

REVIVAL OF INDIVIDUALISM

ONE reason why we thought so well of Lyman Bryson's *The Next America*—and keep on mentioning it, quoting it, and urging people to read it—is the way in which he deals with the tension between individualism and collectivism. Actually, there isn't any tension between them for Bryson, for the reason that he puts collectivism in its place. Collectivism and technology, he shows, belong together. Let us use these methods, he says, at the level at which they are most useful—in production of the things we need for food, shelter and clothing. Then, as human beings, let us be as anti-collectivist and as untechnological as possible.

This seems to us to be the neatest synthesis of the year, or of 1952, when *The Next America* was published, and the years since. What is good about collectivism and technology is what they will do for the material needs of human beings. What is bad about them is the way they get in the way of freedom of the mind and moral independence. Neither one is important enough to make us put up with that kind of interference. Bryson sees this so clearly that he quite evidently doesn't think the matter worth arguing about. Just get collectivism and technology out of the way, he seems to be saying, when we start in to think, to converse, to educate, and to make decisions about important matters.

Lyman Bryson's book is valuable for a variety of reasons, but right now it seems most valuable as a preface to everything that is being written in behalf of the individual. For there is a definite renaissance of philosophical individualism emerging on the contemporary scene. We say "philosophical" because we don't want what we are talking about to be confused with the current recrudescence of "conservatism," which was bound to appear as a companion of the fearful rejection of political collectivism. An appreciation

of the place of collectivism and technology in Bryson's scheme makes it possible to discuss the new individualism without little critical excursions into the subject of political economy accompanied by careful disavowals of what was once known as "rugged individualism."

The individualism that is important and needs reviving is the kind that is advocated by Edgar Ansel Mowrer in the *Saturday Review* for Feb. 5, under the title, "Return to Integrity." This article is practically a battle cry, starting out with the maxim: "Never urge people to do together what the self-reliant among them can do better alone."

Last week, in the review of Harriette Arnow's *The Dollmaker*, a quotation from this book presented a school teacher's explanation of the educational theory of "adjustment." The point of the quotation was a mother's sage rejection of the theory. Reading it, we thought the point well made, but the schoolteacher's advocacy of this "blending" process a bit exaggerated. We now see that it wasn't exaggerated at all. Exploring the extent of the tyranny of the majority, Mr. Mowrer writes:

By 1918 the NEA Report on the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education stated the following:

"The purpose of democracy is so to organize society that each member may develop his personality through activities designed for the *well-being of his fellow members of society and of society as a whole.*" (Mowrer's italics.)

Today, little effort at developing the member's personality remains. No, the modern disciple of "Dynamic Functional Learning," according to John Haverstick, even in teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic "stresses not proficiency in these elementary skills but instead the adjustment of the individual to the group in which he lives."

Joseph Wood Krutch found school consultants advising against giving a baby a hobby horse which

"does not develop the group spirit." David Riesman—the invaluable reporter of the integration epidemic—tells of the mother who will not let John play the piano because she "wants to keep him a normal boy." Today's teacher—writes Riesman—conveys to the children that what matters is not their industry in learning but "their adjustment to the group." Today—he concludes—"all little pigs go to market; none stay at home; all have roast beef if any do and all say 'wee wee'" and (I might add) all emit the same grunts about the necessity of eliminating from the gang those "who stand up or out in any direction."

Introducing Mowrer's article, the *SR* editors say that "he deals in detail with a relatively recent American development which—if unchecked—will prejudice our international status and capacity." This statement is itself an interesting concession to conformity, for it shows an extraordinary regard for America's international relationships, as though these were more important than the dehumanization suffered by the American people through the processes of "integration" which Mowrer writes about. The sentence assumes—correctly, perhaps—that Americans care more about their relations with other countries than about the quality of their own lives. Mowrer, however, is more concerned with exposing the all-pervasive notion that frictionless uniformities constitute the highest good in human and social relationships:

Now, standardized amusements may be harmless (I wonder). But conformist, collective government is low-intelligence government and dubiously capable of solving the kind of life-or-death problems which face us. {This may be the sentence which caused the editorial writer to say what he did.} Regimentation, whether imposed or voluntary, is debasing....

Equally disturbing are the human results of "Dynamic Functional Learning." Visit any of our overseas military camps and see what remains of our young people once they can no longer lean for support upon the corner drugstore or the gang. Around the small minority of "self-directed" soldiers happy to be making the most of their exciting and novel surroundings you find a lackluster majority, devouring their horror comics, mooning uncomprehendingly around Pompeii, the Parthenon,

Westminster Abbey, or Notre Dame, pining for home—or getting into serious trouble.

