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PORTRAIT OF THE ENEMY

THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY, by Jacques Ellul, professor of law at the University of Bordeaux, is a brilliant conspiracy against hope for the human race. It is translated from the French by John Wilkinson and published by Alfred A. Knopf at $6.95. In his foreword, Robert K. Merton places this work in sequence with Veblen's *The Engineers and the Price System,* Spengler's *Man and Technics,* Mumford's *Technics and Civilization,* and Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command.* No doubt these comparisons fit, but we would have called it a climactic expression of a line of thought which began, say, with O'Brien's desperate *Dance of the Machines,* took on portents of doom with Roderick Seidenberg's *Post-Historic Man* and Erich Kahler's *The Tower and the Abyss,* and last year reached a similarly despairing conclusion in Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man.* The translator, whose mastery of the book's subject-matter contributes to its sharp clarity, has this to say:

> Technique, as the universal and autonomous technical fact, is revealed as the technological society itself in which man is but a single, tightly integrated and articulated component. *The Technological Society* is a description of the way in which an autonomous technology is in process of taking over the traditional values of every society without exception, subverting and suppressing these values to produce at last a monolithic world culture in which all nontechnical difference and variety is mere appearance.

The undeniable power of this book has three apparent sources. First, it expounds a metaphysic—the metaphysic of the progressive dehumanization of man by the spread of the mindless imperialism of the technological process. Second, the documentation of the take-over is thorough, covering facet after facet of the social and institutional environment in the three fields of politics, economics, and psychological life. Third, the writer pursues his investigation with a finely tuned animus which combines disdain, wrath, and distant sympathy for the human predicament. Ellul's absolute conviction that he is reciting facts—the all-important facts of the twentieth century—and his presentation of these facts somewhat in the style of a social scientist, make his thesis difficult to resist. Yet the question of *why* remains unanswered. This missing "why" generates a kind of underground of resistance in the reader—a reaction Ellul attempts to scotch by frequent expressions of contempt for "sentimental" solutions. He seems to want the fate he describes to appear ineluctable; he proposes alternatives in a way that makes them sound grimly unlikely, as though the only response seriously permitted to the reader is a dark melancholia. Here, perhaps, Ellul is a victim of his own strength—the strength of the angry logic of his book. One might also think that, hoping to be understood by the technicians, Ellul has addressed them in their own universe of discourse. They deal only with "facts," and to their facts the author adds a factual portrait of man as victim. As Wilkinson says: "The important questions concerning the technological society rarely turn to Ellul on how or why things came to be so, but rather on whether his description of them is a true one." His mood of moral judgment relies for support on the intuitive consensus of his readers. Again and again, he shows how the applications of technique strip men of their "human" qualities. But we know that this is bad only because it is painful—there is no affirmative counter-metaphysic which explains *why.*

In regard to the doom-saying in his book, the author makes this qualification (in his foreword to the American edition):

> . . . if man—if each one of us—abdicates his responsibilities with regard to values; if each of us limits himself to leading a trivial existence in a technological civilization, with greater adaptation and increasing success as his sole objectives, if we do not even consider the possibility of making a stand against these determinants, then everything *will* happen as I have described it, and the determinants *will* be transformed into inevitabilities. But, in describing sociological currents, I obviously cannot take into account the contingent decisions of this or

> that individual, even if these decisions could modify the course of social development. For these decisions are not visible, and if they are truly personal, they cannot be foreseen. I have tried to describe the technical phenomenon as it exists at present and to indicate its *probable* evolution. . . .The reader must always keep in mind the implicit presupposition that *if* man does not pull himself together and assert himself (or if some other unpredictable but decisive phenomenon does not intervene), *then* things will go the way I describe.

In fairness, we should quote one more passage from the foreword:

> While waiting for the specialists to get on with their work on behalf of society, each of us, in his own life, must seek ways of resisting and transcending technological determinants. Each man must make this effort in every area of life, in his profession and in his social, religious, and family relationships.
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> In my conception, freedom is not an immutable fact graven in nature and on the heart of man. It is not inherent in man or in society, and it is meaningless to write it into law. The mathematical, physical, biological, sociological, and psychological sciences reveal nothing but necessities and determinisms on all sides. As a matter of fact, reality is itself a combination of determinisms, and freedom consists in overcoming and transcending these determinisms. Freedom is completely without meaning unless it is related to necessity, unless it represents victory over necessity. To say that freedom is graven in the nature of man, is to say that man is free because he obeys his nature, or, to put it another way, because he is conditioned by his nature. This is nonsense. We must not think of the problem in terms of a choice between being determined and being free. We must look at it dialectically, and say that man is indeed determined, but that it is open to him to overcome necessity, and that this act is freedom. Freedom is not static but dynamic; not a vested interest, but a prize continually to be won. The moment man stops and resigns himself, he becomes subject to determinism. He is most enslaved when he thinks he is comfortably settled in freedom.
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> In the modern world, the most dangerous form of determinism is the technological phenomenon. It is not a question of getting rid of it, but, by an act of freedom, of transcending it. How is this to be done? I do not yet know. That is why this book is an appeal to the individual's sense of responsibility. The first step in the quest, the first act of freedom, is to become aware of the necessity. . . . this book has a purpose. That purpose is to arouse the reader to an awareness of technological necessity and what it means. It is a call to the sleeper to awake.

