anti-Semitism, formed by those who are not Jews, pointing out that the example of an active group acting in behalf of principle would rally others to recognize its importance, and would confront its opponents with "sight of a concrete community engaged in a particular fight," instead of awaiting the laggard remedies of legal action. Of the fundamental contention of such a campaign, he says:

> What must be done is to point out to each one that the fate of the Jews is *his* fate. Not one Frenchman will be free so long as the Jews do not enjoy the fullness of their rights. Not one Frenchman will be secure so long as a single Jew—in France or the world at large—can fear for his life.

Well, can this argument by Sartre be conceived of as turning into a historical force? It certainly begins as a form of self-knowledge. It is even a metaphysical proposition about human freedom, although Sartre might prefer to support it with historical evidence, showing that discrimination, once allowed or tolerated, can be turned in any direction. But it is also an existential intuition about the nature of man and his good. So a humanist might say that Sartre's argument is not a historical force, but that it ought to be. The difficulty in regarding it as a historical

force is that it has a subjective origin; it does not come from "conditioning"; it has a purely human motivation. As Michael Polanyi pointed out a few years ago, American historians have been very reluctant to admit that the Hungarian uprising of 1956 was caused by simple devotion to truth.

The tendency of historians is to accept as causes only those which can be traced to some objective or external origin. This means that truly human causes are neglected until it becomes possible to redefine them in objective—or non-human—terms, and this is why the dignities and nobilities of man seem to us not to enter history at all. For the same reason, history-makers tend to ignore the normative values they need most, and they seldom recognize this omission because we are still so far away from achieving authentic social goodness that existential values do not present themselves with a force sufficient to *compel* their recognition. It is casually admitted that they have a place in private life, but they don't "show" in history.

So, to obtain normative values for history-making, we must *leave* history as we know it. We must get them from Tolstoy, and from inside ourselves. How should the historian use them in his work? That is a problem of his art as a historian.

But if the historian *doesn't* use them, he is bound to use something else. Human beings, historians included, are inveterate moralists, and if the existential values get left out of history, other values, such as those deduced from the dynamics of social change, from the external symmetries of the status quo, or from the disguised self-interest of powerful groups, are bound to give history its organization and idea of ends.

In affirmative terms, history ought to be the story of mankind in quest of better self-perception. For only with better self-perception shall we make better history. It may be difficult to prove this from the record of the past, since we know so little, actually, about self-perception, and typically disagree on when it is better or worse. But there must be a way of treating events so that the importance of humanist self-perception makes itself unmistakably plain. It would then serve as a means of persuading men that they can be either beasts or brothers at any level of social development. No doubt they will be able to be the best sort of brother at the best level of development, but men will remain unable to agree on what that development involves unless they first learn to be brothers, no matter what—and at all the intermediate levels along the way. This is probably the principle of transcendence that Tolstoy was talking about, when he insisted that the humanization or "progress" of mankind cannot be delegated to the "process of history."

REVIEW
ANOTHER GLOOMY DANE

WHAT is the fascination of Soren Kierkegaard? A book published last year by the Augustana College Library (Rock Island, Illinois, 56.95), *Kierkeguard's Authorship,* by George B. Arbaugh and George E. Arbaugh (father and son, both professors of philosophy), goes a long way toward providing materials for answering this question. This remains true even though the reader, like the present reviewer, may have read only a little in Kierkegaard, and has difficulty in entering into the spirit of a man who was saturated throughout his childhood by some of the more oppressive aspects of the Christian faith.

Kierkegaard lived about a hundred years ago (1813-1855). He was a frail man who suffered from a slight deformity of his back and he died, possibly from a paralysis of the spine, at forty-two. His early life in Copenhagen has this description:

> The father forced a gloomy religious outlook on the home, making Christ's sufferings a source of misery even to a little child, who, as he later reflected on it, felt that he had been insanely brought up. Yet S.K. loved and respected his father. . . . he came to feel that this old man had been of untold blessing by personally demonstrating the power of love working through and transforming suffering. . . . Even the strange walks on which the old man would take the little boy *about the living room* rather than the park, were, by virtue of their imaginative and sparkling dialogue and their precise descriptive moments, a marvellous if fantastic introduction to a life of keen perceptive observation of persons and circumstance.

