

ARE WE READY TO HEAR?

Were I ruler of a little State with a small population, and only ten or a hundred men available as soldiers, I would not use them. I would have people look on death as a grievous thing, and they should not travel to distant countries. Though they might possess boats and carriages, they should have no occasion to ride in them. Though they might own weapons and armour, they should have no need to use them. I would make the people return to the use of knotted cords. They should find their plain food sweet, their rough garments fine. They should be content with their homes, and happy in their simple ways. If a neighboring State was within sight of mine—nay, if we were close enough to hear the crowing of each other's cocks and the barking of each other's dogs—the two peoples should grow old and die without there ever having been any mutual intercourse.

LAO-TSE

ONE way to suggest the pace of change in our time would be to say that a man of the present may have been able, within his life-span, to pass from puzzled rejection of the wisdom of Lao-tse to understanding and acceptance of it. Initially, this advocacy of extreme "isolationism" and primitive simplicity seems to reveal precisely the difference between modern man's achievements and the unchanging, "passive" East. Perhaps it is the absolutism of Lao-tse's preference of the *Tao* over even small increments of progress that bothers us most. We have no hesitation, for example, in admiring Leonardo da Vinci's refusal to invent new military machines, on the ground that only an evil use of them would be made by mankind. With da Vinci and others, we are willing to settle on the principle of selectivity in our progress. We have a strong sympathy for the physicist, Otto Hahn, who in 1939 discovered the secret of uranium fission, but would not put his knowledge in the service of the Nazis. And we at least understand how Einstein felt when, at the end of his life, he said it would have been better if he had been a pedlar instead of a theoretical

physicist. These men, we tell ourselves, are not enemies or critics of "progress"; they just want the inventions to be properly used.

It is with such appeals that the present champions of material progress defend themselves against the attacks of the sort made by Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society*. Their logic seems sound enough; but what remains is the question of why it does not work in practice. There is reason to ask, therefore—ought we to have another look at the recommendations of Lao-tse?

Naturally, this will be very difficult for any Westerner. Yet the evidence of extreme crisis is piling up. A recent compilation, Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (McGraw-Hill, 1964), is the severest indictment of technological culture we have seen—a book so filled with novel insights and original analysis that a dismayed editor said to the author: "Seventy-five per cent of your material is new. A successful book cannot venture to be more than ten per cent new." In a way, this comment illustrates what Mr. McLuhan is getting at. The rampant "newness" and the volume of intruding sensory impressions which come to modern man as a result of the multiplication and amplification of communications media threaten to make not just a book but life itself unsuccessful. The first chapter of *Understanding Media* has an answer to the "selective" principle of the defenders of technology:

In accepting an honorary degree from the University of Notre Dame a few years ago, General David Sarnoff made this statement: "We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used which determines their value." That is the voice of the current somnambulism. . . . There is simply nothing

in the Sarnoff statement that will bear scrutiny, for it ignores the nature of the medium, of any and all media, in the true Narcissus style of one hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form. General Sarnoff went on to explain his attitude to the technology of print, saying that it was true that print caused much trash to circulate, but it also disseminated the Bible and the thoughts of seers and philosophers. It has never occurred to General Sarnoff that any technology could do anything but *add* itself on to what we already are.

By "current somnambulism," McLuhan means blindness to the inevitable effect of the *form* of communication, as distinguished from its content. Looking at movies, watching television, listening to radio, reading books and newspapers all have specific effects on the receiver of these impressions, and *Understanding Media* is about these different effects. The title of the first chapter is "The Medium Is the Message," and it takes a while to understand what the author means by this. It is a way of pointing out that the message hardly matters, so far as the audience is concerned. Later in the book John Gosbie is quoted on Telstar—a "complicated ball that whirls through space, transmitting television broadcasts, telephone messages, and everything except common sense." Mr. Crosbie discussed the question, "What do you say on it?"—

Telstar went into operation in August when almost nothing of importance was happening anywhere in Europe. All the networks were ordered to say something, anything, on this miracle instrument. "It was a new toy and they just had to use it," the men here say [Crosbie wrote from Paris]. CBS combed Europe for hot news and came up with a sausage-eating contest, which was duly sent back by the miracle ball although that particular news event could have gone by camel-back without losing any of its essence.

Another way of showing that the medium is the message would be to call attention to the current tendency to run scientific research projects through computers, regardless of whether computers can contribute anything to the results. Apparently, some of the foundations with money for such projects are persuaded that computerized

work is more "real" than other ways of going at problems.