What, for the purposes of this book, is Technique? It is, in Harold Lasswell's definition. "The ensemble of practices by which one uses available resources to achieve values." But values, Ellul points out, are soon lost in the shuffle. Technique eventually becomes its own end and substitutes for values the order required by its own efficiency. In the chapter, "The Characterology of Technique," Ellul makes this clear. The necessities of the technological process multiply in geometrical progression and displace the original value sought with a whole hierarchy of technical demands. A labor-saving device intended to lighten the burdens of the housewife becomes a ruthless dictator. The techniques of producing a low-cost washing machine involve almost endless necessities—all the precise conditions under which this device can be "successfully" produced. Production economics demands that thousands be built, and continuously marketed, and this means that a kind of religion of Consumption must be propagated to keep the factory busy. The elaborate plans that are required to keep the assembly line going create whole new professions, each with its own necessities and ramifying techniques. The good of the housewife soon becomes no more than a rationalization for maintaining and improving the efficiencies of production and distribution. Since "so much" depends upon all these interdependent processes, technological pieties soon completely overshadow the original motive. From means, the processes have become ends. This is the heart of Ellul's argument:

> There is an attractive notion which would apparently resolve all technical problems: that it is not technique that is wrong, but the use men make of it. Consequently, if the use is changed, there will no longer be any objection to the technique. . . . But all this is an error. It resolutely refuses to recognize technical reality. It supposes, to begin with, that men orient technique in a given direction for moral, and consequently nontechnical, reasons.. But a principal characteristic is its refusal to tolerate moral judgments. It is absolutely independent of them and eliminates them from its domain. Technique never

observes the distinction between moral and immoral use. It tends, on the contrary, to create a completely independent morality.

Here, then, is one of the elements of weakness of this point of view. It does not perceive technique's rigorous autonomy with respect to morals; it does not see that the infusion of some more or less vague sentiment of human welfare cannot alter it. Not even the moral conversion of the technicians could make a difference. At best, they would cease to be good technicians.

This attitude supposes that technique evolves with some end in view, and that this end is human good. Technique, as I believe I have shown, is totally irrelevant to this notion and pursues no end, professed or unprofessed. It evolves in a purely causal way: the combination of preceding elements furnishes the new technical elements. There is no plan or purpose that is being progressively realized. There is not even a tendency toward human ends. We are dealing with a phenomenon blind to the future, in a domain of integral causality. Hence, to pose arbitrarily some goal or other, to propose a direction for technique, is to deny technique and divest it of its character and strength.

This is Ellul's metaphysic of technique, as the obsessing, mechanistic succubus of the twentieth century. He illustrates the operation of technique according to its own autonomous laws in the remaining chapters, showing how both economics and politics have submitted to the technical imperatives. The chapter on psychology, called "Human Techniques," is the most horrifying. It deals with the modifications of the *psyche* required by technological processes, and progressively introduced by scientific management. It is all very "reasonable":

The concrete details of man's life with respect to technical apparatus must be taken into consideration on the human plane. The fatigue factor is important; and the individual's labor must be planned to reduce fatigue. It is essential in constructing machinery to avoid uncomfortable or dangerous situations for the operator, and to modify the wage earner's milieu to give him more pleasure, light, and the freedom and fellow feeling indispensable to him. It is desirable to show concern for the worker's dwelling place, for the comfort of the housewife's kitchen, for the lighting of the children's rooms, in short, for any factor that will obviously be of advantage to all. Who could believe the contrary or plead for slums or worker casualties?

However, a certain misunderstanding must be avoided. The word *humanism* is often spoken in connection with the situation I have described. Humanism is essentially a certain conception of man. And, it develops, this is an astonishing conception of man, a conception that involves contempt for man's inner life to the advantage of his sociological life, contempt for his moral and intellectual life to the advantage of his material life. This position is admissible for conscious materialists; but I cannot admit it for the unconscious materialists who are always prating of their spirituality. The argument that moral development will follow material development can only be characterized as hypocrisy. Moreover, it has not always been a voluntary and conscious humanism which has presided over this progress. If we seek the real reason, we hear over and over again that there is something "out of line" in the technical system, an insupportable state of affairs for a technician. A remedy must be found. What is out of line? According to the usual superficial analysis, it is man that is amiss. The technician thereupon tackles the problem as he would any other. He has a method which has hitherto enabled him to solve all difficulties, and he uses it here too. But he considers man only as an object of technique and only to the degree that man interferes with the proper function of technique. Technique reveals its essential efficiency in discerning that man has a sentimental and moral life which can have great influence on his material behavior and in proposing to do something about such factors on the basis of its own ends. These factors are, for technique, human and subjective; but if means can be found to act upon them, to rationalize them and bring them into line, they need not be a technical drawback. Of course man as such does not count.