Later, as a university student, Kierkegaard was shocked to learn that his father believed that he had brought doom upon the family "for having once cursed God," and he also discovered that this "model of piety" had married S. K.'s mother, his former housekeeper, out of necessity after the death of his first wife. Kierkegaard resisted the severity of the typical religious judgment of these sins and came to feel that his father's faith was "more an inward despair than a confident trust." However, as the authors say, Kierkegaard "was not broken by his personal problems but used them as a means to spiritual insight and growth."

In his later life, Kierkegaard became an unrelenting critic of the theology and practice of the state church. In this connection the authors point out:

> Irreligionists have glorified in S.K.'s scathing attack on the clergy and on hypocritical churchianity, yet ignore the crucial fact that he carried out this attack in behalf of authentic Christianity. Religious conservatives have welcomed S.K.'s illumination of gospel, law, grace, of the categories of Christian experience, and of the genuine meaning of the person of Christ—freed of the false trappings of piety—yet they might well cringe before his denunciation of dogmatic orthodoxy. Those with wavering faith have seized on Kierkegaard as a means for restoring to Christian thought a rational respectability—but strangely, for they have seized on a man who with Nietzsche insisted on the foolishness of the gospel. . . .
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> Churchmen . . . tend to be disciples, and are inclined to *use* Kierkegaard for their own purposes. Yet it is likely that he would attack them as vigorously as he did the churchmen of his own day, commenting again on how institution-minded preachers make a fat living "off the blood of Christ." In particular, he would resent anyone's using his writings as a means of defending Christianity.

For many readers, the chief interest of this book will be its clarifying passages on Kierkegaard and modern Existentialism—the latter being more a collection of often dissimilar attitudes than a "school" of philosophy. The authors make the following statement:

> Perhaps, most simply, existentialism may be described as an emphasis upon an attaining of the special kind of existence which human beings possess. Someone has, by contrast, paid glowing tribute to the existence of the brachiopod, rating it as one of the most successful of organisms because as a species it has survived unchanged for 500 million years. Obviously this is not the kind of success which existentialists envision. For them, if man is to succeed he must do so as an individual, not as a species. He must attain self-identity by choice rather than by some kind of stimulus-response mechanism, and such identity must be one of personal character

> and moral purpose rather than of natural function or external structure. As Dag Hammarskjold phrased it, "Only in man has the evolution of the creation reached the point where reality encounters itself in judgment and choice."

Here are clear echoes of Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man.* Unlike Sartre, however, for Kierkegaard this achievement is not without guide from the human essence: "by being contemporaneous with Christ the believer receives the eternal, and through faith is freed to live a proper human existence." Yet at the same time an authentic "becoming" into existence, in the world, is involved, so that for Kierkegaard Sartre's contention that act precedes essence is at least a half truth. But all who call themselves existentialists agree in insisting that authentic individuality must be *earned:*

> Enslaved by ideologies and fashions of the age, by the concern for sheer numbers and what the mass of men believe and do, as well as by one's own "public," a person is for example tempted to think "Now I am a man" at the very pathetic moment when he, like other men, yields to the slavery of passion. To personally exist is not to successfully repeat the normal actions and thoughts of the race, still less those of some momentary public. To truly exist is not to be a kind of generalized man but a unique individual, knowingly responsible for the way in which one has dedicated and shaped his life. On this point almost all of existentialism seems to follow in S.K.'s path. Indeed, it is interesting that many who are not existentialists are increasingly impressed by the insistence that any democracy which is not composed of genuine individuals can be only a frightening mobocracy.

