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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

[This paper is by Robert Hutchins, President of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California. It was written early in 1968 in response to a request for a brief statement of his views on the future of American education. Dr. Hutchins named the paper "Some Aspects of a Post-Industrial Age," but its brevity does not, we think, make the title we have used inappropriate. The content of the statement gives evidence that the shortcomings and failures of higher education in America now have unmistakable objectivity, making them capable of precise generalizations in a few words. The value of such criticism lies in its finality. It leaves no arguable doubt concerning the order of change that must be attempted. The concluding paragraphs of the paper consider the direction and some possible means of change. —Editors.]

ANY educational system is a reflection of the culture in which it operates. The courts have denied relief against the Arkansas anti-evolution law and against the dismissal of a Maryland teacher for asking his class to read *Brave New World.* A recent issue of the *Harvard Law Review* defends these decisions, saying, "Since one function of elementary and even secondary education is indoctrination . . . some measure of public regulation of classroom speech is inherent in the very provision of public education." The *Harvard Law Review* goes on to make a distinction that I cannot follow between "accepted community values," which must be honored, and "oppressive popular prejudices," which must be opposed.

2. Any educational system may have accidental side-effects not contemplated or desired by the rulers of the community. The methods used may be ill-adapted to the aims in view, as when the system offers training for non-existent jobs. Or, if the rulers aim at total indoctrination of the young, it may be inadvisable to teach them to read and write.

3. Or education may at a given time in a given society be regarded as insignificant, and an educational system will be allowed to take its course because the rulers are preoccupied with other matters and believe they can overcome at the proper time any unsuitable tendencies originating in it. Or the rulers may be confused about what they want, with resulting confusion in education.

4. Ordinarily the mandarinate will become the servant of the established order and will cooperate in directing the educational system to the ends the rulers have in view. In return, the mandarinate will receive the opportunity to give muted expression to dissenting views on the less important issues in the society.

5. Existing educational systems appear to involve a contradiction in terms. Education requires the interaction of minds. In this view, existing educational institutions must be regarded as counter-educational. If their present practices are necessary, they must be so because poverty and the state of educational technology make it impossible to provide, within the system, for the interaction of minds. These excuses do not seem available to the United States.

6. Existing educational institutions, in addition to their dependence on the established order, suffer from the characteristic difficulties of all institutions. The central one of these is the difficulty of remembering the purpose of the institution. It is replaced by the purpose of maintaining the institution, operating it efficiently, and guaranteeing its preservation in the face of any changes that may take place. An educational institution, like the system as a whole, must seek popularity with those who can help it achieve these institutional aims. Hence it will gladly adopt those purposes which commend it to the

established order, no matter what its original purposes may have been. Cardinal Newman said in 1852, "A University is, according to the usual designation, an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill." To the President of one of them the university is still a mint. The Los Angeles *Times* quotes Mr. Hitch as recommending the University of California because of the economic benefits it confers on its students and the State.

7. All countries are now industrialized or industrializing. The aim of an industrial society is material goods, with the power, prosperity, and prestige they give. The concern is with "conquering" nature, with technical competence, with men as producers, consumers, statistical units, and objects of propaganda, with markets, with knowledge as power, and with such welfare measures as tend toward the stability necessary for business. We shall surely have a guaranteed annual income, because it will be good for General Motors. More cars will be sold if more people have the money to buy them, and besides, as Gov. Reagan has remarked, riots are bad for business.

8. At its worst an industrial society is the system described by R. H. Tawney: "It is that whole system of appetites and values, with its deification of snatching to hoard, and hoarding to snatch, which now, in its hour of triumph, while the plaudits of the crowd still ring in the ears of the gladiators and the laurels are still unfaded on their brows, seems to leave a taste as of ashes on the lips of a civilization which has brought to the conquest of its material environment resources unknown in earlier ages, but which has not yet learned to master itself." These words were written almost fifty years ago.

9. The nation has been the sponsor of industrialization and the engine of the rapacity and greed of the industrial society. National systems of education have been designed to "process" the young for industry and to make them the willing victims of its claims.

10. To the confusion of their elders, the taste as of ashes is on the lips of the younger generation everywhere: in the West, in the Communist countries, and in the Third World. In the United States the resistance of the better college students to going into business is almost as intense as their resistance to going to the war in Vietnam. This suggests that the aims of the industrial society, no matter what methods are used to achieve them and no matter how far from or near to achievement they are, cannot now satisfy the aspirations of the human animal.

11. Many other signs, sufficient to widen the confusion, indicate that we may be entering a post-industrial age and that we shall do so whether we want to or not. The inevitability of the transition results from the cumulative impact of science and technology.

