VOLUME XXV, NO. 11
MARCH 15, 1972

THE MISSION OF ORTEGA

A FULL-LENGTH study of Ortega y Gasset as educator, providing as much as the reader needs about his life, is now available from Teachers College Press, Columbia University (1971, $15.00). The title is *Man and His Circumstances: Ortega as Educator,* the author Robert McClintock, who is Associate Professor of History and Education at Teachers College. This is a big book of 650 pages, representing years of study and research, and should be of gripping interest from beginning to end for any reader who has been stimulated by the fertility of Ortega's thought. The book is scholarly, yet very much alive. One might say that a writer genuinely inspired by Ortega could not help but write such a book, since Ortega can have no imitators, but only emulators who have been fired up by him to pursue a similar philosophic quest.

Ortega has been reviewed and quoted in MANAS, through the years, more, perhaps, than any other modern thinker, as many readers know. Since Ortega's way of writing permits brief quotation from him, with hardly any distortion of his meaning, the presentation of his thought hardly needs further justification, yet if justification were sought, it could be found in Dr. McClintock's book. Why have we given all this attention to Ortega? Because he articulates with extraordinary freshness and strength many of the basic humanistic themes to which MANAS is devoted. He is, to our way of thinking, a twentieth-century Socratic or Platonic philosopher, a man who will remind some readers of the central contention of Pico della Mirandola's oration *On the Dignity of Man,* while others will think of him as an ally of Tolstoy in maintaining that the progress of mankind is invariably to be found in the qualities, capacities, and aspirations of human beings, and not in their institutions. Ortega also illustrates in his own work the capacity of a profound thinker to make himself understood by a wide audience, and to use ordinary language in doing so. He was a kind of da Vinci of modern intellectuality; his interests were diverse, his skills fundamental, applying in many directions. Much of his writing was in the form of newspaper articles. Early in life, he decided that he would undertake a career as a teacher and work to bring about a renascence of his native land of Spain. The breadth of his conception of service to Spain made him a teacher of the world.

The intensive study of this book and of Ortega's writings cannot be thought of as a limiting activity. To understand Ortega is to inhabit in some measure his mind, to take up his mission, to wrestle with the same problems he faced and to test the conclusions he reached. To borrow one of his own phrases, he "lived at the height of his times," so that to study him is to know the times and to grapple with its issues as he did.

Three paragraphs from Dr. McClintock's foreword give essential facts and some orienting comment:

> During his span of seventy-two years, from 1883 to 1955, Ortega was intensely active, a fact that complicates the effort to characterize his life and work. Ortega did many things. He taught philosophy for twenty-five years; founded several magazines and an important newspaper; campaigned against corruption, dictators, and the King. For these efforts he later endured a decade of wandering exile. He wrote voluminously: hundreds of commentaries for the daily press, numerous articles for diverse journals, and books and more books Ortega talked: he toured the world giving lectures, he stumped Spain making speeches; with everyone he loved to converse in the animated Spanish manner. He took part in politics, in both the politics of Spanish reform and the politics of European union. In short, Ortega met life with chest out, without stopping to bemoan lost

opportunities and without bothering to correct misimpressions.

There isn't much in the way of biography available on Ortega, and English translations of his works, McClintock says, lack adequate introductions giving the historical context of his writings. Further:

> Another complication for Americans seeking to understand Ortega's character is that people are more likely to have read Ortega than to have studied him. This condition has arisen because the works available in English do not fit within a single discipline; instead, each has independently gained a modicum of currency in separate disciplines. Estheticians are likely to have read *The Dehumanization of Art;* philosophers know *What Is Philosophy?,* and perhaps *The Origin of Philosophy* and *The Modern Theme;* sociologists are acquainted *with The Revolt of the Masses* and if interested in sociological theory, *Man and People;* political theorists will also have studied *The Revolt of the Masses,* as well as *Concord and Liberty;* persons interested in historical synthesis will most probably have read *History as a System* and *Man and Crisis*; literary critics will have consulted *Notes on the Novel* and *Meditations on Quixote;* educators will have reflected on *The Mission of the University;* and romantics in each discipline may well have mused *On Love.* Owing to this variegation of his work, one encounters one, two, . . . many Ortegas in casual references. . . .
>
> The man's protean life, the changing complexity of his activities, presents interpreters with a serious challenge. Ortega insisted over and over again that each man has a destiny, an integral mission, a single task in life that lays down before him his personal path to self-fulfillment. Dabblers were damnable. "We are our destiny; we are the irremediable project for a particular existence. In each instant of life we note if its reality corresponds or not with our project, and everything that we do, we do in order to bring it to fulfillment. . . . All iniquity comes from one source: not driving oneself to one's proper destiny."