"Why," asks Riesman innocently, "are American people so frequently aimless, lacking private pastimes and passions and pursuits (in other words half dead) when a greater variety of skilled careers are open to them than ever before?"

Obviously, because they have been trained to eschew private passions and pursuits (the thrills of life) and pursue only the inevitably tepid aims which they find they have in common.

One can understand underpaid schoolteachers succumbing to the selfish economic pressure of businessmen who want "homogenized" young people to fit into their "homogenized" administrations. But how explain the support of the intellectuals? Yet educators, psychologists, sociologists, social reformers go yelping along the neo-tribal trails.

Here surely is a new and fantastic *trahison des clercs*. Here are fine minds renouncing traditional intellectual and cultural values—in deference to what? To undemonstrated theories that deny the dignity of man! To an easy acceptance of "conventional happiness" as the goal worthiest of pursuit! And—sometimes—to a calculated acquiescence in the demands of leading citizens with personal axes to grind!

We can agree with everything that Mr. Mowrer says about this revolting harvest of utilitarian social reform and mechanistic theories of human nature, except the idea that it is a "recent" development. Only, we think, the awareness of it by men like Mr. Mowrer is recent. It is the emergence of an articulate idealism and keen critical capacity which has made such writers feel, first, uneasy about the creeping paralysis of conformist doctrines of "integration," then dismayed, and finally outraged by the measure of serious agreement with these theories. There was just as much "conformism" twenty or thirty years ago, but it was not so carefully rationalized in terms of "human good," nor made the basis of pat clichés such as the schoolteacher repeated to "Gertie," the stubbornly individual mother in *The Dollmaker*.

A story told of Robert W. Chambers, popular novelist of a generation ago, will illustrate what

quite possibly has happened. Toward the end of his career, Chambers became increasingly dissatisfied with his own work. He spoke of this feeling to an old friend, a literary critic, saying that he did not seem to be writing as well as he used to. The friend smiled and patted him on the shoulder. "No, Robert," he said gently. "It's not that. *Your taste is improving.*"

So with the growing anxiety about conformity. We have practiced conformity for a long, long time, but now our taste is improving. Today we have a better idea of what it means to be an authentic human being.

Mowrer supplies evidence of early recognition of the devastating effects of the conformist spirit. He tells of his own rebellious youth and of the experiences which gave him confidence that his resistance to patterns designed by others was the right way to react:

I can remember my joy when, studying in the freer atmosphere of the University of Paris, I came upon the passage by Nietzsche (well known, but not to me):

"The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently."

Gradually, with the experience of an international correspondent in most parts of the world, all doubts departed. I remember a few supreme experiences.

One was that day in Berlin in the Twenties when my young friend Dr. H. was late for lunch.

"Please excuse me," he panted. "I have been first delayed and then cut down to size by the great Professor Kraus of Munich."

"Cut down?"

"And how! Our director asked me to show the professor over the hospital. He inspected almost everything. Then before one closed door he stopped and asked:

"What is in there?"

"That was my undoing. 'Nothing that would interest you, Professor,' I answered stupidly. 'Just a bunch of neurotics.'

"He withered me. 'Young man, don't be a damn fool. God bless the neurotics! But for them we should still be living in the caves'."

This is not, of course, a brief for neuroticism, but a way of pointing out that some of the nonconformists of our world find the pressure of conventional thinking pretty strong, and may from the viewpoint of the conformers manifest neurotic tendencies. The greater evil is the absence of the capacity to think and act on one's own:

The most dangerous Italians and Germans under Fascism were not those who forced castor oil down dissidents' throats and *heiled* Hitler. They were those who failed to laugh (at least inwardly) when it was announced that "Mussolini is always right" or that Herman Goering "will decide who is a real Jew."

Mr. Mowrer has the theory that a resistance movement is gathering strength—that there is something in human beings which, "instinctively seeking social health, regularly corrects an excess." We hope he is right. Meanwhile, we trust that this instinct will have the fortification and encouragement it needs from all those who, with Mowrer and a few others, see what has happened.