12. A computerized, automated world is one in which all the material goods necessary for human existence can be supplied with very little human labor. Already, if the war in Vietnam were stopped, $30 billion would be available annually for other purposes. This is roughly ten times what has been devoted to foreign aid and fifteen times what has been spent in any year in the war on poverty.

13. The rapidity of technological change is such that it is now a waste of time to train the young in school for industry. Since this has been the principal duty of educational systems, they must discover some other role. They might try to find out how to help young people become human. The obvious alternative, and one being pursued with some vigor in parts of this country, is to try to make the young conventional, well-tubbed Americans, conforming in matters tonsorial, sartorial, and political to the prejudices of their elders. This is of course ridiculous, but the possibility is not to be excluded on that ground. A more persuasive argument against this possibility is that the experience of all historical regimes shows that it is very hard to carry it out over any considerable period of time.

14. The nation state is breaking up. All problems, as the gold crisis reminds us, are now world problems. National systems of education, if they turn away from preparing the young for industry, may also turn away from the nationalistic, imperialistic aspects of such preparation. In the absence of industrial competition, the temptation, which may prove irresistible, will be to regard all men as neighbors in the sense in which that word was used of the Good Samaritan.

15. The post-industrial society could be one in which men set seriously to work to straighten out their relations with one another and in which they sought, not material goods, but intellectual, moral, and spiritual, or what might be called cultural goods. The society would be a learning society.

16. The affluence of the world will make it impossible to plead poverty as a reason for not trying to educate everybody everywhere.

17. The education of the post-industrial age may be noninstitutional. The family, the city, the culture, will educate the man. The whole object of the society could be to bring the highest powers of all its members to the fullest development and to raise each community to the highest cultural level it can attain. We would be back with the Athenians and *paideia.*

18. The computer and other devices can make every home a learning unit. All the members of the family could be engaged in learning. Teachers might function as physicians and visiting nurses do today.

19. Educational institutions would provide the chance for dialogue, for the interaction of minds. They would not be "processing" anybody for anything or awarding certificates, diplomas, or degrees.

20. The university could be transformed into a contemporary version of the Platonic academy. It would be a center of independent thought and criticism, bringing the great intellectual disciplines together so that they might shed light on one another and on the most important issues facing modern man.

21. This view of the future of education is not utopian, because it involves no dependence on the intelligence and character of the present residents of this planet. The industrial system has set in motion irreversible tendencies that will lead to its own extinction. It has dug its own grave. World war is now impossible. The nation state, which is a war system, is now impossible. Manpower will be unnecessary. Therefore the aim of education has to be manhood. This change will eliminate institutions and institutional practices appropriate, if at all, to a superseded regime. Education may at last come into its own.

22. In the meantime, the frenzy for educational innovation that is sweeping the country suggests that people are becoming aware of the disparity between the drift of the society and the aims of education. In the general confusion nobody knows what to do next in education, but everybody has a vague feeling that it ought to be different from what we have been doing. When anything can be done, we might as well do the right thing. It would now be possible for a group of dedicated teachers to organize a post-industrial program, that is, to abandon the aims and the institutions and the institutional practices that the industrial society has formed. The work of these teachers would be tolerated as what is called an "interesting experiment." So would a true university, which, I believe, could now be established in this country.

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REVIEW

NEWS AND THE MAN

ONE of the most value-charged words of our time is "participation." The popular intuition which gives it almost obsessive currency is obviously on the mark. We are the inheritors of a civilization whose theory of knowledge (scientific objectivity) and practice of management (by expert manipulators) leave individuals out of their calculations, so that people everywhere are feeling the effects of this systematic neglect. It is a civilization ordered by a number of "systems" in complex interrelation, and their organization takes account of human beings only as they contribute to or affect one or another of the particularized ends the systems serve. Industry and commerce regard people as man-power and consumers; government regards them as taxpayers and the software of national defense. Only rhetorical notice is taken of people as human beings who are ends in themselves; there is no agency which speaks simply for man. So the demand for "participation" is the spontaneous cry of suppressed humanity. As George Buchanan put it in Frontiers two weeks ago:

> Newspapers write from day to day the autobiography of a society. We should feel that we are in it. What we wish to avoid is the tendency for people to be news-spectators, as they are spectators of mass-sport. Each man must participate. He will write on the humble pages of his desk-pad, trying to guide himself in the time. To see where he is, even if the position is tragic, is necessary. Those who prefer to shut their eyes enter a category below the human.

