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THE DENATURIZATION OF HUMAN NATURE

THE 1960's were distinguished, among other respects, by a series of best-selling books which began with *African Genesis*, by Robert Ardrey, published in 1961. Something in this work caught the popular fancy, and it rocketed through seventeen printings. Publishing houses are not oblivious to intellectual fashions. In the years since, we have had six printings of *The Naked Ape*, by Desmond Morris; eight printings of *On Aggression*, by Konrad Lorenz; Ardrey has succeeded himself with *The Territorial Imperative;* Morris has succeeded himself with *The Human Zoo;* there have been dozens of other workings of the same lodes.

Despite considerable differences in the backgrounds of the authors, and disparities in emphasis and tone, this cycle of books has in common certain basic assumptions which, it would seem, may fairly be summarized as follows.

First: All posit that man is limited, "programmed," imprisoned by his animal heritage. The sometime British gerontologist, novelist, and lyricist, Sir Alex Comfort, in a book entitled *Nature and Human Nature,* pursues this doctrine further than most, to assert that man "carries with him . . . heirlooms" not only from butterflies, boring beetles and baboons, but also "from his inorganic . . . past."

Second: All these works assume that the doctrine of instincts applies equally well to man, apes, reptiles, birds, fish, and insects, although some hedge with the term "drives," and Ardrey employs the contradiction-in-terms "open-ended instincts."

Third: All imply, and some state flatly, that not only is man *not* superior to other animals as he frequently flatters himself: he is lower than they—he is more bestial than any beast—in his sexual promiscuity, and even more particularly in his predatoriness and pugnacity. As Ardrey has it, he is a killer ape.

Fourth: "Liberal optimism" and "romantic fallacies"—which is to say, any viewpoints to the contrary are bootless or worse than bootless. The only hope for man lies in abandoning his deluded efforts to be decent, rational, just, and merciful and embracing the fact he is inherently irrational and murderous. The details of how this might work in practice are understandably vague, but apparently wars and race hatreds would end if men were no longer repressed in their instinctual desires to vent their bloodlust on objects closer to hand: parents, perhaps; or wives.

Fifth: These books, however, do not strip man of quite all his human qualities. He is left with a few darker, neurotic characteristics. And then, in a grand, final paradox, the bolder of the New Biologists impute these "human" attributes to other animals, just as they have already assigned "animal" attributes to man. This doctrine is articulated; for example, in *The Soul of the Ape,* by Eugene Marais, published posthumously with a "glowing introduction" by Ardrey. Marais argued that chacma baboons suffer from "hesperian depression" and use intoxicants to escape from "the pain of consciousness." Thus, in the end, man is denied even his neuroses as distinguishing qualities, and left with no peculiarly human nature at all.

There will be no attempt here to review these propositions systematically—or the very long, very old controversy over nature and nurture of which they are only one manifestation. Suffice it here to say that just because a Viennese ornithologist, a Transvaal lawyer, a British botanist, and an American playwright asseverate that men are more animalistic than apes, and apes more human than men, does not necessarily mean

that these asseverations are true. Many alternative propositions are available, and they are not without their own forms of evidence, and advocators. The very process of reviewing alternatives, for example, and choosing deliberately between them, is wholly inexplicable in terms of instinctivism, or any other form of reductionist psychology or anthropology.

Perhaps one may dismiss Sartre as a mere philosopher when he contends man is by nature free and there is no exit from his freedom. ~ Perhaps one may dismiss Buber as mere Hassidic humanist when he writes:

> Man is not a centaur, he is man through and through. He can be understood only when one knows, on the one hand, that there is something in all that is human including thought which belongs to the general nature of living creatures, and is to be grasped from this nature, while knowing, on the other hand, that there is no human quality which belongs fully to the general nature of living creatures and is to be grasped exclusively from it. Even man's hunger is not an animal's hunger. . . .

Perhaps, too, one might choose to dismiss Maslow and the whole emergent field of "third force," existential, or humanistic psychology as too soft-hearted and optimistic for one's taste. But one would then still have to argue with Ashley Montagu, who first achieved eminence as a tough-minded natural scientist, colleague of Julian Huxley's, and observer of the "culture" of wild birds, who reached the mature conclusion that there is a quantum jump from other species to *Homo sapiens.* And one would have to argue with the even tougher-minded Nobel Prize-winning geneticist, Joshua Lederberg, who states that he has yet to find any evidence in his studies for the inheritance of human behavioral characteristics, and specifically repudiates the doctrine of the innate depravity of man. And one would have to argue with the five-and-a-half-year-old girl who recently told me, in the wisdom of her years, "People are better than cats, because people have a sense of humor and cats don't."