Ortega began his higher education at the Central University of Madrid, which he attended from 1898 to 1902, and two years later, at twenty-one, he received his doctorate in philosophy. He was dissatisfied, however, with Spanish thought and went to Germany to study, making there the acquaintance of Nicolai Hartmann and Ernst Cassirer, and studying under Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. The thoroughness and commitment of the German thinkers helped him to reach a decision concerning the rest of his life: he would return to Spain and teach. How would he teach? McClintock makes a talk given by Ortega before a society of mature Spanish intellectuals in 1910 the keynote of the book, since in this talk the young man of twenty-six tried to stir his audience with the vision that would guide the rest of his life. Why did these men listen to a youth of twenty-six? Because Spain was now in trouble, and intelligent Spaniards were beginning to admit it to themselves. The upstart *yanquis* had trounced them in the war of '98, and Spain was no longer a "great power," with little chance of becoming one. Spain was in a ferment of discontent. What would the bright young men of the time have to say about the future? What should Spain do?

Ortega gave his answer. The intellectuals of Spain—all of them—had the obligation to practice civic pedagogy. They ought to teach their countrymen how to become better, more useful, more responsible men, and they would set the example themselves, in all relationships. They would not go into politics, but would set in motion ideas and attitudes out of which a better politics might grow. They would, in short, create or work toward creating a true *paideia*. Ortega distinguished between what he called "law-giving" and "law-making." Law-making was of small importance beside law-giving, which meant embodying in life the qualities that could later become the basis for useful statutes. Obtaining government was very different from giving government. Obtaining government was a matter of power or winning elections, but giving government was an art. It had nothing to do with power, and gaining power did not bring the practice of the *art*. In this speech, McClintock says, the young Ortega would—

> call on his audience to turn away from official politics, not in overt rebellion, but in a spontaneous creation, one in which private citizens accepted

> responsibility for the art of governing and spread ideals of public life that would transform the country despite the moral inertia ensconced in the government. "What should it be?" Ortega would put to them. "What is the ideal Spain towards which we can orient our hearts. . . ?"

How would such men work? They would live out their lives in the community, not as specialists, but as men of cultivation with the resources for renovation and change within themselves. The essential human task, Ortega maintained, is to create a life, and to do this in the light of the best knowledge available. The purpose of the sciences is to give that light, and the purpose of man is to choose and grow. What then is man? Man is himself and his circumstances. By knowing his circumstances, he can use them for his growth. By knowing himself, he becomes able to grasp his relations with his circumstances. Ortega's theory of man is a formative theory, as was Pico's before him. The following account by McClintock is indeed a rich repetition of Pico's Oration:

> "Man! Man!" he would exclaim to his audience. "Who is man?"
>
> Here was the question. Answers had ranged from the cynical saying that man was the only creature that drank without thirst and made love in every season to Leibniz' belief that man was a *petit Dieu.* "Be careful that interpretations of man fall between one and the other definition," he would caution.
>
> Man was a problem for man: that was his most human feature. Man's unique, human characteristic was that he had to decide what to make of himself. Here was the germ of Ortega's philosophy of life—his idea of "vital reason." Human character could oscillate between the beast who drinks without thirst and a small God, whether men traveled towards the former or the latter depended on their will: they were compelled toward neither. The variability of human character intensified the responsibilities of the pedagogue. Man's problem was that he made of himself whatever he would become, "and once we have let ourselves engage this problem without reservation, I believe we will approach pedagogy with a religious dread. . . ." Again, he would repeat the fundamental question: "What idea of man should be held by the man who is going to humanize your sons? Whatever it is, the cast that he gives them will be ineffaceable."

Ortega refused to join in the existentialist lament which made pain and anguish into the testament of human freedom. Anxiety is an attribute of free intelligence, but so also is joy and exuberance. The reality of man's being has a positive side, and the philosopher-teacher "would serve human well-being to the degree that he founded a humanistic, practical reason on the full range of man's authentic concerns, on the joyful as well as the anguished." McClintock writes:

> In sum, Ortega invited men to cease making academic specialties of history, sociology, and philosophy and to begin letting these serve more directly in forming the actual rationality that everyman employs in living his life. These subjects would not work magically, providing perfect programs to the abstract difficulties of the time. These subjects were not meant to perfect primarily our civic programs, but to help the civic substance, men, perfect themselves. The education of the public was thus a matter for self-culture, not paternal instruction; and this faith in the public significance of self-education departs sharply from present practice. In effect, historians sociologists, and philosophers were invited to stop treating their subjects as the vehicles of truth, so to speak, and their students as empty receptacles into which the truths of their subjects are dumped. By basing all forms of reason on the realities of living, the students become the vehicles of truth the truths of life, and the subjects become receptacles into which truths that have been proved in various persons' lives are gathered. "Philosophy is not to demonstrate with life that which is the truth; it is strictly the contrary, to demonstrate the truth by being able, thanks to it, to live authentically."

