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FROM HISTORY TO METAPHYSICS

IT seems clear that Frederick J. Teggart was drawn to the study of history for more than scholarly reasons. An early book of his, *The Processes of History* (Yale University Press), first appeared in 1918, and the preface to this work makes it evident that the writer had felt to the core of his being the horror and cruelty of war. Like others of that time—a generation which for four years had witnessed the most terrible military struggle then known to man, and even suspected, soon after it was over, its futility—he could think of no better use for his talents than applying them to an understanding of the causes of war. He concluded this book, concerned with scientific method in the study of history, with the following paragraph:

> It requires no lengthy exposition to demonstrate that the ideas which lead to strife, civil or international, are not the products of the highest knowledge available, are not the verified results of scientific inquiry, but are "opinions" about matters which, at the moment, we do not fully understand. Among modern peoples, the most important of these opinions are concerned with ordering human affairs, and in this area all our "settlements" of the problems which confront us must continue to be temporary and uncertain compromises until we shall have come to apply the method of science in their solution. Science is not a body of beliefs and opinions, but a way or method of dealing with problems. It has been said by a notable contemporary that men begin the search for truth with fancy, after that they argue, and at length they try to find out. Scientific method is the term we use for the orderly and systematic effort to find out. Hitherto, the most serious affairs of men have been decided upon the basis of argumentation carried, not infrequently, to the utmost limits of destruction and death. It should be possible to apply in this domain the method of finding out, and it has been my hope to contribute, in however tentative a manner, to this end.

The Processes of History was published in 1918. Many years later, in 1939, Prof. Teggart offered another book in furtherance of the same end. Issued by the University of California Press, its title was *Rome and China*, and of it Pearl Buck said in brief review:

> This book is packed with meaning far beyond its few pages. I wish it were in form which ordinary people would read. Clearly and simply, conclusively even, as it is written, the average man and woman will probably not hear of it, and in the democracies, where war is decided upon finally in the minds of ordinary citizens, everybody ought to hear of it and read it before once again considering beginning a war. (*Asia*, June, 1940.)

The point of *Rome and China* is that these most civilized peoples of the ancient world literally did not know what they were doing when they made war. They *thought* they knew what they were doing, but Prof. Teggart shows with pinpointing research that, given the then prevailing conditions, they couldn't possibly have known more than the smallest part of the effects of their wars. To summarize this historian's procedures and to state briefly his results without losing their dramatic impact is practically impossible, yet an attempt must be made. Focussing on Roman history between 58 B.C. and A.D. 107, Prof. Teggart found that during this period there were forty uprisings in Europe, and that each of them was caused either by precedent military action elsewhere by the Romans themselves, or by Chinese "pacification" of their neighbors in the "Western Regions." The conclusion is put by Prof. Teggart in these words:

> . . wars which were undertaken by the governments of China and Rome in pursuit of what were conceived to be important national aims led inevitably to conflicts among the peoples of northern Europe and to invasions of the Roman empire. It is of some importance to note that the statesmen who were responsible for or advocated the resort to war, on each of forty occasions, were entirely unaware of the consequences which this policy entailed. The wars of the Chinese, indeed, were initiated only after

> lengthy discussions at the imperial court by ministers who were well versed in Chinese history, and who reasoned from historical experience no less than from moral principles and from expediency. But the Chinese emperors and their advisors were unconscious of the fact that their decisions were the prelude to conflicts and devastations in regions of which they had never heard. The Romans were equally in the dark with respect to the consequences of their wars in Bosporus, Armenia, and Syria, but here the fact is striking, for the reason that their wars in the East were followed invariably by outbreaks in Europe.

War always disturbs the normal existence of peoples and often they are driven to migrate in order to obtain the necessities of life. These movements bring them into conflict with other peoples, and so, eventually, the disruptive impulse of war is communicated over vast territories, such that, as Prof. Teggart says: "Wars carried on by Rome against the kingdom of the Bosporus, in Armenia, or on the borders of Syria, were followed by barbarian uprisings and invasions on the lower Danube and the lower Rhine." By a similar process of communicated disturbance, "Wars in Chinese Turkestan (the Tarim basin) were followed by disturbances in Bactria, Hyrcania, at Ctesiphon and Selucia, and by wars in which the Romans were involved either on the borders of Syria or in Armenia."

Meanwhile the Romans, regarding themselves as peace-loving, sensible men, were wholly unable to understand the wild invaders who menaced their northern borders. As Teggart puts it: "They [the Romans] observed the barbarians from a distance and from behind the protection of an armed frontier, and saw in the incursions only the spasmodic activities of tribes who appeared to be actuated by an unalterable disposition to maraud and war." On the other hand—

> To the barbarians the action of the Romans in pushing forward their lines of demarcation was no less unintelligible than were their own outbreaks to the imperial government. The barrier maintained by the legions deprived them, in a manner at once sudden and incomprehensible, of an immemorial freedom of movement. Hence the immediate factor in the border wars was not the martial spirit of any particular tribe or tribes, but the mutually unintelligible conduct of men responsive to different modes of existence. . . .
>
> And so the wars went on. . . .