Well, the position *is* tragic, for the reason that the news, if we can call it that, comes to us in terms that makes participation seem impossible. Take for example four feature stories in the *Christian Science Monitor* for March 14.

Three of these stories are on the front page. Claiming about equal attention, they are: (1) "India's largest city, world's largest slum"—a report on the practically hopeless poverty of four million people; (2) "Suez Salvo"—the sudden expansion of the Arab-Israel conflict along the 108-mile front of the Suez Canal; and (3) "Final Steps toward the moon"—detailing the problems of landing a manned spaceship in ignorance of lunar gravity. The fourth story, on the back page, is by a Nigerian who declares that enormous amounts of food and medicine shipped to aid the sick and famine-stricken Biafrans in refugee camps or in the isolated war zone are not reaching these people. Leaders on both sides, he says, are playing politics before world opinion and will not agree on how the relief should be transported. Negotiation does not work because neither side will "recognize" the other. This story ends:

> The obstinacy on both sides means that only a trickle of relief supplies reaches the refugees, while thousands reportedly succumb from starvation daily. Even more sadly, the trickle that get into Biafra—originally intended for the starving children—is fed to secessionist soldiers. Equally distressing was the recent court-finding that a lady in charge of monetary donations in New York had diverted over $50,000 into three personal accounts. Seeing those photographs of starving children makes one shudder. Secessionist leader Lt. Col. Ojukwu realizes that the only thing he has going for his regime is world opinion, and he ruthlessly exploits it to his advantage at the expense of all those sad-eyed innocent children. "We are ready to commit mass suicide" is his slogan. Thus two leaders play politics while their very own people starve to death by the thousands.

The plight of Calcutta's poor represents human need almost beyond calculation. The *Monitor's* correspondent says:

> Over half of the city's more than seven million population lives in pathetic squalor.
>
> As one American writer put it:
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> "If you took four million of the poorest people in America cut their average income to less than ten per cent of the amount received by a family on welfare in New York, and reduced their food rations to a daily handful of rice, you would have a situation somewhat approaching Calcutta, India's largest city."
>
> The writer could have added some other facts: There are about 200,000 people who sleep on the streets because they have no homes. And those poor people that do have shelter, live in some of the worst

slums in the world where even the tap outside their tumbledown building trickles only saline water.

In addition there is the oppressive summer heat that lies heavily on the city like a foul-smelling blanket. During the hottest months of the summer when the tropical sun broils Calcutta, the garbage collection system often breaks down. Last year the stench throughout the city was unbearable with rotting garbage.

When the monsoon arrives in July, much of the city where the poor live in slums called "bustees," turns into a swamp. Since there are no sewers, the water remains, stagnant, with the streets turned into filthy fetid canals.

Visitors to Calcutta, and there are fewer each year, find they are besieged by an army of beggars who wait outside their hotels. Many carry emaciated children which they hold up for the tourist to see. This almost guarantees them a handout.

The rest of the story is devoted to plans for rescuing Calcutta from this terrible decay, and the efforts in this direction, in which the Ford Foundation plays an important part, seem considerable. The Ford Foundation director in India, Dr. Douglas Ensminger, maintains that Calcutta businessmen, who are now investing their money in other areas of India, can do much to save the city. He recently told a gathering of them: "The manufacturing sector of Calcutta makes an annual profit of almost $4 billion. Yet the money spent in trying to save the city is just 1 per cent of the annual profits of the city's industries."

One realizes, of course, that there are built-in biases in all newspaper reports. Even "objectivity" is a bias of a sort, when people are hungry and dying. And a just assessment of the responsibilities of Nigerian leaders and the Biafrans, and of the Calcutta business community is simply impossible for the American reader. Likewise in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict. We know only that these terrible things go on and on, that the next day's paper will have a fresh assemblage of reports on starvation, war, and death—all beyond our reach. And there will be other celebrations of our burgeoning space technology, and of similar marches of progress which are symbolic of a "greatness" every bit as inaccessible and even incomprehensible to the average man as are the woes of the rest of the world. Participation?

We get our news according to the measures and methods of the systems of the time, determined by the way they have grown—like "Topsy." The scale of what we read in the papers together with its distance from our narrow field of action makes participation hard to imagine. Shock, revulsion, eventually benumbed indifference, yes; but actual "participation," according to modes of the systems available to us, would mean getting involved in a notoriously ineffectual political process or in the kind of pragmatic futility described by the Nigerian writer. This is the rule; there are of course exceptions. But on the whole the spectators at a Roman circus "participated" more in what they saw than the modern newspaper reader can participate in the news. The Romans could at least put their thumbs up or down.

