

THE PLATONISTS

THE Platonic thinker is to be distinguished from the Stoic philosopher by the fact that, while neither one takes political power seriously, as an important or desirable end, the Platonist may seem to. There is no question but that Plato's *Republic* has the form of an attempt to decide which social arrangements will contribute most to the full and free development of all men. The Stoic, on the other hand, is entirely concerned with those attitudes of mind which enable an individual man to preserve his self-respect and feeling of dignity, no matter what the social arrangements, and he stipulates that these are likely to be bad. Statecraft was not a subject on which Marcus Aurelius, although an emperor, discoursed at length. And Epictetus, himself a slave, devoted no attention to the abolition of slavery.

Our views of both these schools now tend to be somewhat condescending, probably because of the enormous preoccupation of modern thought with political power. The Stoics ignored power as a human end, and Plato's tendency is embarrassingly "aristocratic." Yet it is impossible not to recognize in these ancient philosophers a great deal of what we now call existential awareness. In their way, they understood "human nature." No politics or bad politics, they nonetheless grasped certain essentials of the "dignity of man." And in the case of Plato, we allow that a dawning *social* consciousness brought him to compare and judge alternative political systems.

Missing in Plato, however, as his modern reader becomes intensely aware, is the explicit commitment to *equality* which has been an absolute obligation of nearly every political thinker since the American and French Revolutions. Even if, as in some totalitarian systems, equality is now often ignored in practice, with all important decisions being made by a

revolutionary élite, much is made of the "concrete freedoms" said to be enjoyed by all men. But while the ideal of equality has only a tacit presence in Plato, it is nonetheless there, since a community entirely committed to education must assume the equal right of every member of the society to the opportunity to learn and to grow. And the stress in Plato is on the qualifications of those who will teach, not upon equal access to power. Plato did not question the "natural law" validity of the principle of hierarchy, evident everywhere in nature, or attempt to replace it with an equalitarian legal convention, but devoted his energies to inquiring into how natural hierarchy should find expression in man and human society.

Modern readers find in the *Republic* evidence of "authoritarian" tendencies because of the "guardians." The guardians, you could say, are Plato's "aristocrats," and *any* justification of the rule of aristocrats—even aristocrats in character instead of by blood—arouses deep suspicion in people who regard the equality of all men as the great ethical discovery of modern times. Equality is a glorious idea, and our devotion to it is rooted in history. It represents what we have hoped is final emancipation from the oppressions of both political and theological hierarchy. A high position in either of these orders once gave control over the lives of whole populations of human beings, and this power was endorsed by supernatural dispensation. The revolutionary cry of the *rights of man* was a passionate repudiation of such prerogatives. The discovery of equality as a fundamental moral truth became an explosive force which swept away the old social order and inaugurated a new system of human relationships based upon its vision.

The idea of equality is the ethical foundation of the doctrine of common rights. And the protection of common rights depends, again, on a

practical application of the idea of equality—equality in access to power. Justice, we say, cannot be preserved for all men equally unless all have equal power, at least in principle. This is the reason for insisting on popular sovereignty. Even if it be admitted, as a practical matter, that men are unequal in their capacities, intelligence, and also in their moral qualities, such differences cannot be permitted to qualify their rights, since once a limitation is placed upon rights, clever men will find a way to whittle away the rights of others, until, finally, we are back in the grip of arbitrary, external power. So, popular sovereignty, whatever its difficulties in practice, must never be abridged.

Yet the fact that popular sovereignty is *always* abridged, one way or another, is one of the most mournful discoveries of modern political experience. And the art of remaining in power, in view of the democratic dogma, lies in keeping this abridgement a secret. When the secret gets out, some kind of reform or revolution takes place, bringing a new interpretation of the meaning of popular sovereignty. The *people*, it is argued, make the revolution. And sometimes they do, more or less. But there is always hierarchy, even in the very best of revolutions. And some revolutions are less "symbolic" than others. Hierarchy can put its organizing intelligence in the service of the equality of man. Hierarchy, like every other reality in human life, has both moral polarities.

In view of the obsession with power of virtually all modern political thought, it is a question whether the imperfections of popular sovereignty can ever be openly faced. They are known, of course, and continually exploited by the Machiavellians, although never openly. But obviously, these imperfections ought to be faced. Plato faced them. How can we? Only, it now seems evident, by severing all connection between the idea of human excellence and the idea of power—by equating excellence with the *rejection* of power. This, incidentally, is what Plato did, by

proposing that only men reluctant to accept power can be trusted with it. He also said that a disordered society with a poor constitution had better live by democracy, as the only way to avoid even worse misrule. (*Statesman*, 303b.)