Pity the poor Romans, who lacked modern techniques of communication, who knew nothing of the scientific study of history, and who had little or no reason to suspect that they might be making a serious mistake in trying to contain, by extending their own frontiers, these barbarians with an "unalterable disposition to maraud." The barbarians, of course, did not diminish in number, but continually increased, making Strabo remark that while the foremost were always put down, peoples in other places always took up the war. It was not easy to be a leader of the Romans and bear the responsibility of maintaining peace in the civilized world. Their work was never done.

The question, of course—the question we have been getting ready to ask, and which the reader, by now, no doubt awaits impatiently—is whether we are doing any better. Are we, first of all, any better equipped than the Romans and the ancient Chinese to make wise decisions about our wars? We certainly *look* better equipped. We have practically instant communication with all parts of the world. There are more scientists alive today than the sum of all the scientists in all preceding generations. And we have—or at least Mrs. Buck says we have ("in the democracies")—a situation in which "war is decided upon finally in the minds of ordinary citizens."

Manifestly, our problems—the ones which lead to war —are different from those of the Chinese and the Romans; or, at least, we see them in a different light. The ancient Chinese disliked war, did what they could to avoid it, and resorted to military action only to put an end to depredations in their outlying territories. You could say that the Romans required only that their neighbors behave reasonably, according to the Roman point of view. In both cases, the wars of that period were practical affairs. They lacked the

highly charged moral atmosphere of present-day conflicts.

In modern times, at any rate since the middle of the nineteenth century, wars have been almost without exception prosecuted as crusades for justice, truth, and right. Napoleon III struck the elevated keynote of modern militarism when he declared, preparing for French participation in the Crimean war, "Not in extending the limits of its territory may a nation henceforward be honored and powerful." And he added: "It must take the lead in behalf of noble ideals and bring the dominion of justice and righteousness everywhere to prevail."

Hardly a single war since that time, and certainly no war entered by the United States, has been without some such grandiose moral justification. Formal endorsement of this view was provided by Admiral Mahan, the American authority on sea power, who wrote: "The province of force in human affairs is to give moral ideas time to take root." No "practical" argument can persuade the American people to go to war—or, it must be added, to stay out of it, once their moral emotions are involved. Both world wars of the twentieth century were great, world-reforming enterprises, so far as the American people were concerned. The moral (ideological) justification for the Korean war was too complicated for most Americans to understand, and the hero of that war was General Eisenhower, who did not "win" it, but got us out of it. We didn't mind at all that there had been no "victory." Similarly with the present war in Vietnam. The chain of inferences on which American intervention in Vietnam is based has little meaning to the citizen who tries to think about his moral attitudes. For probably the great majority of citizens, the main reason for not opposing the war is a feeling of simple loyalty to a government which is doing things they are unable to understand. This, again, is a moral position.

A great deal of intellectual energy has gone into the writing of books which demonstrate the practical futility of war. From Norman Angell's *The Great IlIusion* (1913) to *The Abolition of War* (Millis and Real, 1963), the assemblage of facts which show that war is a self-defeating proposition has grown to overwhelming proportions. But it does not overwhelm. The patient methods of science do not persuade. There is something about the moral emotions which, when once aroused, makes them absolutely immune to arguments from enlightened self-interest. After all, why should a good human being listen to facts which can only chew away at his feelings about what is right? The most they can do is make him feel uncomfortable, and he is hardly persuaded of anything by this, except his growing dislike of people who annoy him with such arguments.

Of this situation, you can either say that, unfortunately, human beings are profoundly irrational in their motivations, or you can rejoice in the fact that they have in them a stubborn ground of moral conviction which refuses to give way to the seductions of self-interest. If you take the latter view, then the argument moves into another universe of discourse, concerned with the rationality of moral ideas. This is not the same as making morals compete with facts. Moral ideas always have an incommensurable factor in them, and facts are without number; so, for these reasons, the conflict between morals and facts is sure to be inconclusive. Neither side can feel the weight of the other's argument. Both believe they have infinite reinforcements for their views.