This, one suspects, is what Mr. McLuhan means when he says that the medium is the message. We get our news by a medium which says to us, every day and all the time: You can't do anything about it. It's too late. More tomorrow.

One can imagine, abstractly, a kind of press service that would tell people about events in the world at a level or in a way that would suggest simple things each man could decide to do next, to help matters along—to make things better. Creating such a service, you might say, would be the natural task of a proper sociology—a Sociology of Being, in Henry Anderson's phrase. He's working on its development, and so are some others.

But if you were to try to persuade a present newspaper publisher to run such stories he would think you meant articles on the Community Chest. And if you pressed him he would tell you about the conditions of survival in the newspaper

business. He would be right, of course, but only *partly* right. Even a commercial institution can practice a little self-examination, a little ironic self-criticism, without going broke. Even a big newspaper can do a little better than it has done in the past. We know this because some newspapers are better than others. The readers could easily make them all get better by making a point of reading only the ones that are already a little better. And so on, up the line. If the medium is the message, then participation means changing the medium, in order to make other kinds of participation possible.

Unless this happens, a day will come when the only truth that people hearken to will be the one pronounced by Proudhon: *Property is theft.* And they may not take the trouble to notice, in the passion of their discovery, that Gandhi said the same thing.

Another aspect of the problem of "participation" is made evident by newspaper reports of scholarly diagnoses of what is "wrong" with modern society. Almost invariably, the trouble is found to be that ordinary people are not able to "keep up" with highly trained experts. Not man's inhumanity to man, not a lack of ethical awareness and consideration for others, not the decline of ennobling purpose in human life, but intellectual inadequacy stands in the way of human fulfillment. One gains the impression that the experts are performing herculean tasks, but are fighting a losing battle. The *New York Times* for Jan. 18 summarizes the fourth annual report of the Harvard University Program on Technology and Society, and adds an interview with Emmanuel G. Mesthene, the Program's director. Like Daniel Bell, Dr. Mesthene sees the future as an age in which intellectuals and scholars will hold the reins of control:

> In governing the nation, Dr. Mesthene said in the interview, it may be essential to rely heavily on an emerging group of "technocrats": persons trained in the computer-based analysis needed to sort out the complexities and subtleties of a rapidly evolving and highly interdependent society.
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> But he declared that making these expert decision-makers" accountable to the citizenry posed a major problem. In his view, the rise of the expert analyst and decision-maker places a heavier burden on the individual than before, that is, the ordinary citizen must learn more and work harder at his public role—almost as hard as he does at his private career—if he is to understand what the technocrats are doing. . . . Dr. Mesthene sees a rising tension between the expert technicians in government and those who want a direct voice in public policy but who are not equipped with the necessary science-based analytical skills. He acknowledged in the interview that this posed a crucial and continuing dilemma.
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> "If you go the full way of the technical elite you'll wind up with a technocracy. But if you go the way of those who want full participation you'll wind up with chaos. The answer we re looking for is a third way. We haven't found it yet.

Toward the end of the interview Dr. Mesthene mixes a defense of technological imperatives with criticism of the misuse of freedom by technological individualism. Corporate business organized for private profit is neither motivated nor geared to deal with social problems, he said; and the problems created by industry, such as environmental pollution, exist "because it has not been anyone's explicit business to foresee and anticipate them." The conclusion of the report is made to point to the necessity for better planning and more power for the planners. The *Times* reporter summarizes:

> These difficulties are traceable much less to "some mystical autonomy" presumed to lie in technology by such thinkers as Lewis Murnford, Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, Dr. Mesthene wrote, "and much more to the autonomy that our economic and political institutions grant to individual decision-making." He stated flatly:
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> "The negative effects of technology that we deplore are a measure of what this traditional freedom is beginning to cost us."

Dr. Mesthene leaves no doubt as to where he thinks the importance of technology lies. It brings "new options to choose from" and can lead to "changes in values in the same way that the appearance of new dishes on the heretofore

standard menu of one's favorite restaurant can lead to changes in one's tastes and choices of food."

The *Times* writer says that this group at Harvard is pursuing what is held to be "the nation's most comprehensive study of technology's impact on society." The annual report quoted gives the preliminary conclusion of the first four years of a ten-year program of study, which seems to be that there is nothing wrong with modern technology. On the contrary it has "made Americans the most genuinely individual people in history." The opening paragraphs of the story spell out this claim:

> The group holds that technology has created a society of such complex diversity and richness that most Americans have a greater range of personal choice and a more highly developed sense of self-worth than ever before. [According to Dr. Mesthene] "This is probably the first age in history in which such high proportions of people have felt like individuals . . . No eighteenth-century factory worker, so far as we know, had the sense of individual worth that underlies the demands on society of the average resident of the black urban ghetto today."