Much of this chapter is devoted to showing how technique is used to adapt human beings to the technical requirements of the mass society and at the same time to persuade them that successful adaptation makes them "happy." A point made repeatedly by Ellul is that the individual in the mass society looks at his own circumstances from a view that is conditioned by his unconscious acceptance of the techniques that are shaping his life. In consequence, he finds it difficult to recognize what is happening to him. This is the most important reason for reading Ellul's book. It is only by dint of his

many differing illustrations that one begins to see the larger outline of the fact the author is driving at—that a new, artificial world of technological necessities has replaced the old, natural world, and that man's relations with this new world represent life in a changed order of external reality. There are exceptions, of course, and "backward" areas, and the general judgment is statistical, but then, technique is statistical, too. The exceptions are hardly a significant contradiction to the general trend. The system simply ignores them, and since the technicians believe whole-heartedly in what they are doing, there are no bad consciences about. Following is a brief statement of Ellul's general contention:

> The reality is that man no longer has any means with which to subjugate technique, which is not an intellectual, or even, as some would have it, a spiritual phenomenon. It is above all a sociological phenomenon; and in order to cure or change it, one would have to oppose to it checks and barriers of a sociological character. By such means alone man might possibly bring action to bear upon it. But everything of a sociological character has had its character changed by technique. There is, therefore, nothing of a sociological character available to restrain technique, because everything in society is its servant. Technique is essentially independent of the human being, who finds himself naked and disarmed before it. Modern man divines that there is only one reasonable way out: to submit and take what profit he can from what technique otherwise so richly bestows upon him. If he is of a mind to oppose it, he finds himself really alone.

It is useless, here, to invoke Ellul's pep talks addressed to the reader at the beginning. If any headway is to be made against this formidable argument, the weapons used will have to be of the same order of magnitude, and the counter-argument will have to be grounded on a more potent view of the possibilities of man than that his sensitive inner being has no place in the premises of technology. The argument from pain and frustration is not good enough. It has weight only for isolated individuals and saving remnants. And while, logically enough, lonely individuals and saving remnants may at first be the only ones who can actually *hear* the counter-argument, whatever is said against mere submission to the absolutes of technology should form a subordinate, not the main contention.

What is wanted is a positive metaphysic. We must say that man has a work to do, a project to complete on earth, to which his creature comforts and mechanical conveniences are vastly irrelevant. This must be made so obvious that it becomes ignominy to adopt any other view. The power gained by the technological metaphysic is a power acquired by default. It rushes in to fill the vacuum left by the departure of any serious conviction about the heroic nature of the human being. We do not say that it will be easy to restore and support this conception of man, but only that a lesser inspiration cannot accomplish what must be done.

It is a question of finding modern versions of the belief in demi-gods and heroes. It is a matter of discovering the mythic dimension in men like Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Gandhi, and of absorbing Emerson's sense of "the soul's enormous claim." An idea of high human destiny must be added to the desperate existentialist stand. And the as yet unregimented, untechnologized portions of the environment must be staked out, occupied, used and cultivated for human purposes by men who have worked out in their own hearts some of the tangled mysteries of good and evil in human life. The absolutes of technique must be confronted by absolutes in behalf of man.

The world in which the absolutes of technique have achieved such uncontroverted power was and is a world without any enduring conception of transcendent meaning. How could men possibly "transcend" the confines of technology without some deep conviction of the importance of transcendence? Without a structured doctrine and affirmation of the dignity of man, transcendence will be left to a handful of heroes and martyrs.