What needs to be investigated is our moral ideas about war. In this case, facts still play a part, but they will be used to illuminate the meaning of moral conviction, not batter down its persuasions. The kind of dialogue such an approach might lead to is well illustrated by an article in the *Nation* (Jan. 17), "Setting the Moral Equation," by Howard Zinn, in which the writer begins:

> When those of us who would make an end to the war speak passionately of "the moral issue" in Vietnam, only our friends seem to understand. The government seems to bomb fishing villages, shoot

> women, disfigure children by fire or explosion while its policy brings no outcry from Hubert Humphrey, Oscar Handlin, Max Lerner or millions of others. And we wonder why.
>
> The answer, I suggest, involves the corruption of means, the confusion of ends, the theory of the lesser evil, and the easy reversibility of moral indignation in a species which is aroused to violence by symbols. . . .
>
> To start with, we ought to recognize the escalation of evil means during this century—a process in which few of us can claim innocence. What Hitler did was to extend the already approved theory of mass murder (10 million dead on the battlefields of World War I) to its logical end, and thus stretch further than ever before the limits of the tolerable. By killing one-third of the world's Jews, the Nazis diminished the horror of any atrocity that was separated by two degrees of fiendishness from theirs. (Discussing with one of my students Hochhuth's *The Deputy*, I asked if we were not all "deputies" today, watching the bombing of Vietnam villages; she replied, no, because this is not as bad as what Hitler did.)

The question Mr. Zinn uses to frame his inquiry is, When is violence morally justified? He finds it easy to supply instances that are widely agreed upon: World War II; the assassination attempt on Hitler; possible armed revolt in South Africa; the American, French, Russian, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions. One supposes that the evil revolted against in these cases may be considered as fairly "pure," and the moral issue, therefore, clear. However, it is necessary, as Mr. Zinn says, to—

> Keep in mind that many who support the war in Vietnam may do so on grounds which they believe similar to those used in the above cases.
>
> The terrible thing is that once you stray from absolute nonviolence you open the door for the most shocking abuses. It is like distributing scalpels to an eager group, half of whom are surgeons and half butchers. . . . How can we tell butchers from surgeons, distinguish between a healing and a destructive act, of violence?. . .
>
> In modern American civilization, we demand unanimity among twelve citizens before we will condemn a single person to death, but we will destroy thousands of people on the most flimsy of political assumptions (like the domino theory of revolutionary contagion).

The rest of Mr. Zinn's article is a carefully argued and factually supported analysis of the war in Vietnam, resulting in the conclusion that anyone who looks closely at the available facts will be able to find little or no moral justification for the violent intervention of the United States.

Well, let us go back to Mrs. Buck. In democracies like the United States, she says, "war is decided upon finally in the minds of ordinary citizens." And this would be fine— far in advance, we may think, of the Romans—if the ordinary citizens of our time could all be persuaded to read Mr. Zinn; or better yet, do the kind of reading and research that he did in arriving at his opinions. What a humdinger of a country we would have if that could be made to happen! Then, indeed, our effort to "win the hearts and the minds of the people" of Vietnam would surely be accomplished, for who could resist, on ideological or any other grounds, the moral power of such an example of democracy in action!

But "ordinary citizens" are not reading Mr. Zinn. Most of them have never even heard of the *Nation.* And so they have little reason, except for vague, intuitive wonderings, to doubt the policies of their country. This makes them participate vicariously, through uninstructed faith, in the decisions of their leaders—decisions which, after being analyzed, cause Mr. Zinn to say:

> American policy makers and their supporters do not understand either the nature of Communism or the nature of the various uprisings that have taken place in the postwar world. They are not able to believe that hunger, homelessness, oppression are sufficient spurs to revolution, without outside instigation, just as Dixie governors could not believe that Negroes marching in the streets were not led by outside agitators.

So, instead of moral emotion, you get apathy, disinclination to think about the question at all, or you get that mindless substitute for authentic moral emotion which Richard Hofstadter named in the title of his recent book—*The Paranoid Style*

in American Politics. In the latter case the moral vacuum is filled by belief in "the existence of a vast, insidious, preternaturally effective, international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most fiendish character." Since genuine moral feeling can hardly be aroused except to *oppose* the war in Vietnam, the paranoid style remains as the only available emotional competitor:

> Not only does paranoia lead the United States to see international conspiracy where there is a diversity of Communist nations based on indigenous Communist movements. It also confuses communism with a much broader movement of this century—the rising of hungry and harassed people in Asia, Africa, Latin America (and the American South). Hence we try to crush radicalism in one place (Greece, Iran, Guatemala, the Philippines, etc.) and apparently succeed, only to find a revolution—whether Communist or Socialist or nationalist or of indescribable character—springing up somewhere else. We surround the world with our navy, cover the sky with our planes, fling our money to the winds, and then a revolution takes place in Cuba, 90 miles from home. We see every rebellion everywhere as the result of some devilish plot concocted in Moscow or Peking, when what is really happening is that people everywhere want to eat and be free and will use desperate means and any one of a number of social systems to achieve their ends.

Now the point we have to make, in the space that is left, is this: The only really serious criticism of the philosophy of nonviolence that is offered today is that it is "metaphysical." That is, it assumes the existence of a moral law in the grain of life and nature, and that the acts of the nonviolent man, performed in the light of his faith in the moral law, will work, sooner or later; and there is the further conviction that, in the long run, nothing else will.