Letter from **ENGLAND**

LONDON.—Several years ago some revision of the Prayer Book was suggested. The Church of England being a State institution, Parliamentary sanction to the proposed changes was necessary. Now the Church of England, as compared to the Catholic Church and the numerous nonconformist denominations, attracts few worshippers, but has a large nominal membership, baptism into it being a social convention among the "classes," as opposed to the masses. Few can have had any intimate knowledge of the Prayer Book, or have had any critical attitude toward it, of which assertion the monotonously empty pews are evidence. Yet, so soon as changes were mooted in Parliament a violent outburst of anger followed. MP's debated the theme with a vehemence that was quite astonishing. And the Press throughout the land sent up a howl of rage. "Hands off the Prayer Book," became a sort of battle cry. Now, once again, a religious controversy is convulsing the country, and even more sedate newspapers are exhibiting signs of hysteria.

A brief digression is here necessary. The BBC under Rieber, a Scots Presbyterian, allowed nothing in criticism of Christianity to be broadcast. This unhealthy attitude was adopted by his successors; consequently, though they have often claimed air time as a right, no secular body has ever been allowed to broadcast. Now, for the first time, a woman lecturer in Psychology in Aberdeen University has been given two one-half hour assignments. It is what she said that has brought about the present furore. For Mrs. Knight happens to reject the idea of a Deity who watches over humanity, and invites parents to teach their children that the gods of antiquity are legendary characters and that Christ, though a real man, must be regarded, as to his divine claims (or those made for him), along with Jove, Zeus, and all the rest. Her talks, subsequently published, are restatements in very simple language of what has

been said over and over again. But the outburst which has greeted these talks is quite amazing. Much of it, expressed in newspaper correspondence, is hysterical, but it is noteworthy that it is Mrs. Knight's clerical opponents who have been calling on the amateur theologians—of whom Miss Sayers, purveyor of detective fiction, has constituted herself spearhead—to avoid abuse and hysterical demands for a censorship.

Why has the reaction been so violent? It is not the opinions expressed by this broadcaster, for they have been so often expressed before: it is that millions, for the first time, have become aware that there *are* people who do not accept Christianity as true. When Freud's *Future of an Illusion* was published it stated the same thesis. There was no reaction. Why? Because the Press exercised its own sort of censorship: nobody reviewed the book. Then it circulated only among the cultured and the man in the street remained unaware of its existence. What Mrs. Knight's talks and the pother that has ensued upon them demonstrates is the vast power of *the medium* and the fact that the mass of the population remain completely ignorant of the trends of modern thought unless thus made aware of them. It reveals, too, the latent hysteria that requires only a trigger mechanism to set it in motion. And, finally, it is a rather sobering reminder of the persistence into the Atomic Age of the spirit of the Inquisition. For the mood of Mrs. Knight's opponents has a horridly familiar sound: it is that which made it possible for decent folk to dance for joy as the flames lapped around the heretic. In giving the microphone to Mrs. Knight, the BBC did something very much to its credit. For, after all, *Magna est veritas, et prævalebit!*

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

MR. MEAD WRAPS IT UP

THE three latest full-dress fantasies about the future, though sharing important prognostications, evoke entirely different moods. George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-four* precipitates the reader into an atmosphere most somber; even "grim" and "sordid" would be apt designations. Orwell's technique is one of shock, and it seems clear that, by portraying the desperate conditions which may close in upon the future, he hoped to induce us to detour the worst traps of totalitarianism. Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* (now *Utopia 14* at your corner drugstore) is calculated to stimulate thought rather than bring reaction by shock. While Vonnegut also viewed the future in terms of an extension of centralized social control, he pictured this as a result of universal conventionality—gradually taking over. The end of individualism arrived, not because of mobilized war-making societies, but through sheer inertia. There are no "evil forces" nor absolute dictators in *Player Piano*, just a sort of lulling music that finally puts the soul to sleep.

Shepherd Mead's *The Big Ball of Wax* places the accent on humor in a tale which likewise tells how Individual Thought was banished from the affairs of men. The way of it is this: Someone finally comes up with an invention called XP, which renders television-viewing obsolete. When wearing a specially constructed headset, the addict is able to tune in on the carefully recorded experiences of other men, and feel them directly in his own nervous system. Want to drive a Lancia at a hundred miles an hour on the curving roads of Italy? Just order the right tape-recording and you'll feel every curve, every thrust of power. Want to make love to the most exotic women in the world? This, too, can be arranged, and the cost in electricity—save for rental of the tape—will be little more than what it takes to burn your morning toast.