Well, this sort of deficit-measure of technology's contribution to "individuality" might be taken to justify Leonard Lewin in saying that the conclusions of some "think-tank" scholars "are so elaborate and detailed that the reader tends to lose sight of the fact that they have been developed from premises that often amount to no more than off-the-cuff opinions." Further, the possibility of "participation" by ordinary humans is pushed clear out of sight by the quite evident view that our only hope lies in gaining enough school-boy faith in the technological experts to make us trust their superior judgment.

Obviously, we require entirely new ways of formulating human need, and more direct methods of improving our lives and reducing the pain of the world. Meanwhile, the way we now get information the way we now get information on these subjects can produce only conformists or, by reaction, nihilists and revolutionaries. But it is possible to agree with Dr. Mesthene on one point: The fault lies not in our technology but in ourselves.

COMMENTARY
MORALITY IN OUR TIME

IT was Alfred North Whitehead who instructed his contemporaries in the fallacy of misplaced concreteness—of locating the stuff of reality in the wrong way. Of equal or greater importance is recognition of the fallacy of misplaced moralizing, which may be responsible for our susceptibility to other forms of self-deceit. A plain example of misplaced moralizing is noted by Howard N. Meyer, author of *Colonel of the Black Regiment,* in a letter to the *Nation* for March 17:

> Dear Sirs: The Navy has not nearly come off as badly as your editorial on the *Pueblo* inquiry suggests. They have successfully deflected the inquiry from the vital question, "*Did the* Pueblo *violate Korean waters, and if so, by chance or design, and if by design, whose?"* Instead, there is a mishmash of sentimental debate about whether Bucher was wrong not to resist. The disaster is that of those who believe in peace, civilian supremacy, and demilitarization. From Fulbright down, we missed the boat. (Pardon that metaphor.)

How has it become so easy to look in the wrong places for explanation of the trouble we get into? The closing words of an article in the April *Atlantic,* "The New American Militarism," by General David M. Shoup, former Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, gives one answer to this question:

> Being recognized public figures in a nation always seeking folk heroes, the military leaders have been largely exempt from the criticism experienced by the more plebian politician. Flag officers are considered "experts," and their views are often accepted by press and Congress as the gospel. In turn, the distinguished military leader feels obliged not only to perpetuate loyally the doctrine of his service but to comply with the stereotyped military characteristics by being tough, aggressive, and firm in his resistance to Communist aggression and his belief in the military solutions to world problems. Standing closely behind these leaders, encouraging and prompting them, are the rich and powerful defense industries. Standing in front, adorned with service caps, ribbons, and lapel emblems is a nation of veterans—patriotic, belligerent, romantic, and well intentioned, finding a certain sublimation and excitement in their country's latest military venture. Militarism in America is in full bloom and promises a future of vigorous self-pollination—unless the blight of Vietnam reveals that militarism is more a poisonous weed than a glorious blossom.

Well, that's how the fallacy of misplaced moralizing gains its ground for effective operations, and if exactly the same thing had not been said, in different language, by Tolstoy more than seventy years ago, and by various others since, we might think ourselves entitled to some angry and indignant reaction. It would be better, however, to continue with the identification of false moral issues, and to find out, if possible, where this process actually begins. For it is only in its beginnings that so universal a tendency can be corrected.

The instances of misplaced moralizing that go by unnoticed may be far more revealing of what is wrong than massive, ugly phenomena which can generate furious response. We need to get at the basic vulnerability to shallow morality more than we need to list its most horrifying results. For example, the editorial page of the issue of the *Christian Science Monitor* discussed in this week's Review takes no notice of the shocking front-page contrast between the four million people starving in Calcutta and the profligate fun-and-games of America's manned flights to the moon. No moral is drawn. After all, the Ford Foundation is on the job in Calcutta.

Instead, editorial attention is given to the salt tears wept by Winston Churchill and by Mrs. Harold Wilson, years ago, when they exchanged notes consoling one another about the threat to their careers which Mr. Churchill and Mr. Wilson both endured by being true to their political principles. This tidbit was revealed recently by Mr. Wilson in a television interview, and the *Monitor,* being touched, is moved to comment:

> We are not *advocating* that political leaders should weep. But here is another reminder from Churchill that humanity is a part of greatness. . . . Of course we could do with more of both from people in

> high places—both humanity and the courage to follow on the dictates of conscience or principle.