The counter-argument, in addition to the rejection of "metaphysics," is that no one has the right to tell the suffering and oppressed peoples of the world not to use violence to gain justice and freedom. This argument has a lot of force, but it is seldom used by the suffering and oppressed peoples, since rational debate is not really their forte. The argument is used by their supporters in technologically advanced countries who want to *help* them. This happens, incidentally, to be the main "moral" argument for interfering in Vietnam. It is also an argument which involves the enormous responsibility of deciding who are the healers and who are the butchers. On the record, to date, the people who believe in violence for a good cause have been less and less able to put weapons into the right hands. On the record, there is little reason to think that it will become any easier to arm the righteous. History, in short, is against the argument for the "moral" use of violence. As time passes, history continues to withdraw support from the claim that modern nations can fight a "just war." In fact, to make this claim usually involves its champions in a tortured metaphysics of their own, which may be difficult to distinguish, when the argument is fully made, from the paranoid style in political thinking. People are not all that different in their moral qualities. And they are very much the same in becoming captives and victims of their means.

The bitter truth is that paranoia *works*, if you want to stir up a war. A careful, "liberal" measure of violence in a righteous cause doesn't—at least, not any more. So, if determined rationalists have an inclination to be practical—to advance the cause of mankind and of sanity in international affairs beyond the status of the Romans in their policy decisions—they would do well to examine the dynamics of human behavior in the light of history. The advocates of righteous violence seem to forget that in order for violence to be used to some purpose—that is, "success"—you need organized power to wield it. You need, in short, the very institutional resources that have made military action the most obsessive evil of the modern world. And if you receive this kind of help, you have to accept, along with the help, the "butcher component" in both men and ideas which is inseparably connected with war and the tools of war.

We must, we are told, be "practical"—that individual nonviolent morality or even cadres of nonviolent actionists can make no headway against evil brutes. But the evil brutes, it can be shown, are themselves the hapless products of societies organized for coercive power and war. Violence has never eliminated them. Violence spawns them. What makes nonviolence seem "impractical" is the forms of social organization we have come to accept, while hating the violence by which they endeavor to survive. These forms of organization must be changed, and violence will never do it.

One more point: Metaphysics is not necessarily irrational. There is good reason to think that metaphysics supplies the only ground for rational behavior. Its chief offense against contemporary rationalism is that it goes beyond the assumptions of nineteenth-century empiricism and the mechanistic conception of the universe which was invented as a polemic against the paranoid style in religion. That sort of rationalism is a reactionary position. Arguments made from that stance may be opposing the only possible alternative to the paranoid style in politics—itself a dark, nihilistic metaphysics of self-hate and fear.

REVIEW
"ABUNDANCE FOR WHAT?"

THE six hundred pages of David Riesman's social studies under this title (Doubleday, 1964) cover a great range of topics. One reason for the universal respect accorded Prof. Riesman, we suspect, is that he assumes the responsibility of joining psychological analysis and philosophical considerations with sociology—yet with no presumption. In his introduction, he speaks of "the tension between topical pressures and longer-range scholarly curiosity," adding:

> The tension between these two versions of the life of the mind, seen in another aspect, allows a varying of tempo and preoccupation that, for me personally, seems inescapable. As I wrote in *The Lonely Crowd,* I have come to feel that one must live on two levels: the level of the Utopian future and of the speculative transcendence of the here and now. To live only in the present and the impending future is too grim; to live only in the remote future, too unconnected. (Where to draw the line in practice is, of course, ceaselessly difficult.)

It is not difficult to summarize what Prof. Riesman is attempting to point out about the crises, both personal and political, which are typical of our time: we have produced a society so affluent that the activities of productivity and acquisition are no longer serving human purposes by their continued growth. The individual possessing both increasing leisure and mobility has little preparation for knowing what to do with his leisure or "where to go." The theme of *The Lonely Crowd* was that the man who does not exercise his capacity for individual autonomy will feel the incompleteness of his humanization more and more intensely. Together with many psychologists, Riesman is aware that the search for authenticity must lead to questions of identity beyond membership in national groups.

In his last chapter, Prof. Riesman says:

> I can imagine a future in which we shall begin to worry less about the specifically American identity and the American character—a worry that among other things exhibits on the international scene feelings of rivalry and even inferiority engendered by domestic conditions. And in that case we shall begin asking whether nations are the most appropriate boundaries for investigating what it is that social groups have in common.
>
> It would be premature to say that nations are no longer important, when they have the power of life and death over us all; and when, since social character is the legacy of history, there will remain for a long time differences in national character just as great as differences in character arising from occupation and class. It is only the fantasy of a brave new world that there is no national character but only a group character, conditioned in the laboratory to order and to be ordered, and where a relic of individualism and parochialism is merely the result of an oversight. Still, as we all know, fantasies when believed in sometimes have a way of making themselves come true. Social science today is increasingly feared as a hidden persuader or manipulator of men, while a generation ago it was primarily admired as a liberator. The study of national character, as of other motivational patterns, can be put to manipulative use, to be sure; the best defense against this that I can see is inoculation by greater knowledge. Moreover, it is no longer possible for people, especially in this country, to remain unself-conscious about personal and group identity; and it is not desirable, for I believe that such knowledge of social science in general, can still be liberating.