The first uses to which XP was put promoted a religious cause, at a time when competition between popular church groups was extremely keen. If one were going to found a new sect, he couldn't possibly succeed without devising some novel form of entertainment; XP was more than merely novel—it was the answer to the promoter-type evangelist's prayer. (While every conceivable creature comfort was already on the market, religious experience still invited the efforts of the sharp merchandiser.) Religion and XP got together when, poring over a few of the rare "written books" (everyone knew by this time that it was too much work to actually *read* anything—television could do it all for you), somebody realized that people once got inspired about the battle against Sin, and even if there wasn't much bothering about sin in 1990, he thought it was just possible that the *mood* could be recaptured and millions of followers recruited. But experiments in coralling the multitudes were unsuccessful until the new invention of XP was purchased by the Temple. The promoters here relate how they looked for such a device, and how they finally came into possession of XP:

"We weren't satisfied. I figure that the guy who could really *send* you would have this religion thing by the tail."

"*Send* you?" I asked.

"You take out in India. They can send a guy so hard he can walk over a fire and not feel it. This is really something."

"You want to have the people walking over fire?"

"I just wanted 'em to have a real knock-out religious experience. Only—get this—I wanted to get it on tape or something so we'd have a real gimmick to merchandise."

"Oh, brother," I said. It was some idea, all right.

"You can see," said Harry, "what kinda vision Will has got. He's practically a mystic, only in a very modern way."

"I guess," said Will, "you might refer to me as a mechanical mystic with a merchandising slant."

Anyhow, it sure got me into one hell of a lot of trouble. I started out by looking for a guy who could figure out this gimmick. It took me a couple of years just to find the guy. He was working on something very close to it already, in fact he got his start at the Rockefeller Foundation, and then switched out there because he had this thing by the tail and wanted to go after it by himself. I hauled him out of a laboratory in his own basement in Muskegon, Michigan and gave him a real fine set-up in a swell shop under the arena. . . . He got *something* working."

"He got it on tape?" I asked.

"I don't know where he got it," said Harry. "I don't even know if he does it with electricity. All I know is, you sit down, and—*boinnng!*"

"Where can I find him?"

"You won't buy him now for any million bucks," said Harry. "I bet they take in that much every couple of nights."

"At least," said Will. "And they've got special experiences that sell for more than a thousand bucks a throw. Or so I hear, at least." It seemed to me he added that last part kind of fast.

Harry looked at him. "Will," he said, 'you've been to the Temple yourself."

"Only once, Harry. I had to see what the opposition was doing."

"They never go just once."

The thing worked like a charm; under the guise of contritely viewing one's sinful propensities by letting XP reveal the full extent of personal lust, one gets prepared to become a follower; the fact that everyone came back to the Temple to re-live the same or even more novel sins the next day simply made the tills ring merrily. (Here we begin to realize that Mr. Mead must have done some pondering about religious psychology, with special reference to the type of emotionalism that hates "sin" because it loves it so much.)

The Big Merchandisers finally move in on the church racket and produce XP sets for everyone, whether or not they are Temple followers. Then an alarming thing happens. All other business goes into a decline. Why should a person buy an

attractive meal when he can ladle in some inexpensive soybean mixture, then play an XP recording of response to a twenty-course banquet? Why should he buy a new Buick when a flick of the wrist will give him the thrill of the Lancia right in his livingroom? The birthrate falls sickeningly, also, for every form of amour comes in a package of the same size. So, finally, there's nothing left to sell except XP sets, and since no one wants to stay away from such thorough-going entertainment any longer than he has to, it is even hard to scare up the labor to make the sets.

A solution is found, of course, but it places the general public even more firmly under the thumb of business and advertising. You simply censor all XP recordings, allowing them to carry the public up to the point of highest stimulation and then stop everything right there. With the control over the emotions made possible by this device, any business can create an advance market precisely suited to its productive capacities, and the public responds on schedule. Titillation, but never satisfaction, is the new XP motto—not so new, at that.

Mr. Mead, as we have said, deals in humor, but he is also quite serious in his ironical condemnation of a civilization which binds men to their own petty desires even more securely than any animal in a cage. "XP" is simply another logical step in the enslavement of the psyche, in the creation of a dictatorship of the senses which obliterates all philosophy, all genuine religion, all serious discussion and debate.

Years before this final invention to end all inventions, art had gone by the board, with but a few recalcitrant individuals stubbornly standing against the tide. The predicament of one of these, an artist husband, is described to the leading character by a highly paid woman executive, Mrs. Schroeder. She tells "Larry Martin" that, though the public does not know it, there are quite a few people like Ben Schroeder still around, living in homespun shirts, cooking their own meals, and

painting pictures or writing books no one except their friends ever sees:

"You have to remember," she said, "that they're artists, and some of them are really very talented, like Ben. A generation or so ago he'd have been a famous writer, but now of course there aren't any famous writers."