For the sake of discussion, let us say that all the evidence is inconclusive, that the old "heredity vs. environment" controversy is still open, and that the final answer on the nature of human nature (or, for that matter, animal nature) is not yet vouchsafed us. Let us turn, instead, to a question which is scarcely less intriguing, but very much more modest in scope and approachable in method: why do people choose to embrace one theory about their own natures, as against others which are at least as plausible, when they have a choice?

Why did the "killer ape" books sell hundreds of thousands of copies, while Fromm's *Revolution of Hope,* for example, sold only a few thousand? Why did fashion change so drastically from the 1950's, when the non-fiction best-sellers were *Kids Say the Darndest Things* by Art Linkletter, *Twixt Twelve and Twenty* by Pat Boone, and *Only in America* by Harry Golden, to works of profound helplessness and hopelessness, pointing toward human extinction, and indeed denying that man has ever existed as man at all?

We have available to us now, more than people have ever had available to them before, a wealth of hypotheses about who we are, and where we are going, and where we should be going, and why. Never before have men had such a plenitude of possibilities among which to choose. Why have so many of them chosen to think they are unthinking brutes? Why, particularly, have people who buy and read books—the best-educated, most privileged people who have ever lived in this world—used their very freedom to deny that they are free?

There used to be a sub-discipline called the Sociology of Knowledge, which addressed such questions as these, before sociology itself became a reductionistic science. Because the Sociology of Knowledge relied on insight, which is no longer an accepted method, and did not lend itself to the statistical survey, almost the only recognized method today, it apparently no longer has any academic standing. But if sociologists will not

touch the important sociological questions, then someone else must, for they are vital questions.

Here is one interpretation of the fact that a great many literate persons, during this particular period of time, in this particular social-cultural-economic-political setting, have chosen to believe a radically dehumanizing body of conjecture about their own natures: man does not yet feel entirely comfortable with his distinctive condition, shorn of the instinctual gyroscopes which guide other species through most of their existence. Man does not yet feel altogether at ease with the requirement that he has to decide for himself what he is going to eat, what he shall wear, if anything, and every other event in his life, from the most trivial to the most momentous. Man does not yet feel secure with his great feelings of love, or with the f act he has a sense of honor, sense of history, and sense of humor that are better than a cat's. He has, after all, had only a short time to grow accustomed to such characteristics. Perhaps, when all the evidence is in, it will prove to have been only a few tens of thousands of years.

The necessity to review alternatives and make choices, moment by moment, day by day, year by year, often seems wearisome. The more alternatives there are, and the more information one has about each, the more onerous it is to make decisions. Sometimes it grows agonizing, and sometimes it seems next to impossible. How much easier to let someone else make the choices! How alluring, how beguiling, how tempting to search for some force, some agency exterior to ourselves, to blame when a decision turns out to be mistaken!

Probably the most notorious example, within living memory, of man's temptation to avoid the burdens of choice and responsibility was the willingness of most of the German people to turn over their decision-making to Hitler. But no culture yet devised, including our own, has proved immune to this temptation—particularly in times of crisis, which is but another way of saying times when decision-making becomes most difficult.

Thus, for example, the vogue of Freudianism in our society cannot be explained wholly in terms of the intrinsic merits of the doctrine itself. The doctrine is full of inadequacies: demonstrable realities which it cannot explain, and elaborate reification of theoretical constructs which have no existence in fact. But Freudianism happened to become widely available at a time when old verities were crumbling, young people were alienated and restless, older people were confused—a time, during and after the first World War, not unlike our own.

How comforting it was to be able to buy absolution from the new priesthood of psychoanalysis: absolution from the pain of freedom and its attendant responsibilities. How comforting to be able to blame everything on a universal scenario in which no actor was accountable for his acts: boys couldn't help having problems because they couldn't help wanting to go to bed with their mothers, and kill their fathers, and all the rest of it.

As America, and Western Civilization generally, lost faith in their own reasonableness and goodness, Freudianism was by no means the only suitor for displaced *amor proprio.* Many other candidate theories entered the lists and had greater or lesser success in jousting for the favor of man's self-doubt and disillusionment. McDougall and his school of instinctivism anticipated the New Biologists by fifty years. Terman and the psychometrists reduced everything to I.Q. and other standardized tests. Kretschmer and the somatotypologists had their day. Hooton and the eugenicist-racists had their day. And not only did Watson and the stimulus-response behaviorists have their day—their day is not done. More psychologists are probably still committed to that form of determinism than to any other.

But none of those doctrines has really solved or absolved anything or anyone. The world seems to be falling apart, worse than ever. Nothing we do seems to go right. If we discipline our

children, as the behaviorists say we should, they run away from home and take to drugs and the gutter. If we indulge them, they do the same things under our very eyes. The more we give rebellious students, the more they seem to rebel. The more concern we turn to the situation of the poor, and racial and ethnic minorities, the more "ungrateful" and "demanding" these groups seem to grow. And hanging over everything, constantly, is the doomsday machine. We feel ourselves crushed by questions which have no answers, by problems which do not retreat before our best efforts to approach them with reason, decency, and generosity. Nothing seems logical or fair, as we have traditionally reckoned logic and fairness.