In a summation of the relationships he sees between the problems of politics, sociology, psychology, and philosophy, Riesman points out the weaknesses of social science for "liberating" the human potential:

> We find it easier to describe the limits on human conduct than the areas of freedom and amorphousness. Studies of national character tend to strike a deterministic note, even when, if they are grounded in history, they show how great and dramatic have been the changes in a nation's ethos within the period of a century or less. It is frequently said that the world is getting more homogeneous, and that enclaves, whether national or regional, are bound to disappear, provided we do not all disappear. There is truth in this, of course. But it is also true that the differences among men that will increasingly matter will not arise from geographical location and will hence be more within the realm of the individual. Indeed, the importance of the individual in setting a

> model for the character of a group had been insufficiently studied by social scientists, though we all know in a general way how identification with great historical figures is one way by which we avoid parochialism of our particular birth in a particular family. We are only beginning to understand the power of individuals to shape their own character by their selection among models and experiences. I can envisage a world in which we shall become more different from each other than ever before, and in which, as a result, national character will be an even more elusive concept than it is at present.

We hear many exhortations in behalf of "One World," and the dream of World Government continues to uplift. But just as a viable human community depends first upon community of thought, so does it seem that thinkers like Riesman are the true "realists," and not, as is conventionally supposed, mere theoreticians. Charles Frankel speaks of the contribution to our future of such thinkers (*Foreign Affairs,* October, 1965):

> The character and moral significance of the radical changes taking place in twentieth-century civilizations are any civilized man's concern. Given a reasonable effort on the part of intellectuals to listen to each other and to try to make sense to each other, direct intellectual confrontations may contribute to a kind of international discourse that exists now only fitfully and precariously. If there is a point in avoiding angry forms of high ideological recrimination, there is no point in avoiding the discussion of high intellectual themes. It is particularly important for American intellectuals, with their sophisticated methodologies, their love of concrete problems and their suspicion of broad abstractions, to remember this. What the much used and much abused word "democracy" means, what the relation is between individual freedom and the emergence of massive forms of social organization, what the function of intellect itself is in a technical and specialized society—these are questions with roots that go far back in the history of intellectual discussion. It is clear that even men of thorough reasonableness and good will will not come to the same conclusions about them. But it is equally clear that if men do not talk to each other about such questions at all, they are not likely to understand each other very well. And this causes trouble when they turn to the more practical matters on which international accommodation depends.

COMMENTARY
MARKETS FOR MISSISSIPPI WORKERS

A MONTH ago (Feb. 2), Frontiers reported on the nine producers' co-ops in Mississippi formed by Negroes who had lost their jobs because of participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Helped by the Poor People's Corporation to get the training and financing they needed to make goods for the consumer market, these people are now offering a broad diversity of articles. Their main problem is marketing. At present they are selling by mail and through a few stores such items as women's hats, men's and women's belts, tote bags, suede pocket books, quilts, children's and adults' clothing, and toys. New products are being added all the time, giving the lines sold by the co-ops a continuously widening appeal. At present sales and distribution are handled by Liberty Outlet House, P.O. Box 3193, Jackson, Miss.

The quality of these goods is excellent, by all reports, and the prices low. Readers wishing to receive the catalog folder should request one from Liberty House. In addition, those who have access to mailing lists of people likely to want to buy articles made by Mississippi civil rights workers could help by sending copies of the lists to Miss Ellen Maslow at the New York office of Poor People's Corp., 5 Beekman Street, New York, N.Y. 10038. A number of such lists would help the co-ops to move toward national distribution, giving them greater economic independence and the resources to expand.

There are general considerations which may encourage people to support economic enterprises of this sort. First, customers get distinctive (largely handcrafted) merchandise of a practical character for impressively reasonable prices. Second, in buying by mail they by-pass the tiresomely commercial channels of conventional distribution. Third, by giving their trade to such sources, they are strengthening the pluralistic aspect of the economy and making it possible for more and more people to do small-scale production as a means of making a living. Finally, they are giving support to self-reliant, courageous human beings who were willing to risk all they had by joining in a movement to make the Constitution of the United States operative in the South. And let it be noted that the Poor People's Corporation, as well as co-ops it enabled to go into business, began without either government or foundation assistance. These ventures show the capacity of people without money to plan, organize, and support themselves, given only very little (but very intelligent) assistance. PPC co-ops are a dramatic contrast to the widely voiced complaint that "federally subsidized anti-poverty campaigns leave the poor out of the planning."