In order to explain what he is trying to do, the author recalls C. P. Snow's conclusion that the highly intelligent British leaders who settled with Hitler at Munich could see nothing wrong with this because they were anti-Red. They couldn't read Hitler's real message because "they did not wish to hear." Mr. McLuhan continues:

But their failure was as nothing compared to our present one. The American stake in literacy as technology or uniformity applied to every level of education, government, industry, and social life is totally threatened by the electric technology. The threat of Stalin or Hitler was external. The electric technology is within the gates, and we are numb, deaf, blind, and mute about its encounter with the Gutenberg technology, on and through which the American way of life was formed. It is, however, no time to suggest strategies when the threat has not even been acknowledged to exist. I am in the position of Louis Pasteur telling doctors that their greatest enemy was quite invisible, and quite unrecognized by them. Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the "content" of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watch-dog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as "content." The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content.

The author's point is that the effect of the medium itself gets by our guard, and it is that effect which turns us into captives. "The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance." Mr. McLuhan continues:

Subliminal and docile acceptance of media impact has made them prisons without walls for their human users. A. J. Liebling remarked in his book *The Press*, a man is not free if he cannot see where he is going, even if he has a gun to help him get there. . . . That our human senses, of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies, and that they also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us, may be perceived in

another connection mentioned by the psychologist C. G. Jung:

"Every Roman was surrounded by slaves. The slave and his psychology flooded ancient Italy, and every Roman became inwardly, and of course unwittingly, a slave. Because living constantly in the atmosphere of slaves, he became infected through the unconscious with their psychology. No one can shield himself from such an influence."

But, someone may object, this man is talking about psychology, not technology! That is exactly right. The point being, who cares about technology except as it affects us as human beings? Of what importance is elaborate information about the physical traits of technological advance, or even its material and "social" benefits, if we ignore what is happening to us as men? The psychological involvements of technology are the only things worth thinking about, here, since these are the matters we must learn, first to understand, then to control.

A quotation from a current war novel seems appropriate. How much of this young man's agony and impotence is related to the compulsions of technology? A marine, a figure of *The Big War* by Anton Myrer, writes from a Pacific beachhead to his wife:

I can't begin to describe it to you, any of it. Sweet Christ—how describe the steady disintegration of humanity in one's own heart and soul, the noisome parade of fear and ignorance and pain and worry, the pure oppressive worry, and the sights that shriek to heaven itself—the great salt wastes of terror and remorse and rage until all that remains of us is blinking, doddering brute? You cannot imagine it, and thank God for that too, for spirits not seared black with anguish.

Which is partly why I am writing this . . . my dearest: so that in a future day you can help me. So that if I am ever, God help me, in danger of forgetting this, of sentimentalizing or assuaging it, of slipping back into an idiot's litany of folly, you can present these fouled and wrinkled pages and say, *Remember*: stanch this lesion of your resolve . . . And not just rhetoric either; not the globes of silver sound mouthed by those personages mindful of their careers or else caught up in the fraudulent abstraction, who cry, "It must never happen again," Thursday evening and

roar, "we will not countenance, we cannot in all honor permit," on Friday morn—

Inevitable, they say; a time when war is inevitable. It is as inevitable as pimping or thievery or conceit, and no more . . . a monstrous debauch without levity or release: without atonement. What can be atoned? Where is the victory? Is there victory in Lundren's riddled body or little Connor's shaking palsied spirit—or in the vagaries of my own reeling mind? Victory—we have already lost: by our violence we have made the next resort to violence all the more proximate, all the more terrible. *Fuit Iliam*. Ah, we could all be near the angels, a little less than angels, I know that now, beyond all doubt—and we have forfeited it: we have thrown it all away. . . .

No. No more rhetoric: but a revulsion we must carry in our vitals like a glowing, white-hot, agonizing coal—which will never heal into romanticism or indifference. And care and care and care. With passion. Care desperately, indefatigably for our lives, our souls, our individual dignity. For there will be no victory: the only triumph is within—over our own murderous folly, our criminal misprisions. . . .

Why—*why*, we must ask, when men feel these fiery thoughts and this ultimate resolution, do we just lie there and bleed? It is only something in a book. Yet why is this cry not more clearly heard? One reason is given by Mr. McLuhan: "For each of the media is also a powerful weapon with which to clobber other media and other groups." The question of why has still to be answered, however. Mr. McLuhan has his answer, and we have ours. His is well made in the following:

It was Julian Benda's *Great Betrayal* that helped to clarify the new situation in which the intellectual suddenly holds the whip hand in society. Benda saw that the artists and intellectuals who had long been alienated from power, and who since Voltaire had been in opposition, had now been drafted for service in the highest echelons of decision-making. Their great betrayal was that they had surrendered their autonomy and had become the flunkies of power, as the atomic physicist at the present moment is the flunky of the warlords.