I knew that wasn't true, but I didn't say anything. I happened to know a couple of very famous writers, not intimately, but I'd met them over at the agency. Why, some of them made two or three million a year and it was really very easy work. They just had to study the figures of the last week's push-button tabulation to find out how much everybody liked any part of the show. Then they punched up the weak parts and made the good parts even better. There wasn't much guesswork about it, it was a regular science. One fellow, who was a whiz at figures, wrote three shows a week with really top ratings. I know he made thirty thousand a week on just one of them alone, because it was our show and I had a look at the billing sheets.

"More and more," she went on in that rapid-fire way, "they've been writing and painting just for their friends, which keeps them happy as long as they have somebody like me to bring in the money. Or unless they've got a block of U.S. Steel like Letty has from her grandfather."

"I don't guess it costs much to keep Mr. Schroeder," I said, "with his poverty and all."

"Well, he does stay close to home, but his poverty is terribly expensive. Why, one of his meals with real meat and that unpolished rice that you have to send hundreds of miles for, and those special vegetables that have to be grown in organic fertilizer, well it costs about ten times what my meals cost, and as for those T-shirts in the store, and with the repairs on the spinning wheel and the knitting needles and all, well, it's quite an item. I guess there isn't anything more complicated than real simplicity."

So, like Kurt Vonnegut, Shepherd Mead paints the puzzling picture of a society where everybody has everything, but can no longer tell the difference between happiness and unhappiness, no longer struggles either for or against. This is the final triumph of mass psychology, ending, not in dictatorship, but in slow obliteration of the spirit of inquiry and adventure.

It is said of Mr. Mead that all went well with his life—extremely well, financially—until someone tacked up a sign in his elegant office which read "Think." This, he says, got him started and he hasn't been able to stop since. The Simon and Schuster reviewer has this to say:

Mr. Mead has unique qualifications for writing a book of this kind, since he is our only leading literary figure who is also vice president of a multi-million-dollar corporation.

When asked if he had any message for today's business leaders, Mead replied without a moment's hesitation, or thought, that they would be far happier if they did not begin thinking. "In fact," he said, "if we can only go on without thinking, as we have in the past, the happy world outlined in my book may very well prove to be more than just a rosy dream."

Well, as we said before, the prophet of doom, the penetrating critic, and the satirist all reinforce David Riesman's view of the predicament of modern man. What price "autonomy"? It is not so much, perhaps, what autonomy costs, but how much it will cost us to forget the meaning of the word.

Mr. Mead's *Big Ball of Wax* is already widely read and will be more so: To *this* popular activity, at least, we have no objection.

COMMENTARY

THE RELIGION OF SELLING

THE sharpening perceptions of the importance of individuality reported in this week's lead article seem unhappily balanced by the ominous anticipations of Shepherd Mead's utopian novel, *The Big Ball of Wax*. This story expertly combines several contemporary trends in religion, technology, and the mood of modern "sales techniques," to show how the sophisticated self-consciousness which, in mature and responsible people, brings the insights of a Riesman or a Mowrer, may produce among members of the merchandising fraternity an entirely different result.

The characters in Mead's book talk about the exploitation and betrayal of the religious instinct—an instinct already perverted—as though this were an entirely legitimate field of commercial enterprise. Religion is as much a commodity to be offered for sale as anything else. In fact, it becomes in this story the supreme commodity, since it deals directly in emotional responses without need for the intermediate step of a "product" designed to evoke the response.

It is the mood of total acceptance of psychological and emotional regimentation that shocks, in books like *Nineteen-Eighty-four*, *Player Piano*, and Mead's story. Loss of moral perception is a kind of mental disease or insanity—the worst, perhaps, of all.

Unfortunately, there are elements in the businessman's version of the "American Way of Life" which lend themselves to this sort of development. The credo of free enterprise and free competition tends, for those active on the competitive "firing line," to turn into a religion in which *selling* is the principal act of devotion. For those who accept this faith, all other values become subordinate to successful selling, so that the man who makes a big sale is the man who really gains "salvation." This is the mood of the promoters quoted in this week's Review—a mood

not too far advanced beyond certain sales activities already in practice on the American scene today.

The importance of such novels as *The Big Ball of Wax* is obviously in the warnings they give to a culture already partially submerged in the sticky atmosphere of the religion of "selling." They sound the same alarm that Mr. Mowrer rings in his *Saturday Review* article.