It must be asked: Why does technique get out of scale with authentic human need? Why does the proliferation of technique demoralize mankind? It can only be because techniques have been developed by men who were demoralized at the start. Their lives had been torn and twisted by an ancient civil war. Somehow, they were betrayed. There are

always betrayers among men; it is part of the human condition to suffer betrayal, and often to betray oneself. There is no point, however, in looking for scapegoats. It is more important to adopt the principle of reality therapy and say to ourselves: What shall we do *now?*

Ellul supplies a clue in his first chapter:

> The celebrated formula of Alain has been invalidated: "Tools, instruments of necessity, instruments that neither lie nor cheat, tools with which necessity can be subjugated by obeying her, without the help of false laws, tools that make it possible to conquer by obeying." This formula is true of the tool which puts man squarely in contact with a reality that will bear no excuses, in contact with matter to be mastered, and the only way to use it is to obey it. Obedience to the plow and the plane was indeed the only way of dominating earth and wood. But the formula is not true for our techniques. He who serves these techniques enters another realm of necessity. This new necessity is not natural necessity; natural necessity in fact, no longer exists. It is technique's necessity, which becomes the more constraining the more nature's necessity fades and disappears. It cannot be escaped and mastered. The tool was not false. But technique causes us to penetrate into the innermost realm of falsehood, showing us all the while the noble face of objectivity or result. In this innermost recess, man is no longer able to recognize himself because of the instruments he employs.

The compulsion to submit to the metaphysic of technology comes from the belief of human beings that there is nothing else to do; that they are somehow in the presence of a new kind of "natural" law. The glazed fascination of men by a means which has no end must be broken, but this cannot be done by mere benevolence. Each of the necessities in which men became involved, as the web of technological means grew up about them, imparted its new necessity to the system, building into the total organization the similitude of anti-human reality. The partisan demand for results, without understanding or even caring about human costs, built awesome technical absolutes into the system. These must be taken apart, piece by piece, part by part, process by process, until techniques are controlled and made to serve as authentic tools. The autonomous authority of techniques must be broken and thrown away. This, incidentally, is what Gandhi meant in his usually misunderstood attack on machinery. He had no enmity toward machines which do not pull human beings out of shape. If a machine would serve as an authentic tool, he was for it. But wasn't Gandhi an "extremist"? Of course he was an extremist! Set one man in a debate against all the distinguished authorities of modern technological progress, who have created the situation described by M. Ellul, and how could he help but appear as an "extremist"! He happened to be right, but no man can expose an omnipresent cultural delusion without being identified as an extremist. How else will he make his point? How else will he even be *heard?*

(Two present-day economists, incidentally, are already thinking along these general lines—that is, of restoring the use of techniques to the service of man, in harmony with the higher needs and qualities of human beings. We have reference to E. F. Schumacher, an economist who is adviser to the National Coal Board in Great Britain; and Walter A. Weisskopf, head of the economics department of Roosevelt University, in Chicago.)

There are, then, two things to do: We must (1) take the self-serving hypnotic element out of the metaphysic of technology, and destroy its mystique, which will call for great amounts of both practical experiment and persuasion; and (2) find, formulate, and begin to live by a conception of man that will tolerate no interference from the distractions of material objectives. If we take seriously the case made for the opposition by M. Ellul, our emancipation will be gained by nothing less. We cannot win this battle in some kind of flight. Evil is not put down by putting down evil. Evil is put down by knowing and living by the good.

REVIEW
ON PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

A NEW volume by the prolific scientist-metaphysician, Raynor Johnson, *The Light and the Gate* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), consists of tribute to four men—the Irish author-poet, George William Russell (A.E.), the writer and semi-spiritualist, Ambrose Pratt, an American (Robert S. Clifton) who became a Buddhist monk named Sumangalo, and the controversial English clergyman, Leslie Dixon Weatherhead.

Dr. Johnson's intent, indicated by short essays which follow the biographical material, is to illustrate the importance of thought which ignores the barriers conventionally separating literature, metaphysics, and religion. In his treatment of Russell, Dr. Johnson uses examples of both verse and prose to show that a symbolic language of the "interior world" gains intuitive response in men of very different backgrounds. "Spirituality," Russell once wrote, "is the power certain minds have of apprehending formless spiritual essences, of seeing the eternal in the transitory, or relating the particular to the universal, the type to the archetype." Indeed, a surprising number found in Russell a special quality, since "A.E." never became a celebrity nor sought a wide public audience. A.E. replied to one man who wished him more worldly success: "My dear boy, a man's success or failure is always with his own soul. You would like to see me well-known, writing wise and beautiful books, hailed by the applause of the best critics. I might be all this and a failure in my own eyes, and wretched and unhappy. I am working for causes I feel to be good. I don't care in the least for recognition." But those who met Russell, either as an editor or a poet, were indelibly impressed by the feeling, however momentary, that they were able to "share his belief in a world full of mystery and magic."