Humanity is indeed a part of greatness. But the present advertisement of these private emotions recalls a comment by Austin Warren on certain preoccupations of the "morality" of Western man. In *The New England Conscience* he wrote:

> Much of the falsity of the Protestant ethics lies in just what—whether in its popular or its philosophic form—it has prided itself on: its concern with self and subjectivity. Concern with *my* motives, *my* intentions, *my* conscience is always in danger of becoming more concerned with me than with . . . that whole vast other world. Egoism—refined subjectivity—is morally more dangerous partly because more subtle, than plain frank egotism or selfishness.

One thinks mournfully of the climactic moments reported in accounts of group and "encounter" therapy—"We both cried" now seems to sum up the ineffable in human achievement. Are these people really finding "emancipation"?

Meanwhile, there is a profound sense in which today's innocence and righteousness become tomorrow's guilt and shame. And if our righteousness is placidly accompanied by misplaced moralizing, we shall not know when the time has come for shame.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE GOOD IN INSTITUTIONS

A GREAT deal, although not all, of what may be good about the influence of institutions is covered by a sentence in Arthur Morgan's book, *Observations:*

> Habits and even beliefs may be shaped or regimented by compulsion, and sometimes by compulsion one may be brought under influences that may infect him with new desires, yet the direct and controlling cause of personal growth is inner desire, and not outward compulsion.

The most obvious thing about this formulation is that its validity depends upon mutual trust. People who use compulsion *only* to control other people, and not to help them to gather their energies for subsequent release, destroy the only meaning there is in the argument for "order," because it soon becomes evident that they care nothing about human freedom in principle, thinking of freedom as identical with the conditions of their own convenience. The result of enforcing this sort of order is a growing popular distrust of *all* institutions, which, in time, makes social formlessness seem the only alternative to regimentation. Once rebellious activity begins to seek this goal, hardly anything can be accomplished until the necessity for structure is independently rediscovered by those in revolt. Argument and moralizing cannot help because the very language of both freedom and order has been debased.

But there is another aspect of institutions. Public agencies which perform cultural services in which compulsion plays practically no part exert a silent influence on people simply from being what they are. They have an order of their own, at once necessary to their being and good in its effect. Consider for example a public library. Most of us take such institutions for granted, just as we take for granted the usefulness of a great many existing institutions. In the *New York Times* for March 1, Philip Roth, a novelist who grew up in Newark, New Jersey, contributes some "Reflections on the Death of a Library." Having learned that the city of Newark planned to shut down its public library system in order to save money, Mr. Roth tells the story of his relations with the library:

> When I was growing up in Newark in the forties we were taught, or perhaps just assumed, that the books in the public library belonged to the public. Since my family did not own many books, or have very much money for a child to buy them, it was good to know that solely by virtue of my citizenship I had the use of any of the books I wanted from that grandly austere building downtown on Washington Street, or the branch library I could walk to in my neighborhood. But even more compelling was this idea of communal ownership, property held in common for the common good. Why I had to care for the books I borrowed, return them unscarred and on time, was because they weren't my property alone, *they were everybody's.* That idea had as much to do with civilizing me as any idea I was ever to come upon in the books themselves.

No common possession can survive abuse, and a public library is continuous instruction in this fact. Had we learned such lessons more thoroughly, we might now have pure air to breathe in our cities. But the library also instructs in the necessities of the learning process:

> If the idea [of the library] was civilizing, so was the place, with its enforced quiet, its orderly shelves, and its knowlledgeable, dutiful employees *who weren't teachers.* The library wasn't just where one had to go to get the books, it was as much a kind of exacting haven to which a city youngster willingly went to get his lesson in restraint, to learn a little more about solitude, privacy, silence and self-control.
>
> And then there was the lesson in order. The institution itself was the instructor. What trust it inspired—in oneself and in systems—to decode the message on the catalogue cards; then to make it through the network of corridors and staircases into the stacks; and there to find, exactly where it was supposed to be, the right book. For a ten-year-old to be able to steer himself through the thousands of books to the very one he wants is not without its civilizing influence, either. Nor did it go for nothing to carry a library card around in one's pocket; to pay a fine; to sit in a strange place, beyond the reach of

> home or school, and read in anonymity and peace; finally, to take back across the city and into one's home a book with a local history of its own, a Newark family-tree of readers to which one's own name had now been added.

Mr. Roth says just the right things in reproach to the City of Newark for even *considering* the abolition of its library—for deciding that "the lessons and pleasures a library gives to the young are no longer essential to an education." As he points out, "In a city seething with social grievances there is probably little that could be more essential to the development and sanity of the thoughtful and ambitious young than the presence of those libraries and those books."