In *Kierkegaard's Authorship,* the discussion of S.K.'s idea of the progressive stages of human development makes various comparisons with views attributed to other religions or philosophies, and this may cause the reader to wonder whether there is not more paradox than necessary in the writings of this religious genius. Suppose Christ had not been conceived by him as an absolutely unique reality? Suppose he had been nurtured on the Indian doctrine of Avatars—of successive incarnations of the divine spirit—or on the Hebrew teaching of many Messiahs? Might not the limits of his "rationalism" have been considerably extended, and his analysis less tortured by intellectual difficulties? Yet the greatness of Kierkegaard, we may think, is found in the clarity he achieves in spite of his narrow religious background.

The authors of this book show that it was not a disdain for practical, earthly decisions—on which, on the contrary, Kierkegaard insisted—but rather a recognition of the need for ideal standards, which made him stress counsels of perfection:

> If one wants to know the nature of the good it can only be by identifying absolute but unrealizable standards. The nature of discipleship must be defined even if there are and indeed can be no true disciples. It appears that SK.'s primary concern was with identification of a criterion, a standard whereby it is possible to identify one as an "individual," as an æsthete, an ethical man, or a Christian (Kierkegaard's "three stages"]. He left it to the reader to try to apply the yardstick.

One might say that this is something like the philosophical necessity of Plato's Ideal Forms. The pure Forms cannot be perfectly realized on earth, by reason of the nature of "earth," yet what *can be* accomplished on earth will not even be attempted unless there are clear conceptions of the ideal. Thus: "S.K.'s concern is for identifying an authentic Christian *quality* of life which is only feebly and variably present in 'becoming' Christians." The authors add:

> There are some critics who have deplored Kierkegaard's failure to develop a social action programme out of his inward ethic. Nevertheless, his position is a stalwart one which insists that the one absolute imperative is clarity on fundamental principles, not tinkering with society. In this regard S.K. may well belong in the company of Socrates, and also of Plato whose *Republic* is not so much a blueprint of an improved society as an attempt at determining what true virtue would be like if it could be attained.

Kierkegaard is again like Socrates in making no personal claims, and he is no didactic instructor, but one who intimates sublime

meanings. Yet his uncompromising search for the highest truth by no means removed him from the ordinary world:

> Far from assuming a superior attitude towards ordinary folk, he personally loved the common people and deliberately lived in close touch with them. Most emphatically, he did not withdraw from the large community to a chosen group of companions as did Nietzsche's Zarathustra, nor did he, after the fashion of a thinker like Jaspers, suggest an elite if austere companionship of an enlightened few. He wrote with touching concern for all, addressing himself in his later and most earnest writings to the "plain man."

We might end this collection of notes with a passage developing Kierkegaard's central idea of "existence" as a man:

> Merely being a member of "the race" does not guarantee that one will possess existence. Sometimes it is assumed that to be a man means for one to assimilate food, engage in reproduction, and in general to be a biological success. However, such an understanding applies to a fruitfly or a horse but not to a man. S.K. believed that if a man merely repeats the customary acts of the species he will be a radical failure as a human individual. Either he will be little more than an animal obeying instinct and being merely another instance of the species; or else he will exercise his will in choosing something less than human, thus evidencing his autonomy but in such fashion as to violate his nature. To truly exist is not to be a mere Cartesian "thinking thing," but is to morally act by willing to transform imagined possibles into concrete actualities, and to willingly repeat one's value commitments. Far from separating the self from the objective world, Kierkegaard treated it as inescapably bound up with the world. The world is the arena in which the self is confronted by alternatives, and by them the self is called to take a decisive stand.

COMMENTARY
WHAT IS MAN FOR?