Had Benda known his history, he would have been less angry and less surprised. For it has been the role of the intelligentsia to act as liaison and as

mediators between old and new power groups. Most familiar of such groups is the case of the Greek slaves, who were for long the educators and confidential clerks of the Roman power. And it is precisely this servile role of the confidential clerk to the tycoon—commercial, military, or political—that the educator has continued to play in the Western world until the present moment.

This seems a clear answer, although a discouraging one. And if you read Mr. McLuhan's book—which shows that after the media are all paid off for what they do to us, no one has much of anything left, either in personal substance or the power to resist—you look for extenuating circumstances on the one hand, and for hope on the other. The high-level flunkies of technology have a pretty good excuse. Power is impressive. Its institutionalization of very nearly the total environment of human beings makes opposition seem futile. And there is always the nasty, sneaky question: What if the power boys are *right*?

This last question forms the basis of our own answer, which is that we pursue our analysis and criticism of technology with an enthusiasm undermined by insecurity, while remaining malingerers in the understanding of man. In this respect, Mr. McLuhan's book exhibits much of the hopelessness of Ellul, although he has a point in claiming that the threat must be acknowledged before a strategy of defense or revolt can be devised. What, then, are the full dimensions of the threat?

These are indicated by the author in his account of the extremes: full exposure to the sensory stimulation of the "hot" media ("hot" meaning total claim on one's attention), versus withdrawal of all stimuli. As he puts it, giving first the middle ground of "comfort":

"Comfort" consists in abandoning a visual arrangement in favor of one that permits casual participation of the senses, a state that is excluded when any one sense, but especially the visual sense, is hotted up to the point of dominant command of a situation.

On the other hand, in experiments in which all outer sensation is withdrawn, the subject begins a furious fill-in or completion of senses that is sheer hallucination. So the hotting-up of one sense tends to effect hypnosis, and the cooling of all senses tends to result in hallucination.

If, after digesting the meaning of this spectrum of response—from hypnosis, through comfort, to hallucination—one argues that the ideal arrangement lies somewhere in the middle, then our point is made. For in these terms the human being is conceived as no more than a passive or waiting focus of awareness, ready for either hypnosis, comfort, or hallucination, depending upon what is done to him. As we see it, there is no hope at all in this view of the situation. The problem is not to define and create the best possible arrangements—a nice, "selective" control of the uses and products of technology, with a filtering out of the unruly and impudent suasions in communications systems, so that we can begin to live a little. It is just this "arrangements" kind of thinking which is at fault.

What other kind of thinking is there? "The serious artist," Mr. McLuhan says, "is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception." This is an important clue. The artist is something more than an expert of perception. He is a man who goes through life with a driving sense of having his own work to do. That is why, in some sense, he is able to turn all this bubbling, boiling confusion of perception into a field of intelligent action. He makes the world, it does not make him. Even a world of very bad sense impressions submits to his discriminations. It is the man who is master; everything else is raw material. The artist will not externalize his sense of purpose, along with his nervous system.

There is no use fooling and tinkering with those big institutions. You don't know what to do about them, and if you spend much time trying to find out, you might go over to the other side. Ulysses had to be lashed to the mast when he

sailed past the sirens, and that kind of an arrangement is seldom possible outside the myths. For the artist, the thinker, the creative human being—and we are all of us that in some degree—the idea is to treat the world as a field of experience for an intelligence that has serious work to do. Only people of genuine purpose and commitment will ever be able to manage their environments, and they will do this, not because of any great technological skill, or because of sagacious censorship in their behalf, or any other kind of planned selectivity, but because they know what they want. They will recognize noise when they hear it, because they are sending messages worth listening to, themselves.

Understanding Media is a book about the losses in human dignity sustained by modern man. It is a careful study of the deficit spending of what we are in exchange for what we have, showing how little we got for what we have become. The control or redefinition of our environment will not help us. What we must do is redefine ourselves. That is really all that Lao-tse was talking about. But, as he said at the end, people didn't want to hear. The reasons for listening to him may now be more compelling.

REVIEW

THE AUTHOR AS PHILOSOPHER

EARLIER discussion of Colin Wilson's view of the relationship between existentialist-humanist psychology and literature may be extended by quoting from the conclusion of Mr. Wilson's *The Strength to Dream* (Houghton Mifflin, 1962). The following passages seem especially notable:

Mathematicians know that most theorems and propositions are susceptible of several proofs, and that some proofs are "beautiful" and some are clumsy. A mathematician who cared only whether a proof was beautiful or ugly would be the counterpart of the purely literary critic. The existential critic is concerned less with the beauty of the proof than with what it is proving.

Art is an equation in which there are two terms, the artist and his material. The "material" is a complex matter of the world he lives in, the tradition he works in, the social forces that enter his daily life.