So a lot of us are giving up. We are yielding to the old temptation. We are looking for a way to flee to some womb, some cradle, some person, or organization, or theory, which will murmur to us, sweet and low, "There, there. Don't worry. It's none of your doing. It's not your fault. It's out of your hands."

Something of this sort must account for the spectacle of otherwise rational people turning to astrology. The vulgarized modern version of astrology offers the completely logic-tight alibi. If one has an unchecked temper, is a miser, is unfaithful to his wife, or whatever, he is blameless. He was born under the sign of Scorpio, when the moon was in the seventh house of Venus, and so forth. The understanding of Shakespeare is now stood on its head: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in ourselves, but in our stars, that we are underlings."

Others are finding solace in equally superficial versions of Eastern philosophies which are taken to mean there is no good or evil, all questing is futile, everything on earth must be accepted just as it is. There are many other closed systems from which one may choose. Cybernetics, to name an example which is relatively "respectable" intellectually. Scientology, to name one which is not. The old warhorse, Marxism, is still available to those who find it reassuring to be able to refer every human question (including evolution) to a class struggle.

And now comes the so-called New Biology, offering to grant surcease from the cares of being human. But for all the colorful new phraseology in which it may be couched, it is actually another tired warhorse, far older than Marxism, Freudianism, or Pavlovianism. Man's efforts to link himself with other animals have been very common throughout history—as they no doubt were in prehistory—being elevated to the status of religion in many cultures. This effort received its greatest intellectual impetus from *The Origin of Species* in 1859. Or, rather, from neoDarwinists who came later, and believed they could serve their mentor best by extending his ideas to all things, biological and social. Darwin himself was too much a scientist, and too much a human being, to claim that the processes he postulated in other species were necessarily binding upon the one species conscious of itself.

The terminology is different; the new biological determinists call themselves Ethologists. The evidence grows more sophisticated, as more fossils are unearthed in Tanzania and the Transvaal. But, at bottom, the appeal is the same as that advanced by other dehumanists at other times in other places: you had best jettison that sentimental nonsense about free will, and get in step with your biologically ordained destiny. You are only a very intricate machine, and by trying to be something more, you are just short-circuiting your computer program, and making yourself miserable.

Are Jews and Arabs locked in a death struggle, which may turn into World War III? Is that what's troubling you? Forget it. They are only doing what comes naturally—acting out the territorial imperative. Worried about the conflict between communism and capitalism? Forget it. Worried about a dehumanizing job, a dehumanizing marriage, a dehumanizing education? Forget it. None of these is a

biological problem and therefore none of them is real. Since there is no such thing as humanization, there can be no such thing as dehumanization.

Because such a world-view makes everything so simple and undemanding, it is a very attractive escape route for large numbers of people. But its vogue will be brief, and all but the truest true believers will soon be looking for other approaches to the problems of being human, for two good and sufficient reasons. First, because doctrines of biological determinism, applied intact to man, are false: all are helpless to account for the overwhelming evidence which anyone can see for himself by looking inward upon the rich, unpredictable, unending dialogue which takes place within himself, and within every healthy human being, during virtually every waking moment. There is no way man can turn off his brain, and plug into an instinct-board or any other kind of equipment which will dictate his actions. Every moment is a decision; the sum total of those decisions is a life. If a man acts selfishly, cruelly, aggressively, it is not because any black gene, or any misanthropic molecules wandering through his central nervous system, compel him to; it is because he has chosen to do so. If he acts lovingly, it is because he has chosen to do that.

Secondly, all the fads and fashions which are momentarily enticing because they seem to sanction the denial of responsibility—all the literature of "the diminishment of man," as Archibald MacLeish called it in his Founder's Day address at the University of California last year—all this will falter and fail, not only because it is false, but because it is so unpleasurable and unsatisfying. There is another side to freedom and responsibility, thought and will and choice, besides the terror and pain of it. Sometimes one is bound to choose badly, no doubt, but in any lifetime one will sometimes surely choose well, too. And therein the unique human joy, and the unique human glory. No comfort which any dogma may confer can compare with the oceanic feeling of accomplishing something innovative and distinctive; of making a difference, even a small difference, through one's personal efforts; of holding fast to one's own craggy integrity; of disbelieving when everyone else believes if that is what one truly feels; of believing when everyone else disbelieves, if that is necessary to keep faith with one's self. In short, no form of determinism has ever offered or will ever offer any reward great enough to compensate for the loss of being a real person.

The "killer ape" and other reductionist theories will pass. More adequate, more humane, and therefore more satisfying alternatives will be selected from the great smorgasbord of ideas, hypotheses, theories, which make this such an unprecedentedly exciting time to live—a time in which the perils are exceeded only by the possibilities.