By such means Dr. McClintock brings into the foreground the reason why Ortega's books are all so *interesting.* They are that kind of book—books which contain the truth that Ortega, an individual man, has proved in living his own life; and therefore the reader senses that he may be able to put to work in his own life some of what they say. They are interesting because they are filled with material for individual testing,

completion, and application. They are, in short, *practical* books.

What this means, for a given discipline, is that the sciences having to do with human life should be descriptive, not theoretical. A *theory* of sociology takes away the initiative from individual man. The reader of such theory may feel himself to be in the grip of vast, impersonal forces. Not so the reader of Ortega. His sociology is descriptive and is meant to be so. He organizes facts about social experience with a view to showing where the options for free choice are greatest, and where they are least. The theoretical part has to do with man, the individual, the reader, who has to cope with society without the aid of armies or magicians or soothsayers. The theoretical part is Ortega's theory about man. By "society" Ortega means that aspect of collective human behavior which is fixed—for the time being—not presently under the control of human decision. Societies may be changed, but only over a long period, and by slow eroding and reconstructive processes which make them malleable to change. Ortega, in short, studies society as a complex of effects, not as a scheme of causation. Men give the causation. Dr. McClintock says in a note to this discussion: "An excellent case study in the processes of civic pedagogy in the United States would be an imaginative inquiry into the influence of descriptive sociologies like William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man* on the expectations of those who acquired their education during the 1960's."

If men of learning generally were to take up the human sciences with Ortega's purposes in view, they would surely help to transform the culture in which they live:

> Ortega urged men not to be content to impose the abstract plans of today upon the living reality of tomorrow. He did not merely invite historians, sociologists, and philosophers to make their subjects serve the pedagogy of self-formation. He further called on men, on everyman, to make full use of this pedagogy, refurbishing the historic spontaneity that has been characteristic of Western history.
>
> Ortega expended much effort in his later years in addressing diverse groups—librarians, architects, educators, corporate executives, dramatists, lawyers, doctors, scholars, and scientists. With each group the plea was the same: *Think in universal terms!* The practitioner of any occupation based on intellect was a man of culture, not a specialist; this man of culture was responsible, not only for performing his limited duties effectively, but further for basing his performance on a definite conception of its implications for the whole of life. All men of culture, especially the young, had a mission to perfect their imagination and intellect, to enter every profession without abdicating their initiative to the formal rituals of a career, and to inform their performances with a definite conception of what significance their special competences had for the complete cultural repertory of their time. Let the librarian find ways to make the book, of which he was the custodian, serve as a more effective stimulus to life. Let the men of the theater discover how to transport the audience to an intimation of yet unimagined human possibilities. Let the lawyer not be content to administer existing law but to create desirable, new forms of law. In short, let cultured individuals in every walk of life continually take initiatives that will keep every habit and every institution in permanent disequilibrium, m a perpetual need for adaptation.

Ortega was quite serious about this. When the Ford Foundation asked him to suggest a program of education for the future, he declared this to be a useless undertaking. To attempt it, he said, would saddle educators with an anachronistic view. "Educators themselves had to clarify their views of the future continuously."

His focus is always on the vital process of self-formation—on the living part of human life, not on any form, however representative and good it might be, for to adopt it as the ideal would turn it into a repressive conditioning. So Ortega refused to write out a "faith." He would not formulate a "program." He returned, over and over again, although always in refreshingly new terms, to the essential idea of man's need for self-formation, self-reform, self-creation. And what he says never grows monotonous, since from moment to moment the necessities of self-creation

change, and the kaleidoscope of his vision turns with the regenerative processes of his own thought and life. McClintock has this passage toward the end of the book:

> We arrive at nothing more or less than an invitation to reform—but what an invitation! Recall how Plato said that the only politics one can take part in is the politics of one's own character. To change the community we each must have a change of character. The realities of life are such that any particular person, after he has seen to the conditions of his own character, can only invite others to do the same, for no power in the world can either force another to perfect himself, nor can any power, but death, force another to stop seeking self-improvement. If men could devise a sound understanding of the art of self-formation, they would have a tremendous defense against their paternal, statist peers. Men could turn away from the hopeless inertia of practical politics and with a great-souled joviality they could leaven public life with diverse personal initiatives. With faith in the dignity of personal existence, the radical concern in living became the effort to realize one's self, the fullest human possibility that one could live.