There are three possible attitudes to this equation. The first is the most prevalent in our time: both terms are fixed. The artist is the sensitive observer, and can be no more than honest; the times are the outcome of the current of history and are beyond the reach of individual approval or disapproval. Therefore, the artist can only work honestly with the material he has been given, and prove his worth by expressing his "sense of his own age."

The second attitude is typical of the Communist countries. The times can be changed, and the artist can play his small part in the change. His business is to communicate to the people, to play his small part in bringing about the utopia of the future. He must, of course, be an optimist.

This attitude is sometimes too quickly condemned in Western countries. Although it may not be desirable as an ultimate philosophy of art, it is often preferable to the gloomy subjectivism or sterile experimentalism of "free artists." Soviet literature and music has produced a great deal of "populist" trash; it has also produced many first-rate novels and operas. Social optimism may occasionally be a shallow and inadequate philosophy for the artist, but it is usually preferable to nihilism.

The third possible attitude is potentially the most fruitful it is the artist's belief that both he *and*

his times can be changed. Such an artist would combine the metaphysician with the social reformer. Kazantzakis is a modern example of the artist preoccupied by self-change; the proof of his genius lies in his accomplishment of the apparently impossible: the writing of a great epic poem [*Odyssey, A Modern Sequel*]. When most modern writers seem to be agreed that the chaos of time can be expressed only in some experimental, chaotic form like Pound's *Cantos*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Sartre's *Roads to Freedom*, Kazantzakis ignores the impossibility of creating a modern heroic epic, and simply creates one. This could only have been done by a man who was accustomed to trying to change himself as well as the world, who believed that the artist is far more than a mere observer.

This is the problem of our time: to destroy the idea of man as a "static observer," both in philosophy and art. All imaginative creation is involved with the three absolutes: freedom, evolution, religion.

This analysis suggests not only that there is challenge in the implications of a materialistic-determinist world-view, but that the challenge is not, after all, so difficult for the writer or artist to meet.

Joseph Wood Krutch, in "*Modernism*" in *Modern Drama* (Cornell University Press, 1953), describes the cyclic appearance among artists of the "man-is-helpless" viewpoint: the Renaissance signaled a bursting of the psychological bonds which medieval thinking had forged around the creative spirit, but as Christian determinism was surmounted, the ground upon which the liberators stood was finally revealed as insecure. Determinism returned in the idea that individual man is a mere by-blow of the cosmic process. But the assumptions of the Renaissance, until undermined by this extreme materialist reaction, remained vital, proclaiming that *man*, not some supernatural being, is the eternally creative spirit. The next historical phase failed to sustain this view. Mr. Krutch writes:

A break with the past as radical as that which much modern thought and much modern drama seems to advocate unintentionally prepares the way for the apes to take over. A civilized man is likely to find it increasingly difficult to live in

either the physical or the spiritual world which has gradually been evolving. It offers him neither the physical nor the spiritual peace without which he cannot exist. But the apes, like the gangster in Winterset, find it not uncongenial. They can survive the physical chaos, and they are not aware of the spiritual one.

Mr. Krutch proceeds to explain, in respect to literature, the effects of the subsequent rejection of Renaissance philosophy:

An astonishing proportion of all serious modern works of literature imply the rejection of one or more of these premises. When determinism, psychological or economic, has deprived man of even a limited power of self-determination and at the same time denied the validity of any of the ethical beliefs to which he may be attached, then man has ceased to have dignity. When either the radical pessimist or the Utopian reformer has represented life "under the present social system" as inevitably frustrated or defeated, then the Renaissance thesis that life in this world is worth living is denied. When the subject of fiction becomes, as it so often does become, the obsessions fixations, neuroses, and perversions to which the human psyche sometimes falls victim, then the premise which states that human rationality is the most important human realm is also denied.

There are many other enlightening sources of reading on this subject. Take for example this beautifully affirmative passage from Maxwell Anderson's modest classic, *Off Broadway*:

From the beginning of our story men have insisted, despite the darkness and silence about them, that they had a destiny to fulfill—that they were part of a gigantic scheme which was understood somewhere, though they themselves might never understand it. There are no proofs of this. There are only indications—in the idealism of children and young men, in the sayings of such teachers as Christ and Buddha, in the vision of the world we glimpse in the hieroglyphics of the masters of great arts, and in the discoveries of pure science itself an art, as it pushes away the veils of fact to reveal new powers, new laws, new mysteries, new goals for the eternal dream. The dream of the race is that it may make itself better and wiser than it is, and every great philosopher or artist who has ever appeared among us has turned his face away from what man is toward whatever seems to him most godlike that man may

become. Whether the steps proposed are immediate or distant, whether he speaks in the simple parables of the New Testament or the complex musical symbols of Bach and Beethoven the message is always to the effect that men are not essentially as they are but as they imagine and as they wish to be.