We have had at hand an interesting book sent by a reader—Denis Saurat's *Gods of the People* (1947)—directly concerned with the vital relationship between philosophy and poetry. Some passages by Saurat may suggest why Dr. Johnson chose George William Russell as a subject. In his concluding chapter, Saurat says:

> What is the value of philosophical poetry? What is the use of this form of art in the general scheme of human life?
>
> Philosophical poetry plays a very special part between philosophy and religion and science. It may now be said that what was once called "philosophy" no longer exists. The name has remained as a general label covering various kinds of researches such as sociology, psychology, logic, etc. Nothing corresponds any longer to what, scientifically speaking, formed the connecting link—metaphysics, of necessity, presented, with an accuracy which rendered them unacceptable, ideas which have only an indefinable existence, which are only suppositions, not even hypotheses, which often admit of contradiction without being shaken by it. Metaphysics carried into the scientific realm conceptions which really belong to the domain of the will. These metaphysical ideas cannot claim to have a place in science, but is that a reason for refusing to consider them? They belong to another order of truth: artistic truth. They are in a latent condition only, a state of possibility.
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> We should try and consider them from a point of view which was that of our first master Plato when he launched out into myths: "possibly, nay certainly, this is not true, but there is something more or less like it which is true." They are strange ambassadors coming from inaccessible realms.
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> Philosophical poetry enables us to arrive at this point of view. Plato is the father both of philosophers and of poets that are interested in ideas. He made use of myth as the poets do. Why have the highest intellects as well as the lowest so often had recourse to myth—Milton and Goethe, Hugo and Plato? Why were they not completely satisfied with science or philosophy? Because there is something in man which goes beyond exact science. All poetry, all great art, all culture, all civilisation, in fact, has been based on some sort of metaphysics, because that element of aspiration towards something which is not of this world is one of the fundamental powers of the human soul.

What Saurat calls "philosophical poetry" becomes, without deliberate intention, a critique of all formal religion. The "real" of the spiritual

world, as both the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads* of India indicate, can never be properly represented by a doctrine or formal belief. From this point of view Saurat looks at the limitations of "science":

> The idea of *thing* has disappeared. Werner Heisenberg pointed out in 1927 that all measurements in the intra-atomic world are unavoidably rendered false by the intervention of the measuring act, so Paul Langevin in 1930 suggested that "we should give up the concept of object, or thing, in the atomic and intra-atomic world." Obviously that soap-bubble, travelling round the pin's head one hundred miles away from it, was too much for Langevin, and much too closely related to pure poetry.
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> In letters as in science, the limits between the human and the non-human have broken down. Literature devotes itself more and more to describing the fragility, the complexity, the imprevisibility of human beings, and simultaneously, science discovers the uncertainty, the complexity, the infinite variability of so-called external phenomena.
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> The modern mind, in the XXth century, has worked in the same way in all domains. The modern materialistic Stanley of Science can somewhere among the stars, or else in that large space between the pin's head and the soap-bubble, between Paris and Orleans, meet the modern spiritualistic Livingstone of Poetry, and recognise him: there is nowadays not very much to choose between them, and neither is entitled to snub the other.

This makes another opportunity to recall the memorable prose of W. Macneile Dixon, whose essays are always gracious links between poetry and philosophy. In the last chapter of *The Human Situation,* Dixon writes:

> I read some time ago of a Spanish girl in England for the first time. Approaching London in the train she looked out on the sea of houses, factories and chimneys. "These people have no view," she cried, and burst into tears. To have no view, how sad a lot.
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> There is nothing to be hoped for, nothing to be expected and nothing to be done save to await our turn to mount the scaffold and bid farewell to that colossal blunder, the muchado-about-nothing world—a piece of work whose defence from any human standpoint, if this be all, no advocate dare undertake.
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> To believe life an irremediable disaster, the heavens and earth an imbecility, is to my way of thinking hard indeed. Since I am not prepared to believe the world a misery-go-round, a torture-chamber, a furnace of senseless affliction; since I am not prepared to believe the fiery, invincible soul a by-blow, a lamentable accident; I prefer to put my trust in the larger vision of the poets. To fortify our minds it is to them we have to return, and yet again return. They alone have understood. "It exceeds all imagination to conceive," wrote Shelley, "what would have been the moral condition of the world if the poets had never been born. . . . What were our consolations on this side of the grave, and what were our aspirations beyond it—if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar?" And it is to their inextinguishable sympathy with humanity that they owe their understanding. Not to science or philosophy, but to their profounder appreciation of the strange situation in which we find ourselves, to their sense of the pitiful estate of man who, with all the forces of nature proclaiming an alien creed, still holds to his intuitions, who knows and knows well that he cannot support himself otherwise than by clinging—as a sailor clings to his raft in angry seas—to his passion for justice, his trust in the affections of his heart, his love of the lovely, his lonely struggle for the best, however clumsy and mistaken he may be in his present estimates of what is indeed best.