Ortega's view of the life-work of the philosopher-teacher was not political but pre-political; it was not "democratic," but was intended to establish those conditions under which a democratic society would at least be possible. Ortega has been called a conservative and an elitist, but this is a misunderstanding of his intent and can be said only by ignoring the facts of his life. As McClintock says:

> An Enlightenment willingness to put confidence in man's capacity for self-perfection characterized Ortega's theory; yet he was not oblivious to the difficulties of getting men to exercise this capacity. Ortega's aristocracy was an elite of intelligence and talent whose purpose was to extend knowledge and to make it accessible to a greater proportion of the people. Rather than the paternal rule of the elites that came to govern Spain, the goal of Ortega's elite was to show Spaniards that they could rule themselves with more humanity and justice. Ortega's so-called elitism was based on the egalitarianism described by Ralph Waldo Emerson when he said: "Democracy, Freedom, has its roots in the sacred truth that every man hath in him the divine Reason, or that, though few men since the creation of the world live according to the dictates of Reason, yet all men are created capable of doing so. That is the equality and the only true equality of all men. To this truth we look when we say, Reverence Thyself; Be true to Thyself. Because every man has within him somewhat really divine, therefore is slavery the unpardonable outrage it is."

This book might well be made the philosopher, guide and friend of every teacher. Yet at present its price puts it beyond many, if not most. This is a misfortune for which no one, or everyone, can be blamed. It would be nice to think that it will soon become a paperback, but publishers need evidence that there will be a popular sale before investing in a paperback edition of so large a volume. There are other books of similar importance that ought to be in paperback, but have not yet found a publisher—for example, Robert E. Cushman's *Therapeia* (Chapel Hill, 1958), which to our way of thinking is the most valuable study of the writings of Plato issued during the twentieth century, yet out of print. A good library distribution of Dr. McClintock's book, as a means of getting it read, might be the first step toward another, lower-priced edition.

REVIEW
BOOKS ON UTOPIAS

ANYONE who undertakes reading in utopian literature is certain to be surprised by its extent. There are minor surprises, also, such as the discovery that Cyrano de Bergerac existed not only in the pages of Rostand, but was an officer in a Gascon regiment of the seventeenth century, and that, abandoning the military profession for letters after a grave wound, he wrote novels and plays and became a utopian author by producing satires on his own civilization in fantasies dealing with imaginary societies on the sun and the moon. In recent years we have had only anti-utopias, which may be preparation for another sort of social visioning. One thing is clear: it is no longer pleasurable to read the utopian romances produced in the past. The history of the past fifty years has made them unbelievable. Plato's *Republic* is perhaps an exception, since to our way of thinking this is only superficially a political treatise, being meant, instead, as a study of human nature, dramatic interest being obtained from the device of an "ideal" social organization.

One of the books which we have for review is *French Utopias* (Schocken paperback, $3.95) an anthology of ideal societies edited by Frank E. Manual and Fritzie P. Manual. The dissatisfying character of most utopias is well explained by the editors in a long and felicitously expressed introduction:

> If they are examined as a body of psychological rather than historical documents, many utopias appear to be expressions of the obsessive, somewhat paranoid personality. How else shall one interpret the regulatory minutiae of Restif and Fourier, the repetitive details, the reduction of reality to a symmetrical uniform structure, the autarchy and isolation of most ideal commonwealths, the piling up of restrictions, the artificiality of relationships? They describe a two-dimensional world which lacks emotional depth. There may be some sorrow allowable but nothing tragic, some orderly joy but no ecstasy. Life is flattened out: everything is adequate nothing magnificent. The extremes of existence have been topped off. The petty bourgeois, straitlaced Frenchmen of the nineteenth century could move into the better utopias without knowing the difference. Poets are not ousted from modern French utopias as they were from Plato's *Republic;* but they are required to behave themselves. . . .
>
> The utopian treats of society and each individual who comprises it as a manipulable object, as "it." He stands in sharp contrast to the mythopoeic view of the cosmos and society where man faces all creatures and things as "thou." Almost by definition, the utopian is alienated from the social order in which he actually lives, so alienated that he is driven to construct another world out of synthetic blocks and people it with creatures whom he disposes like dressed dolls in a model for a stageset. All utopias exude this spirit of the inanimate. Those utopians who created an imaginary contemporary character magically transported to a future age constructed a man who, despite his admiration for the new society, never was emotionally part of it. Attempts to describe utopian feelings, when they do occur, are always dismal failures. Utopias are generally wooden, mechanical, contrived. When we say they are dreamlike, we are probably misleading; they have none of the powerful affective qualities of the dream. Their emotional range is extraordinarily narrow. Rarely do they succeed in conveying what it is like to live in utopia—perhaps because there are no utopian feelings other than the mild contentment and sense of adequacy experienced in an even-temperatured room. Looked at from this viewpoint, the emotionally impoverished utopias may be considered a presage of the well-policed, comfortable civil societies of our advanced technological age. Cabet's Icaria was a fiasco in nineteenth-century Texas and in Nauvoo, Illinois, but with certain organizational changes, it could be looked upon as a social blueprint with recognizable affinities to contemporary suburbia.

The extracts from utopian writings in this book range from the writings of the fourteenth-century traveler, Sir John Mandeville (now said to be of composite authorship), and Rabelais' account of life in the Abbey of Theleme, from *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* to Teilhard de Chardin's *The Future of Man,* dealing mainly with the "Evolving Noosphere." Fénelon, Rousseau, Diderot, Volney, Condorcet, Babeuf, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Cabet, Comte, Proudhon, Renan, and Anatole France are among those included.