For an informing and even exciting examination of the potentialities of co-ops as economic institutions of broadly constructive influence, we suggest Marquis Childs' book, *Sweden: The Middle Way* (Yale University Press, 1941).

Another consideration of interest lies in PPC's demonstration that small-scale manufacturing can be economically sound and successful in certain areas of the advanced technological society of the United States. Years ago, Ralph Borsodi pointed out that the designers of machinery have long been obsessed by bigness, and that if they would turn their imagination and skills to developing production facilities for small units, they might show the way to undiscovered advantages of decentralization. It is obvious that small but efficient production units would open up a large field of new opportunities to individual initiative and enterprise in widely scattered regions.

The cultural values potential in such developments should be clear. Most important, perhaps, would be the freedom they would offer to individuals who want to work as artisans or craftsmen, more or less individually or in small groups. By locating far from areas where real estate values are inflated and the cost of living inevitably high, they would be able to live uncluttered lives, free of the petty conformities

and artificial complications of urban and suburban existence. Practical thinking along these lines by people with either knowledge or experience of what is possible now, or might become possible through engineering vision and market analysis, is very much to be desired.

Quite possibly, research and even pilot projects in this direction already exist. Inquiries might be addressed to the School of Living, Lane's End Homestead, Brookville, Ohio, and to Community Service, Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Meanwhile, a contribution within the reach of many would be to help the Poor People's Corporation with its marketing by supplying mailing lists and individual names of people who would like to receive catalog folders.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
EDUCATION FOR COMMITMENT

KENNETH KENISTON'S sympathic study of alienated youth in American society," *The Uncommitted* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), is the result of the author's five years of research and observation as psychiatrist at the Yale Medical School. Keniston's outlook is that of humanist and existentialist psychology, but his view that the central meaning of human life is best expressed by the word "self-actualization" is developed against the background of detailed sociological analysis. The book is largely a study of the interaction between the inner forces which urge the young to seek authentic individuality and the fragmented culture in which they live. In a chapter titled "Chronic Change and the Cult of the Present," Dr. Keniston has this to say:

> The patterns of life and the values to which we commit ourselves today may soon become outmoded, and those who sense this—as most young men and women do—accordingly must make their commitments tentative, and often are forced to prefer "role-playing" to deep devotion.
>
> There are, of course, some values that endure; and many youths manage eventually to find them and in some way to devote themselves to them. But as the rate of change increases, in each generation there are fewer and fewer such values, fewer practices that have a feeling of solidity, fewer ways of life that have a ring of endurance. As a result, many young men and women choose, as they must, to commit themselves to change itself, usually expressed in terms like "openness," "flexibility," "responsiveness," "sensitivity," and the absence of "rigidity," "intransigeance," and "narrowness."

The following exposition is reminiscent of themes developed by David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* and *Individualism Reconsidered*, and Dr. Keniston acknowledges special debts to Riesman, Henry A. Murray, and Erik Erikson for what he says. He continues:

> Though few of us consciously experience it as such, the pressure to respond to changes in every aspect of our lives places us under a great strain, and especially presses hard on adolescents, who are searching for commitments that will last a lifetime. "Choose to be changed" is, as Rilke knew, a once-in-a-lifetime imperative, and is difficult if it merely means a perpetually vigilant responsiveness to the environment. A young man who makes such a conscious or unconscious commitment to continual self-transformation is committing himself to an unknown whose shape he can do little to determine. To satisfy psychologically, such a commitment presupposes a deep faith in the goodness of the social process by which one lets oneself be bent; yet such a radical faith is almost completely lacking among young Americans. When, as now, society is viewed more neutrally, the result is a loss of an active sense of self, an increased feeling of being acted *upon*, of being a victim of a social process one can no longer control or even fathom. The virtues of flexibility, openness, and tolerance are noble, but unless they are supported by a firm sense of self, of identity, and of individual direction, it is hard for most men and women to distinguish these virtues from senseless and passive conformity. And above all, this combination of a universal human need for enduring ground on which to build one's life plus a shifting social order in which to live it places an added burden on young Americans attempting to chart the course of the rest of their lives.

In his contribution to a recent *American Scholar* symposium on morality, Dr. Keniston put very clearly the necessity for replacing "moral codes" with ethical responsibility (MANAS, Feb. 9). Since this passage has already been quoted, we now note an almost identical development by Erik Erikson in *Insight and Responsibility* (Norton, 1964):

> I would propose that we consider *moral rules* of conduct to be based on a fear of *threats* to be forestalled. These may be outer threats of abandonment, punishment and public exposure, or a threatening inner sense of guilt, of shame or of isolation. In either case, the rationale for obeying a rule may not be too clear, it is the threat that counts. In contrast, I would consider *ethical rules* to be based on *ideals* to be striven for with a high degree of rational assent and with a ready consent to a formulated good, a definition of perfection, and some promise of self-realization. This differentiation may not agree with all existing definitions, but it is substantiated by the observation of human

> development. Here, then, is my first proposition: the moral and the ethical sense are different in their psychological dynamics, because the moral sense develops on an earlier, more immature level. This does not mean that the moral sense could be skipped, as it were. On the contrary all that exists layer upon layer in an adult's mind has developed step by step in the growing child's, and all the major steps in the comprehension of what is considered good behavior in one's cultural universe are—for better and for worse—related to different stages in individual maturation. But they are all necessary to one another.