However he may try to distract or suppress it, man has an ineradicable hunger for authenticity, an itch to use the capacities which are his alone. Since he is capable of oceanic feelings, capable of creative thought, capable of becoming an autonomous individual, capable of changing; he can never be reconciled with his own deepest yearnings unless he feels those feelings, thinks those thoughts, becomes that unique being, and then goes on to surpass himself.

Nostrums which promise relief from the burdens of uncertainty and openness, give only fleeting relief at best. Then the itch to be human begins again.

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REVIEW
LEAPS AND LETHARGIES

ONCE upon a time there was a Past which was father to the Present, and of which the Future will be the grandchild. What we know of ourselves seems in large part the result of *differences* between the past and the present, and what we do not know about ourselves may involve some changeless and continuing reality in human beings, of which we have made little effort to become aware, and out of which, in time, the future will have to be constructed. Meanwhile, quite plainly, the differences are what impress us most.

What, indeed, is a "modern" man? He is a man who cannot believe in overheard, transmitted, or secondhand truth. For internal as well as external or historical reasons, he is born—condemned?—to the condition of having to question all that he has not found out for himself. So, for truthful men, there is the terrorism of the manifest inadequacy of what they feel they really know. The agony of being modern arises out of the tension of having to know, but not being able to. Whatever is excellent in the works of modern men comes from the capacity to live with this paradox as the unavoidable condition of human life.

But how was the past, from which the present is so different, constituted? Briefly, we could say that in the classic past the outward condition of man gave dependable evidence of inward grace. Men in the role of nobility were noble. Rulers and administrators were wise. Power and responsibility were inseparably joined. The structure of society reflected, as in the Elizabethan World-view, the wonderful linkings of the great Chain of Being which sustains all nature and the visible world. Station and degree defined excellences worthy of trust; duties were divided, realizations graded, and deep contentment was possible in lowly as in the most majestic tasks.

The world, according to this view, was under a benign and sagacious management, and trusting docility shaped the virtue of all save the heroic few. And those few—who were they? Call them Promethean rebels, self-reliant mystics, daring sages faithful to an order laid up in heaven, who moved mysteriously, spoke cryptically of transcendent realms, and hid their secrets in the obscurities of allegory and myth. Well, this idealizing account of the past may have in it more myth than reality, yet we find it in some sense irresistible, since we preserve it well, starting with the tales told to children, and in the confirming repetitions of conscious art. So survives in the modern age the longing for trust and nurture in a world where we are not *absolutely alone*.

What is it, again, to be "modern"? It is to resist with all the vigor of our once-born integrity the awful prediction of Ulysses, when he speaks, in *Troilus and Cressido*, of what must happen when "degree is shak'd." It is to announce that no man has definition from any "higher authority" than himself, to link hidden knowledge with infamy, and heroism with ravaging conquest of nature, until there are no secrets left and the world is under a new management, ruled by men who have converted natural fact into "public truth." It is also to believe that there can be achievement without sacrifice, certainty without ambiguity, and acquisition without obligation. Warnings from the discredited past are met by the simple question, "Why not?"

This externalization of the idea of knowledge withdrew support from all the old "moralities" and conceptions of a natural law as the reflection of a higher truth. It also made ridiculous the hints of ancient sages that those who dare to reach beyond the limitations of conventional authority are likely to experience ultimate dilemmas—to be confronted by dragons or lost in trackless wastes. How could men who utterly disbelieved in an inner life find meaning in the mystical tradition of the "dark night of the soul"? Yet it is this same modern man who is now filled with moral apprehensions. Dragons, after all, are protean creatures, quite equal to embodiment in subjective

desperations, while the "wastes" the modern age has in the making creep into visible existence all about. The bold creators of the brave new world have neglected the hidden laws and being-needs of Nature, their host, and the *broken* rules for discovering and using secrets are now objectified before our eyes.

Meanwhile, there are many signs of the inversion of the original "modern" intent. Note, for example, that in this age of scientific certainty and equalitarian morality, a great many people—perhaps the majority—have become nearly adjusted to timid reliance on various castes of experts who cannot possibly deliver what is expected of them! Not strength and sturdy self-confidence, but passivity and waiting are the attributes of our "mass society," in close resemblance to certain ancient civilizations in decline. Whitecollar *fellaheen* are no longer unimaginable. Writing in the *Saturday Review* for Dec. 2, 1967, René Dubos spoke of the psychological effects of relying on scientific "magic":

> Many unwarranted promissory notes relate to such supposedly practical matters as a robot maid that will take care of kitchen work, a vaccine against dental caries, or perfect control of the weather (these are actual examples of claims made by scientists before Congressional appropriation committees). Other extravagant claims refer to nonpractical matters that have a spectacular appeal; for example the imminence of the chemical synthesis of life or the possibility of communication with mysterious creatures assumed to populate celestial bodies.
>
> Promissory notes are dangerous because they encourage a lazy acceptance on the part of the public of the belief that scientists can solve all the problems of the modern world by inventing new technologies and counter technologies. One need not worry about cigarette smoking because *they* (the scientists) will discover a cure for lung cancer; or about environmental pollution because *they* will find a way to dean the air of our cities and the water of our streams and lakes or about overpopulation because *they* will invent new kinds of food and ways of settling people on the moon or on the floor of the oceans.