As the editors say, the implicit condemnation of contemporary social life made by utopias is often more accurate than their evocations of the future. These social dreams and formulas often mix incompatible elements, although "they may reflect universal, perhaps eternal fantasies of mankind, along with particular embodiments of the universal in time and place." A passage on the authors is of particular interest:

> In their social origins, the French visionaries ranged from top to bottom of the hierarchy; and their invention of utopias doubtless appeased a wide gamut of psychic needs. Our selection includes the free intellectual play of the libertine Renaissance humanists Rabelais and Cyrano de Bergerac; the moral preachments of Fénelon for the guidance of princes; the rigid plans for reform of the human species by Restif de la Bretonne, an eighteenth-century peasant's profligate son; vast projects of world organization by Henri Saint-Simon, a declassed nobleman of the Revolutionary epoch, the erotic daydreams of Charles Fourier, a frustrated clerk of the Restoration; the megalomaniac structures of that academic *raté,* Auguste Comte, who was rejected by the university potentates of the July Monarchy; and the rather disenchanted musings of one of the great scholars of the nineteenth century, Ernest Renan.
>
> The individual fortunes of the French utopians were touched with failure and tragedy. Cyrano de Bergerac, estranged from his ducal patron, died in misery of a wound accidentally inflicted by a servant. Diderot was imprisoned in Vincennes, and subversive pieces like the *Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville* could be published only after his death. Condorcet wrote his vision of the future scientific society while hiding from Robespierre's police in a garret, and he died in a sans-culotte detention cell. Babeuf was guillotined for his attempt to implement the *Manifesto of Equals.* Restif de la Bretonne lived in abject poverty during his declining years, though he did receive a rather grand official funeral under Napoleon. Saint-Simon stood trial for publishing the *Parable,* charged with inciting the Duke of Berry's assassination, and in his advanced age despair drove him to an attempt at suicide. Though the Saint-Simonian leaders were rehabilitated and "returned to the world" after serving a short term in a not uncomfortable jail for committing acts which outraged public morals, many adepts perished in North Africa seeking the Female Messiah. A hapless lot of Frenchmen set sail to establish Cabet's Icaria in Texas and succumbed to fever in swamplands. Fourier and Comte died in obscurity—a modern martyrdom.

The other book we have for review, *Journey Through Utopia* (Schocken paperback, $3.95), by Marie Louise Berneri, is a well-conducted tour written from the anarchist point of view. It is a combination of long extracts and commentary by the author. Marie Berneri, who died at the age of thirty-one in 1949, was the daughter of the Italian anarchist leader, Camillo Berneri, who was murdered in the Spanish Civil War. The book has six sections. The first provides the utopias of antiquity, including Plato's *Republic,* Plutarch's life of Lycurgus, and an extract from Aristophanes. The Renaissance utopian writers include More, Campanella, Andreae, Bacon, and Rabelais. Gerrard Winstanley represents the English revolution. De Foigny and Diderot speak for the Enlightenment. Among the nineteenth-century utopians sampled are Cabet, Bulwer-Lytton, Bellamy, William Morris, and Eugene Richter. The modern utopians are Hertzka, Wells, Zamayatin, and Aldous Huxley. "The Big Rock Candy Mountains" is quoted in full to represent the "anonymous literature of the underprivileged," and is titled "A Tramp's Utopia."

While this book is thorough in pointing out the authoritarian structure of most utopias, Marie Berneri also says:

> We shall often feel humble as we read of these ideal states and cities, for we shall realize the modesty of our claims, and the poverty of our vision. Zeno advocated internationalism, Plato recognized the equality of men and women. Thomas More saw clearly the relationship between poverty and crime which is denied by men even today. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Campanella advocated a working day of four hours, and the German scholar Andreae talked of attractive work and put forward a system of education which could still serve as a model today.

Early in her Introduction, Miss Berneri observes:

> Two main trends manifest themselves in utopian thought throughout the ages. One seeks the

> happiness of mankind through material well-being, the sinking of man's individuality into the group, and the greatness of the State. The other while demanding a certain degree of material comfort, considers that happiness is the result of the free expression of man's personality and must not be sacrificed to an arbitrary moral code or to the interests of the State. These two trends correspond to different conceptions of progress.

Obviously, undue emphasis on organization and subordination of the individual leads to tyranny, while too much individualism will establish a centrifugal tendency and make social unity difficult to attain. A conception of synthesis at a higher level is doubtless lacking, and it may be that delicate subjective balances are involved which no popular utopia can describe. Yet what Miss Berneri says about Plato's followers may bear on the problem:

> It is rather puzzling that Plato's *Republic* should have aroused such admiration and, paradoxically, it has been chiefly admired by men whose principles were completely opposed to those of Plato. It has been praised by poets who would have been banned from it, by revolutionaries who fought for the abolition of serfdom and seemed unaware that Plato's regime was based upon slavery; it has been extolled by democrats in spite of the fact that one can hardly conceive a more despotic rule than that of the guardians.