It is by such natural, uninsistent means that institutions impart a sense of the meaning and the role of structure in the growth-processes of human life. But when the very idea of structure becomes hateful—something which always happens when structure is perverted to mainly repressive uses, when form becomes the armor of conventional security, when standards are made the bulwarks of timidity—literature and the arts are the first to suffer. They are torn and reduced by attacks from both sides. Writing in the *New York Review of Books* for Feb. 15, Robert Brustein deplores the descent of the "new theater movement" to the level of postures and slogans:

> . . . it is becoming increasingly clear, now, that the new theater has begun to rigidify, that it may be as great a danger to dramatic art as the old theater. It already embodies similar defects. Its anti-intellectualism, its sensationalism, its sexual obsessiveness, its massacre of language, its noisy attention-getting mechanisms, its indifference to artistry, craft, or skill, its violence, and, above all, its mindless tributes to Love and Togetherness (now in the form of "group gropes" and "love zaps") are not adversary demands upon the American character but rather the very qualities that have continually degraded us, the very qualities that have kept us laggard and philistine in the theater throughout the past three decades.

Mr. Brustein, a vigorous defender of the new and the unconventional in the theater, is now obliged to say:

> What once seemed daring and original now often seems tiresome and familiar; stereotyped political assertions, encouraged by their easy acceptance, have replaced instinctive, individual dissent; and the complex moral and metaphysical issues of great art are being obliterated by a simple-minded nihilism.

Commenting on a performance by one "new theater" group, he said: "The most depressing thing of all was how easily university students, and even some of their teachers, responded to the baldest of slogans and the most simplistic interpretations of reality."

In such times, criticism becomes voiceless and approval claps with one hand. The rage for effortless achievement, for painless "creativity," for disciplineless art shows that cultural dialogue has come to a full stop. Only exhaustion and self-defeat can reveal the cost of abandoning structure and self-discipline, and this means a time of agonized waiting, of suffering the casualties always involved in learning only from "experience." It is a time, therefore, when the caretakers of culture and the managers of education must recognize that they have failed miserably in their responsibility. They need to admit that they have practiced policies, not convictions, have honored a prudence which excludes adventure and risk. Their virtues became slogans, their structure the shell of habit instead of the focus of invention. So now the pied pipers are having their day. It was not that the past contained no truth, but that its truth had become pallid from only conventional repetition. The anomalies of the present—its torturing contradictions and willful blindnesses—have clear explanation by Ortega:

> Society, the collectivity does not contain any ideas that are properly such—that is, ideas dearly thought out on sound evidence. It contains only commonplaces and exists on the basis of such commonplaces. By this I do not mean to say they are untrue ideas—they may be magnificent ideas; what I do say is that inasmuch as they are observances or established opinions or commonplaces, their possible excellent qualities remain inactive. What acts is

> simply their mechanical pressure on all individuals, their soulless coercion.

Writing in *Peace News* a little less than two years ago, Theodore Roszak spoke of the ease with which the leaders of the then flourishing "drug culture" collected followers. Naming some of them, he pointed out that they were men of considerable learning and cultivation, yet they lent their talents to popularizing a very different approach to the goals of human life. Structure became a purchase, not a growth:

> In the hands of vulgarizers . . . , the search for humanization becomes a facile manipulation of push-button techniques which, I feel, cheapens not only the meaning of human culture, but of human personality as well. And the cheapening of culture and personality is precisely what all the contemporary forces of evil . . . are out to accomplish. The Buddha, you know, located Nirvana at the end (not at the beginning) of the eightfold path. Does anyone remember, I wonder, what the stages of that path are—and what they demand of us?

So, these are sad days—days of the uncontested triumph of futile panaceas. But they are also days for new beginnings in the creation of structure—the kind that cannot be swept away by the storms of change.

FRONTIERS
Religious Humanism

IN every great swing of the pendulum of cultural change, there are both losses and gains. The momentum comes from a new-found sense of freedom, and the gains are mostly through the vision which becomes possible by release from old cultural confinements—a release which lasts until the new social and intellectual forms begin to harden.

Is it possible to avoid the *excesses* that seem always to attend historical liberation? A question like this one needs to be pinned down with illustrations. For example, a contrast between the French and the American revolutions might be instructive. It seems fair to say that there was more deliberation and self-restraint in the American effort, no matter how much the advances in intelligent social organization have been wasted and exploited during the nearly two hundred years since.