By reason of the history since Plato's time, the suspicion of power is now much more extreme, and justifiably so. It follows that "reluctance" in relation to power is not a good enough guarantee for the modern citizen, and he will prefer the protection of popular sovereignty, even as Plato advised. But history since Plato's time has also produced a Tolstoy, a Thoreau, and a Gandhi—excellent men for whom power held no attractions at all. They would not accept it as a gift. This applies especially to Gandhi, who, after the liberation of India, could have had any role of power he chose in the new government, but knew that it would be of no assistance to him in accomplishing his ends.

We can say, then, that since the time of Gandhi and the spread of his conceptions of social order and leadership, it has been quite possible to return to a study of Plato's *Republic* without apprehensions concerning the misuse of power. Such a return is possible, that is, if we stipulate that Plato's Guardians are to be Gandhian educators, committed to nonviolence and wholly unwilling to coerce.

This is by no means contradictory to Plato's basic intentions in the *Republic*. For, despite the objections that have been made to its hierarchical system of authority and its neglect of popular sovereignty, Plato gave little direct attention to the exercise of power. This *sine qua non* of modern politics hardly concerned him, and the criticism which denounces the power of the rulers of the Platonic Utopia is mostly beside the point. In *Enter Plato* (Basic Books, 1965), Alvin W. Gouldner writes:

Plato does not pay attention to the kinds and degrees of social power that would be necessary to realize his new state. It is this seeming neglect of power that makes the modern mind uneasy.

To understand this, it needs to be remembered that Plato's cosmology conceives of "generation" as requiring two things which are coexistent and autonomous. One of these is, indeed power which, in the *Timaeus*, is God; the other is the Forms eternal Ideas, laws, or plans according to which power is to operate. From Plato's standpoint, it is not power but the laws which are problematic.

Power, in short, is all around, and Plato, as this sociologist points out, did not regard it "as mysterious, peculiarly scarce, or especially inaccessible." Dr. Gouldner continues:

Power is, after all, continually being mobilized, and used in the see-saw struggles between the cities and in the continuing internecine conflicts between oligarchs and democrats. Power is manifest in the occasional *coup d'état* of one party against the other, and, indeed, as we saw, Plato's own uncle had participated in one of these in Athens. For these reasons Plato might well feel that the mobilization of power as such is not the problem. The problem is what to do with power and how to use it.

Now this, one might say, could be a sneaky way of *getting* power—by pretending its unimportance. But such a conclusion flies in the face of everything Plato said as a serious man, a man whose lifelong efforts were devoted to educational activities; a man, moreover, who withdrew from the power-struggles of his own time for precisely the reason given in his seventh epistle and in the dialogues—because good cannot be accomplished with power alone, and especially with power used as the Greeks of that time were accustomed to use it. As Dr. Gouldner says:

Plato concludes that the customary use of power in Greek society is a corrupt and corrupting thing, a kind of dirty politics at its worst. Time and time again he remarks that power corrupts those who have it, and the more so the more they have of it, especially when they are not themselves subject to a restraining authority such as the laws. "[T]he very bad men," Socrates says to Callicles, "come from the class of those who have power." Again, "if anyone gives too great power to anything, . . . everything is overthrown," and excess and injustice result. . . .

It is thus not only that Plato, knowing the ways of power feels free to neglect it. There is the further consideration that he does not like what he knows

about power. Plato has lost confidence in the ability of the established loci of power to use it wisely. From his standpoint, the major conventional power centers are morally bankrupt. Neither oligarchs nor democrats, neither aristocrats nor the *demos*, neither the poor nor the rich are expected to use power for the moral purposes he sought. Indeed, none of them has even been able to maintain Athenian power; the city is defeated by Sparta while Sparta is, in its turn, vanquished. Thus Plato's utopianism is in some part also to be understood as a result of his despair about the uses of power.

So far as sheer power is concerned, he sees it as a diseased old drab available to all comers, it has lost its lure for him. Power, therefore, has to be transformed and purified before it can be touched without risk of contamination. It has to be used by philosopher-kings who will be beyond temptation, and it has to be controlled and mastered by laws embodying reason and wisdom. There is no problem in getting power, but who wants it as it is?

Well, we can say that Plato sets his utopian sights so high that it is hard to imagine any society that would actually embody the ideals set forth in the *Republic*. What good, then, is such a book? This question has serious meaning only for people committed to the modern reliance on power—who are convinced that the only important social and educational ideas are those that can be enforced. Yet we know from personal experience than an enforced good is a radically diminished good, that an enforced truth is almost invariably transformed into a lie. So Plato's insistence on discovery of the order and the laws governing human development, and his neglect of the means to power and disregard of its distribution, is simply the result of putting first things first.