THERE is a great difference between intellectual formulations which gain currency by repetition, sometimes being expanded into doctrinal systems, and those moving conceptions of self and human possibility that emerge independently, and often simultaneously, in the thought of many men, and by a spontaneous energy begin to alter the life of the times at its very roots. An example of the latter is the conception of man (see Review) which all existentialists, despite many differences, are said to share. "To truly exist is not to be a kind of generalized man but a unique individual, knowingly responsible for the way in which one has dedicated and shaped his life."

This is an attitude which obviously resists systematic definition, yet its theme and inspiration are now finding expression in countless ways. In his recent volume, *For unto Us a Child Is Born*, concerned with population problems, S.P.R. Charter, a California ecologist, writes in an existential mood of the need for transcendence:

> We live in a world where people now draw their inspiration not from natural simplicity or complexity but chiefly from man-made complexity: from missiles and contemplated moon-landings, computers and space-probes, high dams and nuclear reactors, electron microscopes and radio telescopes. Despite our huge technological competence, however, we cannot make segments beget anything but segments, and dimensions only more dimensions. The most sophisticated instrumentation we possess cannot present Man to himself as he exists simultaneously within the many universes of his being.
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> We know what a missile is for. We know what a computer is for. But what a man is for, we do not know. . . .
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> Accepting himself as a Man-Machine being, he feels no need to attempt to transcend his Man-Machine limitations since his faith is in the limitlessness of his machine. He then accepts as a basic tenet that whatever is too difficult for his devices to solve is surely too difficult for him to solve. And because of his belief in the limitlessness of his devices, he limits *himself* to machine-solutions.
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> Transcendence does not mean rejection of Man's totality, which includes his technology. On the contrary, transcendence means the recognition of limitations as challenge, plus the conscious attempt to exceed limitations. In this context success and failure become meaningless quantifiable terms since the attempt, of itself, expands Man's comprehension of, and responsibility to, self and beyond-self. The attempt itself nourishes the continuum.

Mr. Charter's book ($2.00) is distributed by Applegate Books, Box 2214, San Francisco, Calif. 94122.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
CHILDREN ARE NOT PRODUCTS

WITHIN the memory of people living and still active there was a time when a general appeal in behalf of child welfare almost always began with a description of the conditions of want surrounding the families of the poor. These conditions are by no means banished, today, but another kind of disaster now looms more insistently for those who, for professional or other reasons, have daily contact with the young. The universal enemy of childhood, affecting both rich and poor, is now a widespread delusion as to what children are and what they are "for." In *The Conspiracy Against Childhood* (Atheneum, 1968), Eda J. LeShan has put together a horrifying picture of human attitudes, making it seem as though the modern, "progressive" society has abandoned the humanist inspiration which gave it birth, through the habit of treating its children as mere instruments to purposes which have nothing to do with human growth. The broad coverage of Mrs. LeShan's report makes it difficult to temper her indictment with signs of hope, although the signs exist, and she makes as much of them as she can.

Actually, the chief relief from the pessimism the book produces is the warm compassion of the writer, and her flashing humor. Mrs. LeShan shows her readers a new kind of "wilderness" for human beings to conquer and eliminate the wilderness of ignorance concerning the nature and promise of children. *The Conspiracy Against Childhood* should help to persuade many people that the wilderness is real and that the protection of children from its increasingly familiar hazards is the first duty of the present generation of parents. How difficult this may be also becomes apparent. In her last chapter, the author says:

> The conspiracy against childhood is really a conspiracy against ourselves. We cannot help our children to discover and nurture their inner selves unless we are able first of all to do this as adults, as parents and teachers—as persons. It is a strange irony that at the same time we seem so inclined to mechanize our children, to hasten them into adulthood, we are discovering how dangerous and destructive it can be for adults to become alienated from their own childhood. In the psycho-therapeutic treatment of unhappy adults, a primary goal is to encourage a process of de-intellectualization, an attempt to help the individual re-find and re-explore the child within himself—the feeling, creative, growing person he once was. When we lose our way as adults, it is not because we are not smart, not because we do not know enough facts, not because we cannot be "successful" in terms of getting into college or making money; it is that we have somewhere along the line lost touch with who and what we were to begin with.