Evident in this disdain for the use of individual intelligence, for personal control and self-restraint, is the popularity of false *total* certainties—in this instance scientific infallibility—as replacement for the imperfect wisdom, the incomplete but nonetheless reliable knowledge, that we already have. There is obvious vulnerability in human nature to the appeal of spurious absolutes, to the promise of effortless perfections, and it matters hardly at all whether these miracles are promised by the supernaturalism of theology or the super-naturalism of scientific alchemists. The only difference is in the language and the clothes of the wonder-workers.

So, quite naturally, the high pretensions of modern man—his insistence on knowing for himself, his belief in equality, his confidence in experiment and his boast of having firsthand knowledge, his ethical claims and representations—are being subjected to ultimate testing. Not the secret questing of the mystic or the would-be sage, but the precipitating results of the misuse of natural forces are bringing out into the open what can only be called the verdict of Nature. What happens to people who, impatient of drudgery and tiresome labors, refuse to practice the certainties they know, will not do what they can, reject limited wisdom because it isn't *perfect?* J. B. Priestley speaks of this in simple counsels in a recent article (reprinted in the *San Francisco Examiner* for March 1):

> Let us look first at the . . . left, showing us so many young rebels. Suddenly they discovered that they had been told a lot of thumping great lies. All that stuff about America they had been handed out was just a load of bull—Americans weren't better than other people, they were mostly much worse; they were in no position to teach other people anything except advanced and dangerously suspect technology. It is now time the U.S. started all over again and did much better. This is more or less what they think, and really, much more important, what they feel.
>
> Now many of us over here are not at all out of sympathy with these disillusioned young Americans. We also dislike the society they dislike. We are

> wearily contemptuous of its self-glorification. Nevertheless, I for one think a lot of these youngsters go too far in utterly rejecting the American idea, the big dream. Because some of its claims are fraudulent, there is a danger that the rebels may destroy what remains good and true in it.
>
> One example will show what I mean. There still exists in America, very much to its credit, a tradition of free speech. Too many young protesters clearly no longer believe in free speech, being ready to howl down any speaker who happens to disagree with them. Once in power, they could create the very conditions that drove so many spirited men and women from Europe to America.

Then, after some comment on the heresy hunting pursued by far-rightists, he adds:

> This psychological situation, making any mature integration Impossible, not only encourages instant anger, always a bad sign, but also, like an evil spell, can freeze men not utterly brainless into rigid stupidity. Alternatively, more sensitive and neurotic types, refusing to recognize what is there in the dark of their minds, quietly go mad, when they may still be making decisions that affect the whole country, perhaps the whole world.

All this, as we see, has little to do with scientific knowledge, and reflects nothing of the social ideals of the eighteenth century. Coming to the fore are rather subterranean forces of unleashed emotional absolutism, of demand for total solutions, for which only magic and miracle can provide the means.

In our day every man wants to be king—to wear the purple—and is that not, after all, the meaning and promise of democracy? But before democracy becomes—or can become—possible, there is need for every man to begin to behave with kingly responsibility. The law of universal obligation applies now to man's nature as much as it did in past times of fixed degree and classic, hierarchical rule. Can this be the unchanging part of who and what we are?

COMMENTARY
KEEPING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

IN *The Tradition of the New* (McGraw-Hill, 1965), Harold Rosenberg devotes a chapter to the distortions by popularizers of the contributions of great men. The founder of a method or a scientific view has little or no control over what later "professionals" do with and to his work. "He is doomed," Rosenberg says, "by the very processes through which his work reaches society." Further:

> The larger the part played by his creation in the profession the less need there is to understand it, and the greater grows the distance between his idea and the influence exerted by his work. The more widely he is known to the public the greater the misinterpretation and fantasy built upon his name and the greater the distance between himself and his social existence.

It is easy to support this analysis. Newton, for example, was no mechanist. He knew and pointed out that "Gravitation" was a description and not a *cause* of the motion of the planets. Freud was no believer in uninhibited expression of sexual impulses. "Sublimation" is his word. Marx was at least ambiguous in his contentions and the early Marx was in the main a Renaissance Man. Darwin did not apply the same law of the survival of the fittest to both animals and man.