The Uncommitted consists of two parts. The first discusses "alienated youth" by examining common factors in the conscious and unconscious emotional development of a dozen severely alienated Harvard students who cooperated during a three-year study. The second part, concerned with our "alienating society," outlines the social, cultural and historical trends which nurture contemporary disillusionment. Then, from this perspective, "alienated" youth are regarded as trying to cope with the limbo which lies between their rebellion against an unsatisfactory and intrinsically adolescent collection of moral codes and their *possible* commitment to goals of a less superficial nature. Rebellion against the "establishment" or the "system" may lead simply to a reactive set of standards—no better, and possibly less desirable. It is also possible, however, for a true ethical sense to emerge, both encompassing and going beyond moral restraint and theoretical idealistic vision. When this happens, the adolescent mind ceases to be adolescent in the discovery of commitment, and in finding specific, individual ways to focus the new resolve.

In his concluding chapter, Dr. Keniston returns to the idea of a new orientation in sociology, but his approach goes beyond that which we habitually term "scientific." The fundamental lack, as he puts it, is not that we have never heard a statement of "the values that might guide the transformation of our society to a more fully human and diverse one; rather, we lack the conviction that these values might be implemented by ordinary men and women acting in concert for their common good." Such conviction can be aroused only by an awakening of the "Utopian impulse" which "runs deep in all human life, and especially deep in American life." He continues:

> What is needed is to free that impulse once again, to redirect it toward the creation of a better society. We too often attempt to patch up our threadbare values and outworn purposes; we too rarely dare imagine a society radically different from our own. Proposals for specific reforms are bound to be inadequate by themselves. However desirable, any specific reform will remain an empty intellectual exercise in the absence of a new collective myth, ideology, or Utopian vision. Politically, no potent or lasting change will be possible except as men can be roused from their current alienations by the vision of an attainable society more inviting than that in which they now listlessly live. Behind the need for any specific reform lies the greater need to create an intellectual, ideological, and cultural atmosphere in which it is possible for more to attempt affirmation without undue fear that their Utopian vision will collapse through neglect, ridicule or their own inherent errors. Such an ethos can only be built slowly and piecemeal, yet it is clear what some of its prerequisites must be. . . .
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> In defining this new vision of life and society, we must remember the quests of the alienated. Though their goals are often confused and inarticulate, they converge on a passionate yearning for openness and immediacy of experience, on an intense desire to create, on a longing to express their perception of the world, and, above all, on a quest for values and commitments that will give their lives coherence.

FRONTIERS

An Ominous Frontier?

THE brief taste of Storm Jameson's *American Scholar* (Winter, 1965-66) article, "The Writer in Contemporary Society," in our Jan. 26 Review— as a critical foil to the vast claims of Marshall McLuhan for electronic technology— was really not enough. This article deserves closer attention, since, besides being a troubled wondering about what will happen to creative writing in an age of computers, it is a rich exposure of the meaning of the novelist's art.

Our earlier review took cognizance of the intensification of imposed sensory experience brought by electronic communication devices. We owe to Mr. McLuhan our awareness of the psychological magnitude of this great change, which he seems to welcome with open arms. Miss Jameson has a similar awareness, but a different response. She writes:

> We are living on the frontiers of an age in which the printed book is being overtaken by the new electronic mediums very much as the handwritten manuscript was overtaken by the invention of print. The process is only beginning and will probably never be total, but already those of us to whom it has not occurred to think that literacy can rest on anything but the habit of private reading are as out-of-date as the medieval scholar who disliked the look of a printed page and clung to his parchments. A wireless talk means little to me until I read it in print. Television wearies me by forcing me to attend to it with the ear I use for external noises and an eye unused to sudden shifts of focus. My nervous system rejects a forced involvement with the nervous systems of millions of my contemporaries. It rebels against the—to me—demoralizing pressure of information thrust on it from all sides. No doubt I could train myself to take in by ear more than I do. But that is not the point.

Well, what is the point? The point, if we understand Miss Jameson, is the preservation of reflective consciousness, of selective awareness, of psychic integrity, during all this engulfing flow of sights and sounds. She wants a kind of "distance" from the spectacle, an isolation which will in no way diminish the watcher's warm humanity, but may, on the other hand, assure that if there are feelings to be felt, they will at least be his own. The quality of the programs is not even at issue here.