The moral, perhaps, if there is a moral, in this parallel, is that as human beings gain in understanding of the factors of their psychological environment, they become in the same degree vulnerable to the abuse of the power which knowledge of those factors makes possible.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

SUCCESS and failure, Glaucon—how you worry yourself over these words! Do you not see that this preoccupation comes near to being an insurmountable barrier in our converse? Of course, you are hardly alone in your penchant for such labels, and the Five Hundred's displeasure with Socrates may even be attributed to similar notions. It is my role, as would-be philosopher, to argue that there is no true substance to either success or failure, and hence my ways and words and those of governing councils conflict most drastically. The search for truth and the search for influence and power must be attempted along different pathways, and somewhere, in our deliberations about the education of the young, a choice must be made.

As to distinctions: First, the man who wants power is more easily satisfied, since the amount of power which demonstrates "success" is no more than that needed to carry some immediate situation in one's favor. The man who wants truth is only secondarily concerned with how he is able to influence others, and certainly, he never, really, has enough of the truth to satisfy him—even for a moment. There is the difference, Glaucon. The person whose main concern is to win a sufficient number of temporary friends and thus secure endorsement of his wishes can have "success" at almost any time—for a while. True, he and he alone is not altogether responsible, since the prejudices and fashions of the day will have much to do with his winning of the crowd. Thus an element of chance enters in. But at last there are times when the politician can say that he has reached some goal he is pursuing, even though a change in circumstance may disrupt his success and leave him engaged in pursuit once again. The philosopher, on the other hand, never does quite achieve anything. He has no criterion for success and so, at least presumably, is beyond the worries of whether he succeeds or fails at any given time. Unless, of course, you are willing to make the

extravagant grant that anyone who discovers a little more of the truth from day to day is "succeeding," whatever the opinion of the general public.

Perhaps I should go further into this matter of how the philosopher tries to look at success and failure, for there are some arguments in favor of this point of view, and part of the work of gaining an education must certainly be to see that all viewpoints receive their due of attention.

For one thing, the philosopher is never frightened, because he never has anything tangible to lose. We discussed this matter once before, Glaucon, in respect to possessions—an overabundance of which the philosopher has pledged himself to shun. But there are even more important concerns than those of possessions or their absence. Within each person is the desire to believe that he has reached a certain eminence, and the attitudes developed about the supposed eminences attained, they become possessions, too—of a different and more insidious sort. Pride in accomplishment can become a truly dreadful thing, and some who have eschewed material possessions yet embrace it. Such pride inevitably makes it more difficult to admit one's errors and rechart a course of thinking. Men fight most unscrupulously to retain their supposed distinctions in thought, perhaps more desperately than they do to retain handsome ships and homes. I have always felt that it is here that a separation occurs between the boy philosophers and the philosophers grown into full maturity, for intellectual pride, in the final analysis, is just like any other variety—delusive and misleading.

The principal advantage which the philosopher enjoys over the man of purely temporal thinking—and this I enjoin you to point out to your children—is that the philosopher always has somewhere to go beyond the point he has reached. Knowing this, he has a proper seasoning of humility—he is not measuring himself against the accomplishments of his fellows, as is the politician. One reason why the

truths he has discovered cannot be threatened is because he is not dependent upon nor satisfied with them himself.

You say, Glaucon, that this makes the philosopher a less positive individual than the man of political talents, and that there must be something behind the universal admiration for a positive man. But consider that there must be many kinds of positiveness. The philosopher is fully as certain that he has more to learn as the politician is sure that he presently knows all he needs to know; the manifestation of certainty simply takes a different form.

But to come back to the terms on which we began: A little honest self-seeking should demonstrate to anyone that he is *both* a success and a failure many times over. The more sensitive one becomes to the strengths and weaknesses within his own nature, the more readily he admits that, at any given time, to strike a balance is so difficult that he gladly relinquishes the attempt—unless, that is, he happens to be frightened, and needs to construct a sort of private trance in which he is able to crown himself with laurels. Perhaps it is a form of delusion which prompts me to evaluate all others in terms of my own personal experience, but I like to think that every person must some day become a philosopher, in some future life if not in this one, and that Socrates' transitions in viewpoint therefore represent, in a symbolic way, the course of every passage through time. In any case, I find it very easy to regard myself as *both* monumental failure and inspiring success at one and the same time, which is just another way of asserting that neither word has any genuine significance. To press the case further, one may point out that the things we think to be our greatest weaknesses sometime turn out to be our strongest and best points, and the apparent great strengths occasionally reveal themselves to be of rather different origin. Successes and failures, Glaucon? Always are we both and neither.