Darwin's view of the human struggle for existence, as Henry Anderson suggests (see page 7), was very different from that of the neo-Darwinists. In a letter to Alfred Russel Wallace (1864), Darwin said:

> . . . your paper on "Man" . . . is really admirable; but you ought not . . . to speak of the theory as mine; it is just as much yours as mine. One correspondent has already noticed to me your "high-minded" conduct on this head. But now for your Man paper, about which I should like to write more than I can. The great leading idea is quite new to me, *viz.* that during late ages, the mind will have to be modified more than the body; yet I had got as far as to see with you that the struggle between the races of man depended entirely on intellectual and *moral* qualities.

It is not that the original intent of these influential men should be taken as "authoritative," but that when their work is used in either education or polemics, their basic philosophical positions ought not to be ignored or reversed, for the purposes of over-simplifying mass persuasion. As Mr. Rosenberg has said:

> A work not made for but "sold" to the totality of the public would be a work totally taken away from its creator and totally falsified.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE EDUCATIONAL CONTRACT

IN the book quoted here last week, Northrop Frye develops the contrast between the commitments involved in the Social Contract and those implied by what he calls the Educational Contract. In becoming parties to the Social Contract, people grant authority and specific powers to the State, in behalf of the common good. The Educational Contract calls for recognition of the authority of intelligence and involves willing submission to *reason.* The end of the Social Contract is social order, but the end of the Educational Contract is capacity for self-rule. As shown by last week's quotations from Northrop Frye, the Educational Contract is the enduring content of Plato's *Republic.*

In a brief essay, "Toward the Separation of School and State," published in the (Columbia) *Teachers College Record* for October, 1968, Robert Oliver, a scholar in the history of ideas, applies insights based on the *Crito* to reach virtually the same conclusion. This writer sees the present turmoil in education as part of a vast movement away from the domination of human affairs by the State, and toward recognition of the prior authority of the terms of the Educational Contract. Mr. Oliver shows how present use may be made of Plato's thought, bringing clarifying meaning to the apparent chaos of current events. He begins by pointing to the fact of the progressive withdrawal of moral support from State power:

> . . . the saga of the state is now ended. Future history will record how the leadership of the state was eclipsed by that of culture as it is embodied in the school, the university, and the media of communication. Throughout the industrialized world the state has nearly fulfilled its function, rationalizing the political, economic, and social environment of its citizens. Now, innumerable persons perceive that culture, conservation, and education are the dynamic side of life, and they look to intellectual institutions for solutions to the palpable problems that they experience. Great changes are therefore under way.

It will be said, of course, that educational institutions have been directly or indirectly shaped by the State—that, indeed, they have been compromised and even mutilated by political influence and this seems clear enough. Yet we must hear Mr. Oliver out. He turns now to Plato:

> In the *Crito* Socrates explained the inner workings of such shifts in expectation and commitment. Recall that the issue was whether Socrates should desert his city in order to save his life or submit to the Athenians' death sentence in order to uphold his chosen way of life. In deciding for the latter commitment exemplifying man's responsibility towards his laws, Socrates found that the laws could justly demand the ultimate sacrifice from a man because they had been his educators. A man who, in good times, had let his innermost character be molded by the established ways of the city, had no right to reject those ways in the face of deadly demands. Note, however: the whole force of this argument depends upon the recognition by each person that certain principles had been his educators, that by means of these he has defined the very essence of his being. The Socratic argument does not justify slavish acquiescence to the powers that be, no questions asked previously, Socrates had risked his life by refusing to execute a command by the thirty tyrants that he considered illegal. The Socratic argument is more profound; it explains why at certain times certain principles merit unswerving allegiance and why at other times other principles deserve the deepest scorn. One can be a Platonist and still believe in the right to rebel, namely to rebel against those principles that fail to educate. Herein lies the growing debility of the state.

What Mr. Oliver calls "the growing debility of the state" is hardly arguable. Yet using the *Crito* as background for reaching this position has a deeply educational purpose, since, in a time of changing loyalties, no casual or easy decision can be responsible. The ruling principle must always be the affirmation of a larger loyalty, a more far-reaching duty, and it is frivolous to exchange a practical responsibility for one that is merely rhetorical. This writer now turns to the environmental framework of choice:

> Ineluctably, the face of the future will be different because a revolution of declining expectations is emasculating the industrialized nation-states. More and more youths simply are not finding economic well-being, political stability, and social security to be significant goals for personal aspiration. They do not find the principles that promise to provide for these objectives to be educative, without more ado they are transferring their drive to other matters; and hence the scions of the established order find that this turn towards allegiance to other principles is a manifestation of mere anarchy. In truth, it is something far more significant. Youths are moved by intimate problems; they are concerned with the quality of their human relationships, with the difficulty of reconciling their deeds with their beliefs. Candide symbolizes the outlook of many; they have seen the folly of man's efforts to reform the world; and, as each seeks out "his thing," they echo Voltaire's conviction that a man had best cultivate his own garden.