It is interesting to find in a current paperback, E. V. Cunningham's *Sylvia*, time taken from a detective's probing into the life of a mysterious woman, for dialogue between the investigator and a professor of literature:

> "What is poetry," Mullen said, not asking me, but the declarative of the teacher who must teach above all else. "The first men on this earth sang, for man is a creature of music as well as words. But when the words came, with all their images and colors and memories, there began to be a particular music of language itself. The poem was the beginning of all our literature and all our art. Homer sang poems, and the terrible preaching of the old Hebrew prophets, that was also poetry, and who made music for old Ireland but the wild poets who wandered around the land with their fine voices and their stringed instruments. And even here at home the culture of the Indians was to play on their wooden flutes while their singers made poetry. It is an old thing that grew and flowered, but somewhere of late

we danced a step too quickly and the world became strange. Now the poet looks for pictures and music and finds it hard hunting—so many is the one content with polishing his little apple forever and never giving a damn about the tree.

"We do not now live in a time when you can say of this poet or that one that greatness or grandeur has kissed him. The poet is a tired, lonely lad, cast out of his father's house and looking for a proper door or reason to enter. Or else he sits under the bramblebushes in the back yard and coddles his precious gift and whispers it to the poet neighbor yonder under the other bramblebush. Once the poet was part of a grand orchestra, Mr. Macklin, and he made his sounds with great large brasses and whole banks of fiddles and big drums that boomed so loud and with such fine syncopation that the world cocked its ears and listened. But that is no longer, young man. Oh no. Not at all. Today the world listens only to the poor silly lyrics that the Broadway people write, and only those peculiar versemongers are rewarded, while the gift of poesy is booted away. . . . The most the poet does today having been labeled with queerness and that mortal American sin, poverty, is to twitter on his bit of a pipe and try with such thin music to portray the vast, idiotic and confusing world that once hailed him as his voice and song."

COMMENTARY
ACTS OF FAITH

THE only good life for human beings, much of this week's contents suggests, is a life of daring. The acts of the poet, Review makes clear, are acts of faith and of daring—faith that flights in search of something beyond the measurable and safe are worth taking; daring which risks the unbelief and misunderstanding of the practical world.

Education is unmistakably an act of faith, since, as those quoted in this week's "Children" declare, it means putting away the techniques of stolid certainty in the transmission of information, in order to turn the young loose among the cultural resources of the world. At some point in the educational process—the earlier the better—you have to *trust* the young. You have to hope that they will outdo their teachers—have more daring, make fewer mistakes. For this, after all, is what is involved in refusing to convert their minds into echo chambers resounding with our own assumptions.

Then, in Frontiers, Nicolas Walter urges that the growing tip of human progress is precisely what is left undefined, unlegislated, unguaranteed by anything except the contagions of sympathy and spontaneous regard. The best things that human beings do are always uncompelled, uncalculating acts of generosity. We all know this, and we honor such men in our hearts, even when, on occasion, we call them foolish or impractical.

From what stubborn and ruthlessly self-destroying ignorance do we, when we act as organized societies and states, throw away the humanizing and liberating qualities we prize most in individuals? By what stultifying logic do we argue that only "sure thing," boxed-up and nailed-down judgments based upon the lowest possible estimates of men in other societies, should guide our policies of state? How could such policies fail to produce exactly the kind of men they anticipate—produce them abroad and at home?

Social orders which find their security in the denial of acts of faith, in contempt for all daring except experiments in graded hostility, are plants for the mass production of faithlessness and fear. Their final effect—so long as there are human beings to contend with—can only be the generation of desperate revolt.

The project is not the successful management of man. The project is the design of a social matrix for acts of faith. This is all we can ever find out from studying the wisdom of the free. The wisdom of the unfree is not worth studying, except to recognize the imprisonments to which it leads.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

SUPPORT FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM

DONALD KINGSBURY of McGill University was quoted here on Jan. 13 as favoring dramatic innovations in the teaching-learning process. In brief, Dr. Kingsbury proposed:

> Abandon lectures. A professor should never give a lecture unless he has something new to say or a new way to say it. Put your lectures on tape. Have hundreds of tape machine booths so that a student can listen to a lecture when he is himself ready to take responsibility for learning what is on the tape. If visual material is required for the lecture, use video film capsules. For special courses, such as languages, tapes should be keyed to illustrated texts along with equipment allowing an extra tape band for the student to record his own voice.
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> A staff of Consultants would replace the lectures. A consultant in a subject would do nothing but answer student questions. He would not tutor. If a student was so lost he needed a tutor he would be referred to the proper tapes and texts and programmed texts.
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> Abandon registration day, years and semesters and final exams. Take in your student any week of the year he is ready to start. Give him a checklist of everything he has to know to get a certain degree.