The Conspiracy Against Childhood is a long bill of particulars concerned with how that touch has been lost, and how it is being destroyed in children as a result. Worst of all, perhaps, is the insatiable ambition of parents for their children. In a society which takes great pride in counting, measuring, and computing, it is doubtless natural for parents to demand "objective" success of their offspring, and as early as possible. So nursery schools, we find, are expected to give children who are still almost babies a six-months' or a year's advantage in the competition for grades. And they are encouraged in this expectation by plausible psychological reports which tell how babies *can* be taught to read! Something of this mood is captured in the following story:

> A nursery teacher and I were having a conference recently with the mother of a perfectly charming normally endowed four-year-old girl. We had nothing but good things to say about Jessie; she was friendly, spirited, enthusiastic and happy in school. Her mother was pleased but not ecstatic, and finally she said, "In other words, you're really telling me I have an average child." She sounded so crestfallen that I found myself feeling somewhat ashamed, as though I had insulted her child. She went on to tell us that in her neighborhood all the mothers knew their children's I.Q.'s, and as it came closer to the time Jessie would enter grade school and be tested, she was getting more and more nervous about having to know "the verdict" as to how smart the child was. "Suppose it turns out she isn't as brilliant as her father thinks she is?" she asked. I confess to having lost my professional objectivity

when I snapped back, "Well, there's obviously only one thing you *can* do—throw her back and try for another!"

A mother wrote Mrs. LeShan the sad story of another child who had been pushed along:

> My 14-year-old daughter is in a special class for very bright children. This weekend she has been preparing a report on Greek philosophy and literature. My husband, a student of the classics, never heard of some of the obscure Greek poets she is studying. He glanced through a book she was assigned to read and discovered that it was written for college students at Cambridge University, England. This same brilliant child, who later got a 95% on her report, is scared to death of boys, spent one evening recently working with a friend on how to "hex" a mean boy by making a voodoo figure and sticking pins in it. She is also experimenting with fake nails and making phony phone calls. On the one hand she functions like an elderly intellectual and on the other she acts like a normal little girl who is just barely beginning to grow up in her feelings. I am truly frightened by the widening split between what she is being taught and what she needs to live through emotionally.

The chapter, "Any Dope Can Have a High I.Q.," should be required reading for everyone, as a thorough debunking of this widely worshipped norm. The best part is probably the author's own adventures with I.Q. tests. It begins:

> As one very wise guidance counselor explained it to a group of parents, "A child's I.Q. test score really measures a child's ability to take an intelligence test—-nothing more." I was very happy to hear this since, when my husband used me as a guinea pig for practicing the art of testing, my score was 94; at the time I was in graduate school—and I graduated. I have always been a classic example of a terrible test taker; I get nervous as soon as I hear the word "test", my mind wanders, I cannot concentrate, I think of answers that are very original but have nothing whatever to do with the subject at hand. At the age of six, when I was given my first intelligence test for entrance into a progressive school, I was later asked by my mother what I thought of the test. I reported that it had been all right, except for one very puzzling question. I said that the teacher had asked me to draw a lion between a chair and a pail drawn on the test page; I didn't think I could draw a good lion, so I had drawn a daisy instead. When my mother said, "But Eda, they probably wanted you to draw a *line*, between the chair and the pail," I replied, "Oh, but that would have been too *easy!"* It was a testament to the school's faith in human potential that I was admitted—especially since it later developed that on a simple arithmetic question, "When the fox ate two little rabbits, and then he ate two more little rabbits, the fox had eaten___little rabbits," I gave as my answer, "The fox ate the *poor* little rabbits." When my mother suggested that I should have said "four rabbits," I replied, "Oh Mommie, the *poor* rabbits!" As you can see, I have always been a troublemaker when its comes to taking tests, . . .