One should not, of course, be so bold as to claim that television is intrinsically bad. But before it is defended in terms of the "excellent programs" which backward booklovers must confess to missing, some attention must be given to television's sensory imperialism. Under what circumstances is submission to this medium a "good thing"? We don't know much about learning theory, except that it sometimes fails to distinguish between techniques of printing facts on peoples' memories and causing them to think about the meaning of the facts. Accordingly, a person consistently exposed to television is no doubt loaded with impressions of what he has seen and heard, and he may have good retention of them, but what can you say, one way or the other, about their value to him as a human being? Obviously, there is much to be found out on this question.

We have a clue, perhaps, to the potentialities of such media in the films of Ingmar Bergman. But in view of the kind of emotional experience which Bergman induces, one might argue that the responsibility of such a producer is almost priestly. Here is no issue of "free communications" resisting censorship, no question of regulating commercial exploitation of mass media "in the public interest," but a matter of finding some kind of dividing line between the sacred and the profane. Social sanctions are surely useless in all such matters. One needs, instead, the kind of heightened awareness of values that comes naturally to Miss Jameson in considering the rebellion of certain artists against the inroads of technology on their domain:

> The literary rebel who can imagine no other way of outwitting it will turn nihilist. You can see this happening at the moment in the novel, on two levels. On the sophisticated level of the *nouveau roman,* and in the growth, or irruption into daylight, of the

> pornographic novel. The first is an urbane, highly intellectual and fragile growth. Its most self-explanatory practitioner, Alain Robbe-Grillet, sees human beings as a kaleidoscope of moods, and communication between them little more coherent than a conversation on crossed telephone wires; to pass judgment on their acts, thoughts, feelings, is senseless or impossible. This irrational philosophy lays an ax to the roots of any intelligible vision of reality, so that by an ironical paradox the New Novelists devalue man, rob him of his identity, as fatally as does the most menacing product of technology.

Thus the argument is only incidentally about technology. Basically, it is about what you think of man. All that technology can do, once its possibilities are understood, is to give sensory extension and multiplication to the image of the human being—which will be either enhanced or degraded, according to how that thinking goes. Miss Jameson deals fundamentally with this question:

> At first glance it seems absurd to see the writers of the newest erotic or pornographic novel as part of the revolt against a civilization in which machines are felt to be more than a match for men. But these doctrinal works, from *Lady Chatterley's Lover* downward, a long way down, to William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, are treated seriously as literature—not only by their authors. . . . Critics are prone to see them as "a gesture of liberation, intellectual and moral." I don't suggest that these critics are out of their minds; I suggest that they are innocent dupes of an *ad hoc* critical theory which lays down that all dimensions of human experience are equally worth a writer's devoting energy and brains to explore them. All without exception. This is worse than silly, it is sentimental or hysterical. Clinically reported acts of sex are of interest, no doubt, to an ignorant adolescent, if such exists. What is infinitely more interesting, revealing, and a great deal more difficult, is to discover and give a lucid account of the emotions involved, their strength, effect, circumstances, in the slow corrosion of Anna Karenina's life by her passion for Vronski, not the method she used to avoid pregnancy. . . . the extreme example, so far, of the school, the novels of William Burroughs, greeted by reviewers and generously befuddled fellow-writers as "one of our greatest living novelists," are a sharp reminder that a counter-revolution is as likely to get out of hand as any form of social violence. It goes far beyond the obligatory clinical scenes, to turn on and destroy the human instincts themselves. What is baffling is that there are intelligent people willing to accept as literature the efforts of a writer so disgusted by his physical humanity that he labors to make it dull and disgusting to a reader. They would be better employed trying to decide why he hates himself. He is rebelling, yes. It is easy to see against what. But for what? If the author of *Naked Lunch* had wished to cut off at the source the sensual springs of life, could he have devised a surer way? An attack on conventions—which can be gay and salutary and life-giving—begins to shock me when it becomes an attack on our self-respect and decent self-love. The roots joining a literature of self-contempt and self-hatred to the worlds of Belsen and Auschwitz run underground, but they run.

It does not diminish the force of this criticism to note that, far from being an enemy of electronic technology, Burroughs is very much its friend. "Most serious writers," he remarked in a *Paris Review* (Fall, 1965) interview, "refuse to make themselves available to the things that technology is doing." He added: "I've never been able to understand this sort of fear. Many of them are afraid of tape recorders and the idea of using any mechanical means for literary purposes seems to them some sort of sacrilege." It is also to the point to notice that Burroughs' "cut-ups"—use of pictures, photographs, clippings—constitute a kind of writing with sense images, in order, as he says, to "make explicit a psycho-sensory process that is going on all the time anyway." The final point to be made here is that, by a blending of words with collage techniques, Burroughs is also attempting a sensory encirclement of the reader, not unlike, in principle, the saturation achieved by electronic communication—"by-passing the conscious, rational apparatus." All this seems part of an attitude toward man and experience, of which television-watching is only a single phase.