Mr. Oliver finds behind all this longing, struggle, disaffiliation, and improvisation an assertion of the validity of the Educational Contract. Schools which are creatures of the State are no place to fulfill it:

> In a post-industrial world, men will find that the political economic, and social principles of the state have less and less to do with their personal education and that the cultural principles of the school are increasingly crucial to their pursuit of a good life. In the face of this situation, there is a silly complacency in high places. The restlessness of youth, which is present throughout the West, is not a passing fad; and it will not be placated by citing the material boons that industrialism offered previous generations, it will not be suppressed by the police, and it will not be superseded by a less "nihilistic," more "respectable" movement. Even the restless young are not really yet aware of how great an historic cause they represent.
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> Everywhere the restlessness centers significantly on the university. In Italy, France, Germany, Japan, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Spain, Latin America, Canada, and the United States diverse movements of students and intellectuals share one common conviction: *educational and cultural policy should cease to be made to suit the political and economic priorities of the state.* Increasingly, people believe that culture, not politics, commands their allegiance, and that intellectual institutions possess an independent sovereignty that has priority over the state.

Mr. Oliver now voices a prophetic optimism which some readers may not feel is justified—but, justifiably or not, what he predicts seems the only thing worth working for:

> One can foresee the future only in its broadest outlines. The way that the cultural institutions will win their independence from the state is still tomorrow's secret. But the fact that such independence will be won seems unavoidable, barring catastrophe, for the problems that men face are ones that will prompt them to look more and more to the school, not the state, for assistance. And brief reflection shows that on achieving independence, the school will easily encompass and master the state.
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> Sovereignty, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. For many, the nation-state has become a provincial, a dowdy bull; it is sanguine to say that she is sovereign. The young and the not-so-young live in a supra-national culture and the nation-state has been unable to stay in style. The inherent impossibility of a significant internationalism signifies that the state cannot adapt to a cosmopolitan world.

Since a human order *must* make this adaptation, it follows, Mr. Oliver proposes, that the modes and objectives of the Educational Contract will eventually replace the terms of the Social Contract:

> The school, the university, and the media of communication are universal institutions whose officials enjoy direct relations with the peoples of the world. The aesthetic, intellectual, and moral principles that inform the relations between teachers and students are universal principles that do not vary according to the whims of political, religious, or economic orthodoxy. It does not, therefore, seem impossible that should the school manage to separate itself from the state, the cultural institutions will then become the basis of a world community. Here, perhaps, is the seed of our future.

FRONTIERS

Permissible Self-Criticism

TIME'S cover story for March 23, "America the Inefficient," is an example of a shallow job done so brilliantly that it comes close to being an effective vaccination against going beneath the surface of anything that has been said. The story is made up mostly of detailed case-histories of incredible foul-ups at every level—in government, industry, retailing, and service businesses. "America," *Time* says, in an early generalization, "seems to have become a land governed by Murphy's Law: If anything can go wrong, it will—and at the worst possible time."

The story has the virtue of being a sure thing. Nobody can disagree. All the criticisms are nailed down with dismal facts. You could say that if anything is wrong with the country, and *Time* decides to report it, the trouble has already gone far beyond dispute and probably passed the point of no-return. An oblique comment might be developed out of a featured quotation from *Up the Organization* by Robert Townsend, the maverick business executive offered by *Time* as the hero of self-reform by American businessmen. The box on Townsend concludes:

> Corporate viability, in Townsend's view, means a running skirmish with the business establishment. "When the vast majority of big companies agree on some policy or practice," he writes, "you can be fairly certain that it's out of date. Ask yourself: 'What's the opposite of this conventional wisdom?' And then work back to what makes sense." Essentially, Townsend calls for an end to institutional submissiveness. "Most of us," he sardonically asserts," come from good solid European stock whose record of rapacity, greed, cruelty and treachery would make Genghis Khan look like Mahatma Gandhi. To go down now without a whimper (much less a bang) is completely out of character."

Well, what would be the opposite of *Time's* "conventional wisdom"—an eight-page compilation of goofs? Ruth Benedict's (unpublished) account of the excellences of what she called a "high synergy" society would come close to filling the bill. (See A. H. Maslow's presidential address before the New England Psychological Society, November, 1963.) In the synergistic society, peoples' goals are mutually supportive, producing extraordinary bonuses for everyone, instead of the erosions, conflicts of interest, and breakdowns described by *Time.*

Some day, one hopes, Dr. Benedict's paper will get the attention it deserves. Meanwhile, we have what seems an interesting comparison to offer—between the "natives" of San Francisco and those of Java. As one of the juicier items in its collection, *Time* reports:

> In the San Francisco area, the Bay Area Rapid Transit Authority (BART) is a three-county agency that was supposed to build a mass-transit system for the entire region by 1968. Snarled in squabbles among the municipalities, and hampered by unrealistic cost estimates and design blunders, it will not be completed until 1972 at the earliest. Among its ludicrous inefficiencies, BART has somehow managed to lose 100 lampposts, a total of 200,000 lbs. of metal costing $150,000. Workmen pulled them from a street that was being torn up for a new subway line, and BART'S managers just cannot find them.