Among the responses received were the following:

> To the Editor, MANAS:
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> I read with interest and complete agreement (albeit I am not a college teacher) Dr. Kingsbury's comments on "the lecture system."
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> I teach this year in a new classroom equipped with all the latest in composite blackboards, fluorescent lighting and plastic desks. It is somehow sterile, antiseptic, with the flavor of the operating room.
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> I suppose classrooms and lectures began in the Middle Ages (the Greeks never used them) when such oral methods most efficiently transmitted knowledge. But with the printing press didn't such methods become obsolete?
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> Visit a high school classroom. Doesn't it look unnatural? Neat rows of physically energetic youngsters sit trapped in silent geometric patterns. What in nature or anthropology leads us to support such an inhuman method of teaching?
>
> Studios, yes, and shops and libraries and laboratories and seminar rooms—but let us abolish the "classroom."
>
> * * *
>
> To MANAS and Kingsbury:
>
> I have just read my first issue of MANAS as a subscriber.
>
> Thanks to K for having written the delightful prod to schoolmen.
>
> Thanks to M for having published it.
>
> More sense than nonsense, say I!
>
> When transmitting facts is done, as it should be done largely by mechanical devices, teachers may aspire to become MENTORS.
>
> Also, I'm quite in favor of every pupil's being a teacher at one and the same time—from birth to death, one might say.
>
> Enclosed is somewhat out-of-date article which I wrote some years ago on a subject which is not altogether remote from those principles mentioned by Kingsbury.
>
> Dr. Dreikurs (psychiatrist, Chicago) once said something to the effect that those corrective measures which need to be taken in order to bring about adequate improvement in the schooling system will never be initiated by schoolmen themselves.
>
> So long as there are Kingsbury's sort around, Dreikurs may be wrong.

The second communication is from Stewart Pahl, a director of the American Humanist Association. In a reprint of his article in the *Humanist* are paragraphs which amplify his agreement with Kingsbury. The title is "Learning and Accreditation," and the introduction reads:

> Perhaps there are as many definitions of "education" as there are people. However, despite differing concepts as to what constitutes "education," most of us (when we are truly thoughtful on the matter) will agree that each of the following four propositions is true:
>
> 1. Some persons have a great deal of schooling and a great deal of sound education.
>
> 2. Some persons have a great deal of schooling but pitifully little of genuine education.

3. Some persons have little schooling and also little education.

4. Some persons have little schooling, yet have a great deal of genuine education.

To such propositions we can agree *when we are truly thoughtful.* In other words, deep within ourselves we realize that *schooling* and *education* are not necessarily synonymous.

Mr. Pahl then describes the results of research conducted at Brooklyn College in 1954 concerning the discrepancy between the "knowledge" recognized by the accreditation system and the sort of understanding which should inform the background and activity of a good teacher. The directors of the Brooklyn College program were forced to admit that the *"meaning* of academic credit is not clear." Bypassing prescribed units and courses which would ordinarily precede a teaching degree, they found other ways of giving credit where it was merited, and informally "graduated" 84 people, 54 with honors, of whom 49 went on to graduate schools to work for master's or doctor's degree. Probably most of these men and women would never have become teachers if they had had to face the rigid requirements of credit hours standing between them and graduate courses.

Asking, "What about similar adults elsewhere?", Mr. Pahl sums up:

How many adults in the USA are worthy of some credit and might not have been lost to the schooling system, if only there were some way in which the learning which they could gain outside of schools could be and would be evaluated? Would there be 20,000 or 100,000, or millions?

Would these (generally brilliant) people be worth more schooling?

Would these students of years ago perhaps have continued with their schooling if the system had then been fair enough to give them credit for what they were learning outside of school?

It would seem that some organized group of our society ought to be concerned about what happens to sensitive, fair-minded young people who are confronted with a series of realizations such as the following:

—the schooling system is customarily referred to as "the educational system";

—the schooling system is held in high esteem;

—our present accreditation system (a monopoly of professional schoolmen) says, in effect, that everything inside a school has to do with education;

—that same accreditation system says, in effect, that nothing outside a school has anything to do with education;

—to be "in" I must abide by the above verdicts despite whatever my powers of observation may indicate to the contrary;

—in other words, to be "in" I must subscribe to a patent falsehood and an injustice.

Is it astonishing that some young people refuse to pay such a price in order to be "in"?

FRONTIERS

A Freer Society

THE concluding portion of a review of two histories of anarchism, in *Anarchy* for December, 1964, is so valuable in its showing of how historians and people in general misconceive human progress, and the means to progress, that we not only quote it entire, but urge that the canons proposed by this writer be adopted by all serious students of the problems of human betterment. The books under examination are James Joll's *The Anarchists* and an earlier volume by George Woodcock. The reviewer, Nicolas Walter, says:

> I think both Woodcock and Joll are wrong—not because anarchism is a success, but because the cult of failure is just as invalid as the cult of success, because anarchism should not be judged in this crude way. The point of Christianity is not whether the Christians can convert the world, but whether Jesus was Christ. The point of Communism is not whether the Communists can make successful revolutions, but whether a Communist society is a good thing. The point of pacifism is not whether war can be abolished, but whether it should be abolished. And the point of anarchism is not whether we are a success or a failure, but whether we have something to say about present society and something to do about future society. Joll, like Woodcock, accepts the value of anarchist criticism, but he doesn't seem to understand this criticism, and, like Woodcock again, he seems to see it only as a permanent protest, good for anarchists because it provides self-expression, and good for other people because it challenges their complacency. This is a completely false way of looking at anarchism. It is not just a historical or political idea, a sociological or psychological function. As long as anarchism is present in individuals, in groups; in a movement, it is present in society to a greater or lesser extent, whenever a gain in freedom is won or a loss of freedom is resisted. Joll sneers at Kropotkin for seeing evidence of anarchism in the British Museum Library and the British Life-Boat Association, in the International Postal Union and the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits—but Kropotkin is right. Utopia is present in topia: the free society is contained within the unfree society. Every gain we hope to make in the future is based on a freedom we already possess, and every loss we fear to sustain in the future is based on a freedom we already lack. We are here and now, and our means are our ends. What is important is not *the* anarchist movement, but anarchist movement—not the free society, but a freer society.

Here is a statement which, because it contains so much basic truth, may appear to some to say exactly nothing. Its validity is as elusive as one of Zeno's paradoxes—indeed, it may be a case of one of Zeno's paradoxes—yet, unless it is understood, nothing important can be understood.

Thought about human betterment, if it is to become practical by embodiment in action, can never have a simple theme. At any given moment of history, and in relation to any specific social and human situation, the thought must be contrapuntal in character. It has to begin with subjective awareness of values—which means expressions concerning the good as it is realized in the *flow* of human life—and then it must illustrate in practical terms how that good appears, or may appear, and exhibit itself objectively in particular situations and relationships. Of course, the good is never *really* objective, since experiencing it is a matter of *feeling* it, and oftentimes those who feel the good are unaware of their good fortune, just as men who, as we say, live "natural" lives, seldom talk about the harmony of their existence as though it were a "thing."

This amounts to saying that the good is "ineffable"—which of course will call out angry cries. But we must note that the anger comes more from a feeling of being deprived than from a capacity to make authentic definitions of the good. The good, especially as a political objective, is always defined according to what men hold are the forms of its default. Other ways of speaking of the good require symbols and abstractions.

Under what circumstances do men experience the good? Does it come in climactic moments during the movement toward some goal—as the quality of feeling which attends triumph over obstacles, or in fugue-like waves of increasing comprehension—or is it some kind of pervasive

essence which does not become accessible until the static perfection of a final achievement is reached?

Only fools will deny that the good lies in the joy of pursuit, and here, quite plainly, comes the real problem, since it is equally clear that experience of the good is possible to men who pursue illusions—or what, when the end is reached, turn out to be tasteless substitutes for the envisioning longing which spurred them on.

The revolutionary movement is now in the process of redefining its goals and its methods of pursuit. This was the fundamental contribution of M. K. Gandhi, for whom the subjective character of the good was paramount, yet who found dramatic ways of seeking it for the Indian people in particular personal and social forms of action. The counterpoint, the balance between the subjective and the objective, is quite plain in Gandhi's theory and practical programs.

Mr. Walter's insistence that the way to get more freedom is by using and expanding the freedom we have is a means of affirming that the heart of the anarchist philosophy lies in the attitude of men toward one another. This attitude engenders the style of the human relationships which, in total, constitute the living, organic character of the society. The laws and formal rationalizations of the society are only its external shell. They do not "change" the society, but constitute a kind of finite, dialectical effect of the living energies of the society, sometimes acting as a stabilizing influence, sometimes functioning as a brake on progress—depending upon the contrapuntal relationship between men's feeling and understanding of the good and their theory and practice for increasing it.

The living organism of society is the only reality of our common human life. It consists of the flow of awareness and feelings, from moment to moment, in the human beings who make it up. This flow has only to be recognized as primary reality for it to become the controlling cause in human affairs. This is what Tolstoy was talking about when he said:

> For the old, outlived public opinion to make way for that which is new and living, it is necessary that men who recognize the new requirements of life should speak of them openly. . . . Men have only to understand that what is given to them for public opinion, what is maintained by complicated strenuous and artificial means is not public opinion, but only the dead relic of public opinion that once existed; above all, they have but to believe in themselves, in the fact that what is recognized by them in the depths of their souls, that what craves free expression in everyone is not freely uttered only because it runs counter to existing public opinion, is the force which will change the world, and that to manifest that force is man s true vocation. . . .

Where do men get views like Tolstoy's? They get them from their feeling of what it means to be human, and from recognizing that only the men who give expression to that feeling—who insist upon *living* by it—are really free. So Mr. Walter, when he declares that "our means are our ends," is telling the whole truth of the matter.