There are dozens of anecdotes which show how children are manipulated by adults, of which one of the most revealing is the story of a mother who used to creep into her eleven-year-old, baseball-loving son's bedroom after he was asleep and whisper in his ear, "I want to be a lawyer, I want to be a lawyer," in the hope that subliminal suggestion would cause the boy to switch to more productive interests. Among the telling comments quoted from educators is that of Bruno Bettelheim, who says: "It is very difficult to cheat a gifted child out of making good use of his intellectual abilities, but it is very easy to cheat him out of his childhood." The author's view is well put:

> Our basic problem is that we have "conquered nature" in a scientific sense, and in so doing we have lost respect and reverence for that part of nature which we must never try to conquer—the living minds of living men. What is sacred about childhood is that it is the beginning, the essence of human life, the potential and promise of individual uniqueness, which we cannot predict and which we therefore must not try to harness—for when we do, we restrict the possibilities.

The Conspiracy Against Childhood has a warp of devotion to children in which is woven a woof of devastating criticism, with many practical suggestions on what not to do. It is a book which ought to inspire practical reforms at the point where they must begin—in the attitudes of adults.

FRONTIERS

Socialist Criticism

TWO things happen when a revolutionary movement loses hope of reaching to power. Released from the partisan obligations of gaining control, its articulate members often become the most valuable critics society possesses. After they are freed from the myopias of the power struggle, they are able to see the social order with greater wholeness, even though this vision is bought with the disappointments of political inaction. The second thing that happens is that radicals begin to look critically at their own thought and tradition. This latter activity may have the effect of changing the meaning of "revolution."

Something of this sort is illustrated by material in the May-June issue of *Dissent*, an independent socialist magazine (bimonthly, 509 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017, $5.00 a year). There is, for example, a meditative critique of Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (reviewed in MANAS for Sept. 30, 1964), by Allan Graubard. There is no question about the intellectual capacities of Mr. Marcuse, nor of the general accuracy of his diagnostic conclusions. Mr. Graubard is disturbed by his pessimism, and by the sense of impotence transferred by this book to the reader. Actually, there is little difference between the feeling of the reader after he has read *Brave New World* or *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, and the let-down depression which comes with ending *One-Dimensional Man*, except for the pent-up moral passion of the author—a quality absent from the anti-utopias of Huxley and Orwell. Mr. Marcuse's main point, endlessly made, is that modern technological society has absorbed, homogenized, and rendered ineffectual the Great Refusal, the protest of the intellectual and artistic minorities of earlier generations. Critical and rebellious utterance is now packaged by commercial interests and sold to the vast middle-class market almost as entertainment. Radicals are cast as daring court jester—no one need be alarmed. Mr. Marcuse views this process with unrelieved despair. Mr. Graubard says:

> The quality of the despair can be related to Marcuse's Marxian framework. One-dimensional society, however wasteful, and crippling for man, seems increasingly capable by its irrational rationality, of containing social change, and containing it by consent, as it were. This implies the disappearance of real forces, of definite social groups whose existence would compel them toward the abolition of oppression. Without these social groups, determined in their very existence by the nature of the society which brought them into being, can any change come? Can theory, however critical, become practice in some other way; by changing consciousness within the affluent society, for example?
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> For Marcuse it seems that the answer must be no. This is the way history *must* work. His despair and anger translate themselves into the depressing sense that thought itself is becoming impossible.

For a man in this state of mind, recognition of encouraging signs is virtually impossible. He is compelled to minimize what others may regard as emerging forces of change. Mr. Graubard has this to say about the elaborateness of Marcuse's analysis:

> . . . the real help we need is not in giving nightmares an intellectual structure. It is in beginning to answer questions about the politics of the "totalizing" and "post-totalized" society. The old agents of history may disappear or be absorbed, but what will the new social and psychic strains and discontents be like in the prosperous, post-industrial society and how will the discontent, dissatisfaction, and alienation be made politically relevant, at least potentially? Should the movement be one of resolute opposition . . .? Or should attempts be made to work at least partly within the established institutions of the society, to attempt to affect, even if only marginally, the actual and potential destructiveness of American power . . .?