Discussing "The Problem of Backwardness" in *Richer by Asia* (published in 1947), Edmond Taylor tells about the perturbations of an English official who needed a locomotive that the Indonesians had reported "lost." He found this unbelievable:

> My friend had tried to explain this to the Indonesian transport official.
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> "The locomotive must be lying around somewhere," he had said. "Just look for it—but quickly, please."
>
> "But we have looked, sir, and we cannot find," the Indonesian had replied. "The locomotive is lost."
>
> "Man, that is impossible! You can lose your pocket-book. You can lose your watch. You can lose your automobile. You can even lose your wife. But man, you cannot lose a locomotive. That is something which just can't happen."
>
> "I know it can't happen—but it has happened."

Well, the Englishman couldn't *stand* it. He reverted from a broad-minded individual to an "imperialist of the worst sort." The natives, he said,

are just "hopeless," and nothing remained "except to turn them back to the Dutch." Taylor mused:

> My friend had an exceptionally clear, undeluded mind. It had withstood everything except the supreme and almost superhuman test of trying for days on end to talk sense to the Dutch in Batavia. Now a trivial incident had seemingly laid it open to invasion by the crudest sort of delusion. Many worse provocations had failed to achieve this result. When defenseless Dutch women and children were massacred by infuriated mobs of native extremists, when unarmed British soldiers were stabbed in the back or crashed flyers were captured and chopped into small pieces by villagers, my friend merely shrugged his shoulders fatalistically. You had to expect that sort of thing in a colonial war. The tribesmen on the Indian northwest frontier had equally rough ideas of sport, yet the British were quite fond of them. Atrocities one could forgive. But losing locomotives—no, that was too much.

While *Time* is not going to dampen its fun with the trivia of lamp-post-losing by San Francisco natives in order to speak of "massacres" and things like that, the case for our backwardness now seems just about complete, any way you look at it. So the *Time* story makes an occasion—for us, at any rate—for calling further attention to the excellences of Edmond Taylor's book, and in particular to the chapter, "New Wine and Old Bottles," where he *defends* another sort of backwardness. Taylor does this by quoting an Indian physician who, in conversation after a dinner party (in 1944), explained why the backwardness of the "passive East" might turn out to be a civilizing influence on the United States. The doctor said:

> Some day—a near day, I think—we shall be free. There will be cultural relations between the East and the West—closer than at present, I hope—and there will be all sorts of political and economic matters which have important cultural implications in which you will need our cooperation. Since you will no longer be able to win it by force, you will have to make concessions to our point of view, our backward point of view. You will be very impatient and annoyed with us, but you will have to make the concessions anyway, and you will have to waste a lot of breath explaining things to us that seem self-evident to you. Sometimes in making these explanations you will be forced to examine your own concepts and re-define your own terms and you will make important discoveries about your own culture. There may even be times when we will save you from yourselves. Suppose some crackpot scientists—more likely some chemical cartel—were to persuade you to seek an international agreement for spraying every square inch of the globe with DDT, and suppose some chauvinist Indian demagogue, appealing to the Hindu prejudice against taking life, even insect life, persuaded the people of India not to sign this agreement, and suppose that in the middle of your arguments to the Indians not to hold up progress any longer you discovered that the areas where DDT had already been used were turning into deserts? Wouldn't you thank God for backwardness?

Good books are filled with valuable predictions. Here is another, largely confirmed since 1944, from the same man:

> You can't survive without science, or even with less science. You need science to save you from the effects of science. As a matter of fact, the scientists themselves are no longer the chief upholders of idolatrous science-worship. They are at least getting confused and confusion is often the beginning of wisdom. More and more of them are beginning to develop a social conscience—perhaps even a biological conscience which is more surprising. A number of modern physicians and modern agronomists seem to be tending toward a kind of agnostic humility with regard to the processes of nature which, at least in its results, is not far different from the superstitious nature-reverence of the old-fashioned family physician and the old-fashioned gardener. Your physicists are discovering mathematically the unity of the cosmos which our philosophers discovered mystically.
>
> The real danger is not from the priests of science but from its devotees among the masses—and above all from the temple hangers-on, the capitalist masters of technology who need new discoveries in order to create new needs, so they can sell new gadgets, the soldiers and the politicians, capitalist and otherwise, who need science to provide them with the instruments of power. These, if necessary, will imprison the scientists in their laboratories and make slaves of them—as the feudal barons of Japan enslaved the emperors—while continuing to prostrate themselves before science in public.

A truly unsettling cover story could be constructed along these lines.