Perhaps these poets have felt the truth of what Eric Havelock makes clear in *Preface to Plato* concerning Plato's meaning in relation to the poets; and others may have realized what Northrop Frye took to be Plato's essential purpose in writing the *Republic*. Frye wrote recently:

> Plato and More realize that while the wise man's mind is rigidly disciplined, and while the mature state is ordered, we cannot take the analogy between the disciplined mind and the disciplined state too literally. For Plato certainly, and for More probably, the wise man's mind is a ruthless dictatorship of reason over appetite, achieved by control over the will. When we translate this into its social equivalents of a philosopher-king ruling workers by storm troopers (not "guardians," as in Jowett, but "guards"), we get the most frightful tyranny. But the real Utopia is an individual goal, of which the disciplined society is an allegory. The reason for the allegory is that the Utopian ideal points beyond the individual to a condition in which, as in Kant's kingdom of ends, society and the individual are no longer in conflict, but have become different aspects of the same human body.

COMMENTARY
UTOPIAN DYNAMICS

THE two "main trends" of utopian thought referred to by Marie Berneri, one seeking salvation through the State, the other in the pursuit of individual happiness, represent, as this author says, "different conceptions of progress." They might be considered to complete each other, and yet, in human experience, their combination leads only to a philosophy of limited or calculated self-interest that soon goes out of balance. Self-interest as an animating principle never submits willingly to any sort of harness; instead, it seeks equilibrium by invoking the now familiar principle of "always more."

The "pursuit of happiness" may also be a corrupting element. It represents the typical neglect by political thinkers of the psychological fact that happiness is never gained by its pursuit. Happiness is rather a by-product of not seeking it at all, while placing one's talents and energies at the service of others, *voluntarily.* The career of Socrates, in Plato's view, was an ideal human life, but one would hardly think of it as a pursuit of happiness. Yet Socrates was surely a happy man; or better, a fulfilled human being.

If the best men we know about have been of that sort, what good is a social theory which proposes a lesser goal for all the rest? You could say that both arrogance and elitism infect social theories based on the idea that "the masses" can be influenced only by appeals to self-interest. If we believe that all men have the same basic potentialities, then all men have in them at least the germs of the qualities that come to fruition in the best of men.

Statist utopias are designed to *force* those germs to develop, but coercion and the qualities of human excellence are contradictions in terms. So the real Utopia, as Plato insisted, is an individual goal, although its realization is sure to have widespread social effects. The tracing of how these effects come about might be a beneficial undertaking for a new kind of sociology. Certainly Ortega's life and influence would be an illustration of this process of the slow diffusion of constructive attitudes from their originals in a man of vision and creative capacity. And there are many others who could be studied with greater knowledge of this beneficent process as the objective.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE WAY WE DIE NOW

THE fact that lettuce is now selling in Washington, D.C., for 59 cents a head may not seem like much of a start for a column on the education of the young, yet the new paper in which we found this bit of information—*Rough Beast* (published ten times a year at 1522 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, $6.00 for twelve issues)—turns the current price of lettuce into an informative essay on the disappearance of the family farm. We had thought that the family farm started on its decline at least fifty years ago, if not more, but apparently there are still a lot of them left, since according to this article they are "presently disappearing at the rate of *2,000 per week"!* While this figure seems almost ridiculous, the comment which follows makes a great deal of sense:

> Drive around in parts of the Midwest. You will see abandoned farm house after abandoned farm house. To be sure the land is still cultivated, but not by the families who used to live in the houses; by factory hands, employees of an anonymous corporation in New York or Los Angeles. It brings to mind an interesting thought: maybe revolutionary theorists have been looking in the wrong place when they look at the cities for signs of the present order's being eventually overthrown.
>
> In fact, life in the cities may simply become untenable. People may decide it's too much to pay 89 cents [the price has gone up, as it always does] for a head of lettuce. They decide to move to the country to grow some for themselves. Only when they get there they're going to be told, You can't grow lettuce here, this land belongs to Purex. When the peasants of Russia were told something like that they burned down the manor houses. We'll burn down the corporate headquarters of Purex. (It should be recalled, of course, that when the Russian peasants, following in their fathers' footsteps, tried similar measures under Stalin, he burned them down.)

Filling in a bit, we should say that Purex is identified as one of three enormous agribusiness corporations which are the largest food-growers in the country. The other two are United Brands and Bud Antle.

What makes all this pertinent to education is the fact that, as Arthur Morgan has pointed out, the vitality of the rural areas is the source of the strength of civilization. Unreplenished by people from the country, cities wither and die, and the process of decline doesn't take very long.