COMMENTARY

SCIENCE AND TEACHING

IF YOU ask an engineer how he was able to design a skyscraper, he will tell you about the years he spent at one of the great institutes of technological learning, and recall to you that he owes an incalculable debt to thousands of past contributors to the present-day craft of construction.

But if you were to ask John Holt how he understands so much about children and how he knows what he knows about education, he would probably be embarrassed by the question and not know what to say, save that he has affection for them and has worked with them as a teacher all his life. He has read, of course, but the matter of this reading has a different content.

In this broad comparison, certain obvious conclusions appear. First, technical knowledge is transmissible. Further, it exists in finite, measurable quantities. This is not to suggest that engineers and builders are without imagination; all great constructions no doubt have a transcendent or poetic element in them; but the practical body of their knowledge is additive, and made up of public truth.

Whatever you may say about the applications of science to teaching, the labors pursued by teachers with children are a very different affair. The builder, save for his poetic inspiration, deals with means—bricks, steel, stone, and the principles of construction. They are means to ends which have practically nothing in common with building materials and mechanical engineering. The teacher deals with children, who are ends in themselves. As a communicator, he may be not without science, but he practices art and *lore* more than a scientific discipline. What he knows, he knows as an artist or philosopher, rather than as an engineer.

For several generations we have been trying to convert the art of teaching into a science. It doesn't work—or rather, we have been

unsuccessful. One might argue that the misapplication of science to an art results in monstrous practices and terrible self-delusions. Yet the skillful practice of an art involves intuitive applications of the most delicate techniques. The science is there; what seems difficult or impossible is its codification. Is it conceivable that the explanation for this lies in the centuries-old abstraction of the physical sciences from moral awareness, so that, when we try to use them for the illumination of moral questions, they are so unwieldy and stubbornly resistant that they turn out to be practically useless to us?

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

EDUCATION AND PEACE

[This is the second of two illuminating essays written by John Holt subsequent to publication of his book, *How Children Fail*. It touches the heart of contemporary concerns respecting a "psychology of education." This material is copyrighted by Mr. Holt.]

IN my book, *How Children Fail*, I summarize what seems to be wrong with traditional and conventional education, in part as follows:

When we talk about intelligence, we do not mean the ability to get a good score on a certain kind of test, or even the ability to do well in school; these are at best only indicators of something larger, deeper, and far more important. By intelligence we mean a style of life, a way of behaving in various situations and particularly in new, strange, and perplexing situations. The true test of intelligence is not how much we know how to do, but how we behave when we don't know what to do . . .

Nobody starts off stupid . . . Babies and infants, except for the most grossly retarded, show a style of life, and a desire and ability to learn, that in an older person we might well call genius. Hardly an adult in a thousand, or even ten thousand, could in any three years of his life learn as much, grow as much in his understanding of the world around him, as every infant learns and grows in his first three years. But what happens, as we get older, to this extraordinary capacity for learning?

What happens is that it is destroyed, and more than by any other one thing, by the process we misname education—a process that goes on in most homes and schools. We adults destroy most of the intellectual and creative capacity of children by the things we do to them or make them do. We destroy this capacity above all by making them afraid, afraid of not doing what other people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes, of failing, of being wrong. Thus we make them afraid to gamble, afraid to experiment, afraid to try the difficult and the unknown . . .

We destroy the disinterested love of learning in children which is so strong when they are small, by encouraging and compelling them to work for petty and contemptible rewards—gold stars, or papers marked 100 and tacked to the wall, or report cards, or

honor rolls, or dean's lists, or Phi Beta Kappa keys—in short, for the ignoble satisfaction of feeling that they are better than someone else . . .

In many ways, we break down children's conviction that things make sense, or their hope that things may prove to make sense. We do it, first of all, by breaking up life into arbitrary and disconnected hunks of subject matter, which we then try to "integrate" by artificial and irrelevant devices . . . Furthermore, we continually confront them with what is senseless, ambiguous, and contradictory; worse, we do it without knowing that we are doing it, so that, hearing nonsense shoved at them as if it were sense, they come to feel that the source of their confusion lies not in the material but in their own stupidity. Still further, we cut children off from their own common sense and the world of reality by requiring them to play with and shove around words and symbols that have little or no meaning to them . . .

We encourage children to act stupidly, not only by scaring and confusing them, but by boring them by filling up their days with dull, repetitive tasks that make little or no claim on their attention or demands on their intelligence . . . We tell ourselves that the drudgery, this endless busywork, is good preparation for life, and we fear that without it children would be hard to "control" . . . Why not give tasks that are interesting and demanding? Because, in schools where every task must be completed and every answer must be right, if we give children more demanding tasks they will be fearful and will instantly insist that we show them how to do the job . . . By such means children are firmly established in the habit of using only a small part of their thinking capacity. They feel that school is a place where they must spend most of their time doing dull tasks in a dull way. Before long they are deeply settled in a rut of unintelligent behavior from which most of them could not escape even if they wanted to.