Take Socrates, for example, After believing that I served the welfare of Athenian society by calling attention to the role of the philosopher, it suddenly becomes apparent that the majority of the present citizenry would rather I disappear. (How, does not really matter, since men are not, for the most part, by nature cruel, but my disappearance is surely what is presently demanded, and so strenuously that any means will be adopted to attain the result.) On the other hand, and from a quite different standpoint, I feel I have learned more with each passing year, and, moreover, have contributed to the philosophical education of the young. So am I a success or a failure? Better, perhaps, not to try to add matters up in this arbitrary way, and if better for Socrates—I cannot escape this common sort of conviction—better for all other men as well.

I am not giving you "advice" in respect to the teaching of your children, Glaucon, in the expectation that a few words here and a few words there, repeated after me, will make better Athenians or better men of them. No one really "takes" my advice—and this is as it must be, since each must evolve his own perceptions, and I certainly lay no claim upon having *discovered* a way of making others happy and wise. I ask only that my point of view, along with others, receive its hearing. If this can be, then, from time to time, some youth may adopt from it a principle or two which may add meaning to his own life, and if they then should be formulated in a somewhat different way, this would be so much the better.

FRONTIERS ON SELF-RESPECT

J. BRONOWSKI, termed "one of England's foremost scientists," writes in the *Nation* for Jan. 29 to argue that the human propensity for violence is a manifestation of the spirit of independence. In our modern, mechanical world, he proposes, the prestige of the individual has fallen away to a cipher, causing men to turn to law-breaking to piece together their shattered egos. "The violence of the lawbreaker becomes the symbol of manly action in a world of machines. This is what draws the young men together in gangs, to see their leader as a hero in a fight against a baffling society."

The rebellion itself, however, does not trouble Mr. Bronowski very much. Resistance to rigid patterns he regards as inevitable and fortunate. What worries him is the ease with which unscrupulous leaders are able to organize the spirit of resistance into the phalanxes of "a more terrible conformity." Thus, he maintains, are "gangster nations" created. In the modern state—

The members dwarf the man, so that each holds simply a place of no significance and of immeasurable remoteness. And more than numbers, the complexity of society makes the man lose heart. Nothing he does any longer seems a skill to be proud of in a world where someone else always hits the headlines.

This is the plausible picture, in despair of which men cheerfully join any private army which will offer them the right to salute and be saluted. It is of course a false picture. Precisely the size and the complexity of modern societies have raised the status of labor. The slave has become extinct because he had no skill to give, and we can get his mere muscular energy from nature. The two hundred years of discovery from which the convolutions of our societies have grown have steadily increased the importance of the individual and with it his standing. But we have failed to find the forms which acknowledge this new standing.

Bronowski's point, here, is that the individual is important in our society, but nobody has made

the fact clear to him. Man's low estimate of himself is only an illusion. Today's human beings are people with widely diversified and technical skills, and yet they think they are unimportant:

. . . their cry is one with the wish of the churchwarden and the toff and the squire's lady. They want a place in the world. They want to be among friends. And they want to stand and be recognized. They want someone in their street to nudge his wife and say, "There goes that Mr. X who is doing so well." It does not seem too much to ask of society. . . .

Our dilemma is not in any failure to make men individual; on the contrary, their individuality is the creation of two hundred years of invention which have steadily liberated men. We have failed in something else—in finding how to give recognition to what is everywhere individual. We must mend this to survive.

Somehow Mr. Bronowski has not convinced us of anything at all. Unless, that is, it be that he, too, along with the masses who do not understand their true distinction, has a low estimate of human beings. People do, we suppose, enjoy being "popular," and in being pointed out on the street as a "success," or as handsome, or pretty. These are foibles to which the flesh is heir, and Calvinist denunciations will never do away with them.

But are such matters the spring of human dignity, the key to human happiness? The troubling thing about Mr. Bronowski's argument is that it gears the effort to improve the lot of human beings to some sort of paternalistic plan to fortify their self-esteem by means of educational propaganda. "You really *are* important," would be the message of the benevolent managers of human welfare to the "little people" of the world.

However plausible this message were made, it would not, we think, be believed, for the simple reason that the supporting argument would be untrue. Technology has *not* increased the real resources of human beings. Our great and wonderful machines have not improved the quality of our lives or made us better, "more important," men. That we are button-pushers instead of

laborers has not added to our stature as human beings.

Then there is this question: What are you likely to think of a person who is dependent for his self-respect upon the reassurances of an educational program sponsored by a corps of social psychologists?