More intimately, children need the experience of life on a "family farm." Many of those now in maturity can remember days spent during childhood on a family farm or the farm of a relative. But soon going to the country won't mean a chance to wander through a barnyard, learn to milk a cow, feed the chickens and collect eggs. These experiences are already too much like the adventures of kings and princesses, known only in illustrated books for little children.

So parents may want to find a way to get a place in the country, not only in order to have some lettuce they can afford to eat. Living in the country is a way of regaining touch with life.

Of course, this isn't any sort of "answer" to the problems of urbanization on a social scale. But just in case there *isn't* any answer to some of our problems, this one among them, on a social scale, the time may have come for people to do what they feel they ought to do, individually, regardless of the total situation. Maybe, some day, industry will really decentralize, and people will find it easier to combine subsistence farming with their jobs. Today it is more difficult, yet parents who think it is important for their children to be brought up in the country sometimes manage to find a way to do it.

Ralph Borsodi's book, *Flight from the City,* tells how he and his family did it in the 1920's.

But there's really no hope of being able to cloister one's children from all the ugliness and meaninglessness of modern life. The idea is rather to help them to gain the strength to resist it, and in some measure to change it. Too many people think of this as requiring a search for a proper "educational environment." Such an environment doesn't really exist, these days. No doubt there are some good schools, but the really good environment for a child is one in which there is intensity of purpose in the people he is with, most of the time. That means his

family. Children develop standards which eventually guide their lives by watching older people. They don't talk much about this; they just do it. A small boy who watches a fine carpenter or cabinet-maker at work won't have to be told a lot about having respect for tools. He will have taken this in quite naturally as part of his older friend's way. The lessons of self-control and restraint are at least best begun by this means. There is a craftsmanship about everyday duties which, if learned at an early age, will make a solid foundation for whatever the child undertakes later on. In a helter-skelter, disjointed, over-institutionalized environment, the young need most of all to see continuity of purpose and examples of the priority of individual responsibility.

Another article in *Rough Beast* is a study of the breakdown of these qualities in modern life, and of the institutional conspiracy against their revival. The editor, Gary Potter, tells about the death of his wife's grandmother in a nursing home at the age of ninety-three. Old Mrs. Meinders was given all the advantages of modern, technologized medicine, but the disadvantages of the institutionalization of responsibility—chopping it up into little, purchasable segments—were too much for her, and they ended her life. She was scalded to death in a sitz bath, and when the nurses heard her scream they were "too busy" to go see what was the trouble. Old people get notions, you see. They may even scream about nothing at all.

The old lady was reasonably strong, sound in mind, and healthy except for a trouble that needed some attention, but the doctors wouldn't even examine her except in a hospital. They wanted everything their way. Then, because the Medicare funds were low, she had to go to a nursing home for convalescence, since the family couldn't afford the two registered nurses required. Who could? And in the nursing home nobody bothered to coax her to eat enough. They cooked it and brought it to her; that ought to be enough, they thought. Her children and grandchildren loved her. They hated to put her in a hospital, and then in that nursing home; but they had to, since the doctors insisted. The writer concludes:

> When we buried Grandma her pastor said that everything he knew about her indicated that she was now with God. It is hardly possible to believe otherwise. All signs, her devotion, her piety, her prudence, indicated that she understood her very long life to be a gift from God, which He meant her to use in preparing to meet Him. Not everyone receives suck a gift. Consider the case of a young man wiped out [in a freeway accident] driving to work. Yet Grandma's death was more nearly akin to the young man's than it surely was to that of, say, her grandfather's. But Grandma's case simply was not unique, you know that. That most of us will have her institutional kind of dying, or the young man's violent death, and almost no one of us the older kind of demise, an 1878 death—there is the material for meditation.
>
> The majority of us from now on will die in institutions, hospitals, "nursing" homes, and other such places. They are the places to which we now go for dying; it appears that increasingly, particularly for older folks, they are places we go to be killed.

If we put first things first, in education as in all else, we shall be working for the kind of environment of which such things can no longer be said. For here, surely, is the stuff of ugliness and despair in human life, not in any particular act or crime, but in the texture of the existence which has grown up around us, and which can be changed only by growth-processes which create, little by little, very different relationships among the members of society.

To be considered is the fact that introducing the changes that are needed is likely to be as arduous, in its way, as the lives of the first pioneers who settled this country. Nothing was done for them; they had to do it all. They had to break ground, build a house, get in a crop, and teach their children to read and write, too. In those days conditions set the problem and necessity dictated action. Today, system-justified inhumanities set the problem and only individual imagination can indicate what must be done.