This indictment (if true) is damning enough. But there is a still more important case to be made against traditional education, and one which should carry great weight with everyone concerned with the problem of creating law, order, justice, and peace in the world. It is that traditional education, sometimes inadvertently but often quite deliberately, denies children the kind of experiences that would help them grow up to be the kind of people who, being at peace with

themselves, are ready and eager to live at peace with other men.

Our efforts for peace are doomed to fail unless we understand that the root causes of war are not economic conflicts or language barriers or cultural differences but men—the kind of men who must have and will find scapegoats, legitimate targets for the disappointment, envy, fear, rage, and hatred that accumulates in their family lives. The man who hates or despises his work, his boss, his neighbors, and above all himself, will find a way to make some other man suffer and die for the sense of freedom, competence, dignity, and worth that he himself lacks. There will always be others to help him, political leaders ready to appeal to and make use of his unconscious but inexhaustible and insatiable desire to do harm.

The fundamental educational problem of our time is to find ways to help children grow into adults who have no wish to do harm. We must recognize that traditional education, far from having ever solved this problem, has never tried to solve it. Indeed, its efforts have, if anything, been in exactly the opposite direction. An important aim of traditional education has always been to make children into the kind of adults who were ready to hate and kill whoever their leaders might declare to be their enemies. But even those societies that did not set out to make their children war-like, jingoistic, xenophobic, ready to see every stranger as an enemy, have never tried to make them feel that the moral code that governed their relations with their neighbors reached out to include all of mankind.

The fact is that all the moral codes by which men have lived have contained an escape clause, sometimes implied, but often clearly stated. In one way or another these codes have said what our own Ten Commandments say—thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet, thou shalt not bear false witness, and so on. But then they add a footnote, that these rules only apply when you are talking about Us—Our Tribe, Our

Kingdom, Our Faith. When we start talking about Them, those people on the outside, strangers, heathen, unbelievers, then the moral code goes out the window, and everything is allowed. Lie, steal, cheat, kill, destroy, torture—nothing is too bad; in fact, the worse, the better.

Human society has never until now had to come to grips with the source of human evil-doing, which is the wish to do evil. It has been sufficient, until now, to control human behavior, to prevent most men from robbing, injuring, or killing their neighbors by threatening to punish them if they do, because if any man wanted badly enough to hurt other men, legitimate victims could always be found. The moral codes worked, at least fairly well, within their limited frames of reference, precisely because there always was an escape, there always were people whom it was all right to hate and injure as much as you wished. And mankind was able to afford the escape clause, was able to survive the killing and destruction of enemies that his moral codes allowed him, because, after all, his means of destruction were so limited, and because it took most of his time and energy just to keep himself alive. He might, like Caligula, dream that all mankind had but one head, so that he could chop it off, but the hard fact was that there were too many people for him to kill. He couldn't reach them all; he couldn't even afford to try; his warmaking machines fell apart of their own weight, and crushed and impoverished the societies on which they rested. His very impotence saved him from the consequences of his own malevolence.

But no more. Now every man can be a Caligula. The means to kill tens and hundreds of millions of people, even to destroy all life on earth, lie ready to hand. And cheap to boot. The man who does not value his own life, and hence feels that no life has value, may not be able to make Doomsday machines in his own basement, but with the vote, or even without it, he can get his governments to make them, and eventually to use them. We do not, in fact, need even this much

will to do evil, to accomplish the destruction of mankind. It is too late to talk of preventing foolish or wicked men from letting the Genie out of the bottle. He is already out, and it will take heroic efforts, supported by an undreamed-of willingness to risk, trust, and sacrifice, to get him back in, to collect and destroy all the weapons of mass destruction that have already been made, and to insure that no more such weapons will ever be made again. Those who are not ready and determined to do this job have only to hang back, to obstruct, to keep us going along as we are, to insure the end of the world.

Seen against this background and in this light, the argument of A. S. Neill of Summerhill, that the business of education is above all else to make happy people, must be acknowledged to be, not frivolous and sentimental, as its opponents claim, but in the highest degree serious, weighty, and to the point. For the sake of man's survival we must indeed learn to make happy people, people who will want and will be able to live lives that are full, meaningful, and joyous. We may be able to do more than this (though Neill feels this is enough), and perhaps we should; but we must do at least this much. If we can get wisdom, skill, and intelligence along with the happiness, and we probably can, as they tend to go together, so much the better; but the happiness we can no longer do without.