Reviewing in *Dissent* three books containing the writings of Che Guevara, Nelson P. Valdes remarks: "Some men suffer the fate of becoming the symbols of generations which misunderstand them." After commenting on the books under review, he suggests that the extreme commitment of the "guerilla" spirit shaped Guevara's conception of the ideal revolutionary society. Only the "constant asceticism" and "consciousness of sacrifice" of the guerilla fighter, he felt, can produce the fellowship which transcends class differences. Mr. Valdes says:

> This is what Guevara wanted on a national scale: to create a *guerilla-nation,* a guerilla communism. This is why the theme of struggle, of fighting in the trenches of production, of combating illiteracy and yankee imperialism appear in almost everything he said or wrote.

The reviewer thinks Guevara may have left Cuba because he saw that such a society was not possible there. Mr. Valdes adds:

> But far more obvious aspects of Che's thought seem to have been overlooked by most radicals. If one favors decentralization or "participatory democracy," he should not have as an idol a man who considered strong centralization as the only way in which a socialist society could be created. And can one demand U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam while carrying a poster of a man who called for more Vietnams?
>
> It appears we have reached the stage of "confusion in revolution." In the meantime, the duty of a revolutionary seems to be to buy a revolutionary poster. . . .

Another contributor to *Dissent,* Michael Walzer, explores "A Day in the Life of a Socialist Citizen," concluding that there is much truth in the opinion of Oscar Wilde that Socialism would take too many evenings! The point is that modern government, on any hypothesis, is a very demanding affair and is likely to interfere with the almost apolitical pastoral dream of Marx concerning life in a socialist society. As Mr. Walzer says:

> Wilde's objection isn't silly. The idea of citizenship on the Left has always been overwhelming, suggesting a positive frenzy of activity, and often involving the repression of all feelings except political ones.

This view, he suggests, is inherited from Rousseau, who saw the ideal citizen as intensely politicalized, perfectly dutiful to the needs of the state and overflowing with "republican virtue." But what about the people who don't feel drawn to political struggle? Because they resist the Aristotelian dictum that duties to the state exhaust the nature of man, are they to be condemned as social deadwood? Mr. Walzer thinks not:

> . . . many of the people who stay away from meetings do so for reasons that the militants don't understand or won't acknowledge. They stay away not because they are beaten, afraid, uneducated, lacking confidence and skills (though these are often important reasons), but because they have made other commitments, they have found ways to cope short of politics; they have created viable subcultures even in an oppressive world. . . .

These people, he thinks, need proper representation in a revolutionary order, to avoid getting "one or another sort of activist or *apparatchik* tyranny." There is a sense in which politically inactive persons are trying to live lives as though politics had already been reduced to unimportance, as it finally should be; one could even say that they are closer, existentially, to the political ideal (little or no politics at all) than the activists who, by reason of their dedication to change, tend to live, emotionally, in the future. Mr. Walzer doesn't say this, but it seems not far from his meaning. What he does say is this:

> . . . those who don't go [to meetings] may well turn out to be more effective critics than those who do, no one who was one of its first guessers can usefully second-guess a decision. That is why the best critics in a liberal society are men-out-of-office. In a radically democratic society they would be men who stay away from meetings, perhaps months at a time, and only then discover that something outrageous has been perpetrated and must be mocked or protested. The proper response to such protests is not to tell the laggard citizens that they should have been active these past many months, not to nag them to do work that they don't enjoy and in any case won't do well, but to listen to what they have to say.

Conceivably, the perfect politics, like Buckminster Fuller's perfect technology, would be invisible, and take as little of a human being's time as possible. The apparently all-engrossing character of our present political needs may be evidence of a vastly exaggerated estimate of what can be accomplished by political activity.