Another historical illustration would be the entirety of the scientific revolution, extending over some two hundred years—throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Now, as we look back on that great transformation in men's ideas of truth and reality, including the birth of the idea of progress, we find reason to be critical of thinkers whose ideas became serious blinders for later generations. Descartes, for example, is often condemned for his arbitrary division between mind and matter—Cartesian dualism, we call it—and we make him largely responsible for the over-simplifications of mechanistic philosophy. Alfred North Whitehead put this criticism clearly in *Nature and Life:*

> The mental substances are external to the material substances. Neither type requires the other type for a completion of its essence. Their unexplained interrelations are unnecessary for their respective existences.
>
> The effect of this sharp division between Nature and life has poisoned all subsequent philosophy.

But why didn't the contemporaries of Descartes make this objection? The answer is that some of them did. Men like Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, and Joseph Glanvill, often referred to as the Cambridge Platonists, saw the threat to human freedom in Cartesian materialism and did what they could to brake the enthusiasm for the new "mechanical" explanation which was sweeping away all obstacles in its path. Cudworth argued for a "plastic" intermediary between mind and matter, and Glanvill's writings, particularly, opposed scientific dogmatism, while he at the same time defended the spirit of scientific inquiry. (In 1668 he wrote a vigorous defense of the Royal Society, then under angry attack.)

The Cambridge Platonists could be called the religious humanists of their time. True followers of the Florentine Revival of Learning and the Humanism of Pico della Mirandoia, they devoted their learning and scholarship to the service of human freedom. They did what they could to inform the scientific spirit with the temper of self-restraint.

Today, we are in the midst of another vast swing of the cultural pendulum. Unlike the change that gathered strength in the seventeenth century, the momentum is now in the other direction—toward new departures in religious thinking. Fresh intoxications are manifest on every hand and "religious intentions" are claimed for very nearly every sort of enterprise which promises release from conventional restraint. And again, "freedom," with not much attention to the balanced use of human powers, is declared to be the objective. The brakes applied by the Cambridge Platonists to the unrestrained "scientism" of their day were in the name of philosophic religion, and, appropriately enough, the brakes which present-day seekers for balance are using can be recognized as principles of a philosophic sort of science. And the men applying them call themselves "religious humanists."

The quarterly journal, *Religious Humanism,* now in its third volume, is edited by Edwin H.

Wilson and is published by the Fellowship of Religious Humanists, at 105 West North College Street, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387. The subscription price is $3.00 a year (single copies 75 cents). The two-part article, "The Loss of the Future," by Wendell Berry (appearing in MANAS for Nov. 13 and 20, 1968), was reprinted from *Religious Humanism.* Following is a portion of a statement by the editor, in explanation of the meaning of "religious" Humanism:

> If the word "religion" puts you in need of a straitjacket, you probably won't read beyond this sentence. Words sometimes trigger people irrationally, even in the name of rationalism. But now we have it from the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Torcaso* decision that there are non-theistic religions in America which do not teach what would generally be regarded as a belief in the existence of God and which fill the place in the lives of their adherents comparable to that of the more traditional faiths. Secular Humanism, Ethical Culture, Taoism and Buddhism were specified as religions without God! So Religious Humanism is *not* a contradiction in terms; one has to get used to it.
>
> Religious Humanism is the position of those who arrive at humanism through a critical study of religious trends and experience. Organized humanism before and after the *Humanist Manifesto* was issued in 1933 began that way. . . .
>
> Many well-known thinkers have given voice to the hope of Religious Humanism that a comprehensive world religion will develop through the creative processes of our times. Roy Wood Sellars in 1927 held humanism to be the next step in religion. John Dewey, in his book *A Common Faith,* believed that we have all the materials for such a faith. Sir Julian Huxley predicts that the next great religion of the world will be some form of humanism. Psychologist Abraham Maslow probing religious experience in the tradition of James H. Leuba and William James, talks of the "peak experience" as central to naturalistic religion.

Well, there may be those who find this formulation a bit confining—who think that while we already have ample *critical* armament for a humanist faith, there is nowhere near enough positive affirmation to inspire "the next great religion of the world." Yet it seems right to say that no man ought to *jump* to affirmation merely on pragmatic grounds. This is the terrible mistake of vulgar "conversion," which can obtain sustaining strength only from dogmatism. And that starts the vicious, reactionary cycle all over again.

Meanwhile, the field of open-minded inquiry represented by the religious humanists leaves little to be desired. These people are examining the reviving questions of religious meaning with the critical intelligence that has been evolved by the best minds of the scientific age. When it finally becomes evident that the only ideas which, *ipso facto,* should be repugnant to humanist thinkers are ideas which locate spiritual or intellectual authority *outside* individual human beings, then modern humanism will achieve the same classical catholicity as the Socratic Dialogue.