The word "happiness" is so generally abused and so little understood that it may be well to try to put this objective in clearer and sharper terms. Happiness is not game to be trapped, or a bird to be caught in a net. It does not come when we beckon, or even when we pray. There is no formula for it, no sure recipe; we cannot bake it like a cake. The most we can say is that there are elements or ingredients of life, in the presence of which happiness may be found very often, and in the absence of which it is rarely to be found at all.

There can be a great variety of happy persons, living in a great variety of circumstances, but about them a few things will almost always be

true. The happy person has a strong sense of his own aliveness; his senses are keen, or at least he rejoices in them and makes full use of them. He is not dead to the world about him. He does not seek happiness in escape and forgetfulness; he is alive and aware, and moves toward life. Also, he has a strong sense of his own unique identity; he is himself, and not someone else, and not like anyone else; he has his own very particular ideas and opinions, and tastes, and skills, and pleasures, that no change in his circumstances can take from him. He is not a mass man, who has to be told who he is; he knows. Most important of all, he has a strong sense of his own dignity, competence, and worth. He may value the good opinion of others, but he does not need it or depend on it. For he knows, despite his many faults and weaknesses, that he is a creature worthy of affection and respect, and that, in however tiny a degree, the world is a different and probably better place for his being in it.

Only a rare child could possibly survive conventional schooling feeling this way about himself. That it happens at all, as it occasionally does, proves how tough and resilient children can be. For, in their schooling, they are quickly cut off from the world, and their senses, and their common sense, and made to live in a world of dead and meaningless words and symbols. They are given almost no time or opportunity to satisfy their curiosity, to explore and discover, to study and learn what interests them most, to develop their own talents and tastes, to find out what they like, and care about, and love. They are not given the chance to become a unique person, far less find out who and what that person is. On the contrary, they are herded into school situations where they are expected to do and think what everyone else is doing and thinking. They are encouraged at every turn to get their identity from outside, to think that they are only what others think and say they are—a good (or bad) child, an able (or dull) student, a popular (or unpopular) teen-ager. Whatever is unique in them is scarcely acknowledged, much less valued.

Children are above all else demeaned and degraded by being subject for so long to the feeble, wavering, capricious, arbitrary, and aimless tyranny of their elders. Submission to authority is not always or necessarily degrading. We are not lessened in our own eyes by having to do the bidding of someone we know to be our superior; thus musicians, for example, felt it an honor to submit to the tyranny of Toscanini. We can even obey the orders of lesser men, and suffer indignities at their hands, when we know it is done in a good cause. Thus the otherwise cruel and silly lives of the boys in Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* took some meaning and dignity from their awareness of the far-off existence of a world that demanded, and needed, and would one day use and honor the very best they had in them. Children could very probably submit, without feeling resentment or suffering harm, to a strict and even harsh adult tyranny, if they could believe that the adults knew what they were doing, and that the grown-up world they were being prepared to enter made sense and had some stability and purpose. But what child of today can believe this, when twelve, ten, even six year olds talk, and think, and dream of the end of the world, when little children say, as I have heard them say, not "when I grow up," but "if I grow up"?

To have most of your life controlled by people who are so clearly not your superiors in anything except age, size, and power, and who are so far from being able to manage their own lives, is a continuing indignity that cannot but destroy, as it does, most of the self-respect of the children who undergo it. As it destroys their self-respect, it destroys their respect for other men, and forces them to try to find a sense of being and worth in one of the collective identities, (be it teen-age gang or nation state) that have throughout history been the great agents of human evildoing, and that today stand solidly in the way of peace and brotherhood.

If we want to have peace in the world, there are many things we must do. Not the least of

them is to give our children, at home and in school, what most of them do not now have—freedom, dignity, and respect. It is not a moment too early to begin.

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FRONTIERS

A Case for Nonviolent Peacekeeping

DURING the seventeen years the Selective Service Act of 1948 has been in effect there have been at least about 400 convictions of conscientious objectors who have refused to comply with it. A goodly number of these draft refusers had taken the step of destroying their draft card or returning it to the Selective Service System. Such a step has almost inevitably precipitated, after several months of red tape, a "delinquency" announcement from Selective Service, followed by an order to report for induction into the Army.

Several years ago a number of Oberlin College students renounced their draft cards. Soon thereafter, in April of 1961, Karl Meyer of the San Francisco-to-Moscow Walk team made an outdoor speech at Oberlin encouraging other students to follow that lead. As it happened, on the evening before this fine anti-conscription speech I had joined the Peace Walkers in order to ask them questions.