FRONTIERS

A Comment on ESP

AN interesting juxtaposition of attitudes appears in the article, "Science and Evil," by Alfred Adler, in the *Atlantic* for February. Mr. Adler is identified by the editors as a mathematician, yet he speaks with confidence and knowledgeability in behalf of science in general, which is not after all surprising, since the "grown-up" sciences pride themselves in having become increasingly mathematical. The article is a high-level preachment against mistaking technology for science. Technology produces "results," it provides products and conveniences. It takes the discoveries of sciences and cashes in on them.

But science is not a series of ingeniously satisfied needs and desires. "Science," says Mr. Adler, "conducts a disciplined and fully accountable pursuit of knowledge, tentatively and with the understanding that truth is not a kernel but a progression without end." The stops on this path are marked by technology, which takes off readings from current science and makes things out of them. "Technology is results, science is process; though the two fuse and separate and then fuse once more, as ends and means must, their opposition is profound." This writer sets a rigorous standard and sees in the scientific spirit the only salvation from "ethical disintegration," since nothing important is left, these days, of philosophy which has not been taken over by science: "the two have in fact become almost synonymous." Not results, not an endless array of products, not even "success," but ongoing effort to know and excellence, which are the foundation of human inquiry, should become the moral basis of life.

Yet there is a curious—not to say gratuitous—aside in Mr. Adler's development of his generally quite admirable case. In one place he says:

> When science asks, What aspect of the unknown is now accessible to intellect?, the word "now," although difficult to interpret satisfactorily, serves to distinguish science from more frivolous intellectual pastimes. Consider ESP research, for example. The fact that some persuasive instances of extrasensory perception have occurred is not to the point. The point is that there exists no intelligent way to discuss the phenomenon, no nontrivial approach to ESP beyond the accumulation of statistically meaningless data. ESP at present is inaccessible to intellectual force of any kind, and so is of no interest to science. Perhaps in a few years (or decades or centuries) it will be. But not now. The word "now" is decisive.

Apparently, Mr. Adler wants his science to be able to deal with phenomena with a nice, Cartesian precision, and this is hardly possible in the area of ESP. There are too many unknown or hidden variables. Extra sensory reality seems to represent the occasional, indeed almost random to the observer, interpenetration of two systems of laws, forces, and phenomena. The rationale of the relationships between the two is not yet established. It is only suspected as perhaps a possibility to human understanding. From the scientific point of view, what is known experimentally of the relations between matter and mind (as an independent, causal agency) is almost unbearably primitive or crude by comparison with the exactitudes of physical laws. So Mr. Adler will have none of it, "now."

Yet there is already a wealth of evidence that has been gathered in parapsychological laboratories—in addition to universal tradition and the personal experiences of countless individuals—pointing to the reality of superphysical forces and factors in both nature and human life. The fact that the methodology of study of these things is still in its infancy is not an argument against their reality. Nor is the imprecise character of the conclusions drawn from ESP research a sign that this reality is a "trivial" matter. Vague knowledge is still knowledge. With respect to a mature organism, an embryo is a very vague indication of future possibilities, but nonetheless an *indication.*

In the September 1971 *Journal of Parapsychology,* Dr. J. B. Rhine describes the

practical effect of this indication on the thought of the psychologist, William McDougall, a man who all his life sought by means of the scientific method for a foundation for ethics. To him, the promise of psychic research was of the greatest importance. McDougall was not an easily convinced man. Yet he found in parapsychological research good reasons for rejecting the mechanistic view of human life, for his conception of purposiveness as the basic attribute of human behavior, and for adopting "an elementary conception of the soul theory." However, he jumped to no conclusions and indulged in no wishful thinking, remaining a responsible scientist until he died in 1938. In his last year, asked how he would comment on the question of personal survival of death, in relation to the evidence offered by mediums, he replied:

> "I would frankly confess I do not know the answer. But I would want to comment on the question itself. I still have hope that something may come of it in time. The human mind still remains its own greatest mystery; but now parapsychology has a unique opportunity to help in solving it. It once did look as though proof of survival might provide the key; but perhaps an understanding of the mind will, after all, have to precede discovery of its ultimate destiny. I do think it is something at least to know that the transcendent order of mental life is now well confirmed. The rest of the picture of the mind in the universe will surely emerge as the search goes on."

This is no substitute for the faith in the soul and in a moral order which has been at the root of all the great religions of the world, even though the findings of parapsychology were enough to give a man like McDougall enduring strength of purpose and hope. Yet the open-mindedness which he exemplified, and his refusal to join the chorus of mechanistic reductionists, were these attitudes more widely adopted, would at least strengthen the moral convictions of a great many people who look to men of science and learning for guidance in questions of knowledge and truth. And it would make less plausible the easy opportunism of the "practical results" theory of knowledge, which has been able to replace the true meaning of science in the popular mind. We do not need and should not want from men of science a set of dogmas to succeed the moribund beliefs of religion, but the identification of science with technology, as though it were in full support of the hedonistic religion of the market place, may be partly the result of the default of scientists to learn from McDougall's example.