It is true, of course, that people can help one another in the matter of self-respect. Gandhi advocated the spinning program for the millions of Indian villagers as much for purposes of morale as for actual production of homespun cloth. Every patriot who works for an authentic social or cultural ideal helps his fellows to participate in his feeling of the dignity of man. Generous and large-minded human beings carry with them an atmosphere of strength and friendliness wherever they go, and others are affected by this constructive influence, often being moved to gain greater strength themselves, and emulate their leaders in the support of similar ideals. But the *self-respect* never comes from verbal assurances: it grows out of an inner sense of the validity of what one is doing and working toward.

When, however, Mr. Bronowski speaks of the dignity of labor, he seems to have a different idea:

The heart of social reform today is to make the world acknowledge the central place in it of every man's work. Exactly because ours is a mechanical age we can have no man in it merely a cog. The dignity of labor has been put into his hands by the machine.

This, we think, assigns practically supernatural powers to machines. The machine doesn't amount to much unless the thing that it is used to make is itself of some human importance. How could anyone derive any real dignity from operating a machine which turns out bullets? What of the thousand and one industries and occupations which cater to superficial fads and fancies or turn out millions of practically useless gadgets? What kind of "integrity" will belong to the men who plan the "self-respect" campaign for

producers of cheap and shoddy articles which ought never to have been placed on the market? There is at least a flavor of George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-four* in Mr. Bronowski's article.

The truth of the matter is fairly evident, we think, and may be found in the writings of almost any reflective thinker of our time. It is that men tend to lose their self-respect when their prevailing motives and habits of life, both their ends and their means, are unworthy of the true capacities of human beings. Tolstoy discovered this about himself and recorded in his *Confession* the agony it cost him to face himself honestly and to resolve to revolutionize his personal life.

Any other approach to the problem would be an attempt to "kid the public," to set for men goals that can never excite the best qualities or draw on their best energies. The trouble with most sociological designs for the Good Society is that they originate in statistical studies of what men are doing *now*, and what they are wanting *now*, when these doings and these wants are things which ought to be changed.

Of course, if you are satisfied with the status quo of human behavior, it will not occur to you to call for changes. Then the problem becomes one of tinkering with psychology in the hope of discovering how to make people happy the way they are, doing what they are doing. This may suit the prosperous nations who are convinced that they have found the means to the Good Life, and need only to work out certain bothersome details which prevent people from reaping its benefits. There will be others, however, who are able to see many defects in the status quo and will demand far-reaching changes.

But who will impose the changes? That is the great question. If it is assumed that the leaders have the responsibility of planning the reforms and putting them into effect, then you get something like the totalitarian revolutions of the twentieth century. *Everybody* has to go along and become a "changed man" in order to make possible the Better Society or Better State. If you don't agree,

you must be liquidated, since the welfare of all mankind is at stake, and who are you to stand in the way?

If, however, we agree that changes are necessary, but maintain that they must be consistent with human freedom and human dignity, then we shall have to look elsewhere than the political revolutions of our time and the plans and projects of the social psychologists for guidance in how to undertake them. What we need, and what we have never had under the ægis of Western civilization, is a double doctrine of the Good Life—a course for heroes, saints and sages, and a course for ordinary men, with complete freedom for any man or woman or child to follow either course.

To plan a society for "ordinary" people alone is to reveal either ignorance or contempt for the hidden greatness which may emerge at any time in any individual—no one knows where or when. No community of human beings can enjoy genuine self-respect without acknowledging this ever-present possibility and providing for its free expression. On the other hand, to lay down blueprints which require extraordinary qualities and achievement of everyone would be to attempt to mechanize a development which is almost wholly inward, of secret and mysterious origin, and alien to any and all "conditioning" processes so popular in the mass societies of our time.

How may such a society become possible? Only, we think, through the efforts of individuals who are irrepressibly convinced of the high potentialities of human beings, and who believe at the same time in the absolute importance of human freedom. Such a society would gain its support and sustenance from the intangible essences of a cultural atmosphere—an atmosphere which would have the same effect upon the people as the great myths and legends of heroes in the past. The dream of the heroic life is something which nearly every mother envisions for her son. A society which knows no version at all of the heroic life kills that dream before it can be told.

The son may not be made of the stuff of heroes—but then again, *he may*. No one knows. It would be the duty of every parent to transmit to the coming generation the possibility of an heroic life, and to set what example he can of this sort of striving. There will be follies, no doubt, and tragic disappointments, especially until parents learn that their children are not their possessions, that they are individuals who must be free to choose what they will do. A child is not an instrument for repair of the parent's sense of failure and inadequacy; a child is a separate and independent enterprise in life. The parent who grasps this verity can never be thought of as a failure, however slight the mark he has made upon his time.