And, lo and behold, on the afternoon following Mr. Meyer's speech I found myself dispatching my own draft card and feeling wonderfully liberated. A month or two later, at Polaris Action in Connecticut, I was told by Dick Zink (who in 1960 had boarded Polaris submarines in civil disobedience) that he also had mailed in his draft card as a result of Mr. Meyer's speech.

As I prepare these pages it is June 24, 1965. Yesterday I was released from the federal prison at Danbury, having served three years there and at Springfield, Missouri due to my draft refusal. For a CO to be behind bars so long is rare, but to me it was well worth it. Today I am back at Polaris Action Farm in Voluntown, Connecticut and settling down for a long stay.

Since my 1961 encounter with the dynamic San Francisco-to-Moscow Walk for Peace, the

pacifist commitment it implanted in me has both deepened and grown better informed. It is a humanist commitment rather than religious, and more personal than impersonal. My determination to never kill a human being and to withdraw my support from social institutions which do so is based upon the discovery that there are qualities in every person which are of immeasurable value. Of immeasurable value to whom? To me.

Beyond (and above) personal pacifism there lies a social problem which has preoccupied much of my thought since I first encountered the radical methods and message of Gandhian nonviolence. Namely, how might we begin working toward Nonviolent Resistance Corps which could largely solve the "defense problem" and thus undermine militarism? Peace Walks and other direct-action projects launched by such groups as the Committee for Nonviolent Action try to act as white corpuscles within our diseased body social. So also, from a more conventional political viewpoint, do peace campaigns which eschew direct action. Both types of work are good, but even now in a period during which they are co-existing with minimum friction, can they alone be considered sufficient?

The body social is indeed desperately sick, yet, like Toynbee, I would not be inclined as of now to diagnose its maladies as definitely terminal. I would agree with Toynbee that our "Western Society" (within which he includes the Soviet Union) has apparently been "broken down" since World War I, but that nonetheless there can be a fruitful and perhaps centuries-long future ahead for it if a constitutional world order can be established in place of the present world anarchy based upon national sovereignty. And I would go beyond Toynbee's analysis to say that our Society's future could perhaps be uniquely significant for the future of mankind as a whole if the new forces of Gandhian political nonviolence manage to rise to that challenge which is labeled "the strategic defense of peoples."

The Selective Service Act offers the possibility of "alternative service" to religiously-oriented conscientious objectors—and in practice to some non-religious COs as well. It was because of an abhorrence of conscription in any form that I personally chose to be a non-cooperator, but it was also because I think it has been a mistake on the part of most pacifists in earlier decades to largely ignore the problem of defense. I wish to emphasize that the rejection of the idea of "alternative service" as well as of military service does not imply that one considers efforts on behalf of social development and the like to be misguided. In fact, such work undertaken as "alternative service" can undoubtedly be just as beneficial in *shrinking* the defense problems of our own and other countries as would be voluntary service by the same individuals. But if these young men do not emphatically reject the principle of conscription, who will? And if they do not aggressively take on the challenge of developing pilot programs for national defense through nonviolent resistance, who will?

Without implying that any possible political future for the world could be a Rimbaudian "Christmas on Earth," I think common sense requires that the formulas of Toynbee and so many others for world peace through world law be enriched—undergirded might be a better term—by programs for nonviolent peacekeeping and nonviolent defense. World peace through world law might well be temporarily achieved in the wake of mere multilateral disarmament, but could we expect this achievement to be anything but temporary and precarious so long as present concepts of defense prevail? The blithe substitution of the term "international law enforcement" in place of "defense" or "war" would not alter the underlying nature of the world's political problems.

Thus, in my opinion, what is crucially needed, coincident with progress in the direction of world law, is the development and concrete

implementation of one or more formulas for the defense of peoples which meets these three criteria:

(a) decentralization of authority (as opposed to a world deterrent, a world army, or a world police authority);

(b) extensive civilian participation (on a voluntary basis);

(c) nonviolence (implying both rejection of violent techniques and the use of dynamic nonviolent techniques, and incidentally ruling out automatically the possibility of strategic offensive, as opposed to defensive, action).

To date, not a single country of the world has even an experimental Nonviolent Resistance Corps. However, non-governmental or semi-governmental pilot projects should be within the realm of possibility in the foreseeable future if we become determined to work toward them. Also UN projects concerned with nonviolent peacekeeping.

And as a final point I would like to be more specifically personal. Few types of activity could be considered less rewarding than strict training programs, not to mention the frustrations involved in the work of agitation such as must come first when nonviolent defense is chosen as a goal. We cannot suggest to prospective co-workers that the prospectus is attractive—it is unattractive, but crucial. And I personally have long felt that not until the challenge of creating true defense is actively being met should I allow myself the pleasure of devoting what might then remain of my life to unencumbered Constructive Program.

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