In the light of recent history we have no difficulty in recognizing how easily the demand for getting power *first* displaces the inquiry into how men ought to govern their lives. It seems evident that Plato wanted to eliminate the distractions of the struggle for power in order to borrow *time* for a serious investigation of the educational or therapeutic community. So he announced on various occasions how unlikely it was that such a community could ever exist. At the same time,

anyone who gave thought to these matters might profit greatly. The wise man, as Socrates says at the end of Book IX, will try to live in accord with the principles of the utopian city, even if he knows that the city itself remains a distant ideal:

And in matters of honors and office too this will be his guiding principle. He will gladly take part in and enjoy those which he thinks will make him a better man, but in public and private life he will shun those that may overthrow the established habit of his soul.

Then, if that is his chief concern, he said, he will not willingly take part in politics.

Yes, by the dog, said I, in his own city he certainly will, yet perhaps not in the city of his birth, except in some providential juncture. I understand, he said. You mean the city whose establishment we have described, the city whose home is the ideal, for I think that it can be found nowhere on earth.

Well, said I, perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. The politics of this city only will be his and of none other.

That seems probable, he said.

The relation of the Gandhian conception of leadership—involving you could say, the voluntaristic, counter-society plan—to Platonic thought was briefly made clear by Hannah Arendt in her essay in the *New Yorker* for Feb. 23, 1967, in which the Socratic proposition, "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong," is the basis of discussion. How, for one thing, could you "compel" anyone to adopt this principle? And how could a practical politics be based on it? Pressing this paradox, Miss Arendt points out that the Socratic idea belongs to an order of value which is not apparent except to those who pursue the examined life. No coercion, and not even reasoning of the ordinary kind, could convince a man of its truth. Miss Arendt writes:

To the philosopher—or rather, to man insofar as he is a thinking being—this ethical proposition about doing and suffering wrong is no less compelling than mathematical truth. But to man insofar as he is

citizen, an acting being concerned with the world and the public welfare rather than with his own well-being—including for instance his "immortal soul" whose "health" should have precedence over the needs of a perishable body—the Socratic statement is not true at all.

What *is* the *Republic*, then, if its most essential message—its *Gandhian* content, as we might say—is, so far as the man in the street is concerned, "not true at all"? The *Republic*, it seems clear from the text, is a kind of allegory in which the problems of learning virtue and goodness and the meaning of justice are projected in the form of "social" questions, and closely examined in the light of the resulting objectivity. Then, these conflicts, along with their solution, are returned to where they originate and finally belong—in the nature of the individual. This is suggested at the end of Book IV:

And truly, said I, now that we have come to this height of argument I seem to see as from a point of outlook that there is one form of excellence, and that the forms of evil are infinite, yet there are some four of them that it is worth while to take note of.

What do you mean? he said.

As many as are the varieties of political constitutions that constitute specific types, so many, it seems likely, are the characters of soul.

How many, pray?

There are five kinds of constitutions, said I, and five kinds of soul.

The problem of order and freedom in the state is shown, at the end of Book IX, to be a demonstration of the same problem in the individual, the solution of which is the central task of education:

And it is plain, I said, that this is the purpose of the law, which is the ally of all classes in the state, and this is the aim of our control of children, our not leaving them free before we have established, so to speak, a constitutional government within them, and, by fostering the best element within them with the aid of the like in ourselves, have set up in its place a similar guardian and ruler in the child, and then. and then only, we leave it free.

The critic may see here, slyly inserted between the lines, the plan of a moralistic dictatorship, but to accuse Plato of this he must ignore the passage we have already quoted from Book IX, and also what is said in Book V, where Plato makes it clear that the "constitution" Socrates has in mind can never be put into effect until philosophers become kings, or kings philosophers. And to be sure that he is understood, Socrates explains that the basic improbability of this development has made him shrink from proposing any such utopian solution. "For," as he says, "it is not easy to see that there is no other way of happiness either for private or public life."

And when, in the *Gorgias*, Callicles ridicules Socrates, pointing to the defenselessness of the philosopher, and predicting that such a man could easily be dragged off to prison, condemned whether guilty or not, and even put to death because of the false charges of "a mean and rascally accuser," what reply does Socrates make?

Does he blow the whistle? Does he propose rolling out squad cars to enforce the justice of a righteous state? Does he shield the philosopher with the protection of a proper city hall, armed with the sanctions of commonly admitted social intelligence? He does nothing of the sort. He cherishes his defenselessness, his harmlessness, as a mother would a new-born child, and endeavors to demonstrate to Callicles that, *by nature*, "it is more shameful to do than to suffer wrong."

So, in the context of the *Republic*, at any rate, Socrates is a Ghandhian, a man who will invoke no other power than the power of truth.

REVIEW

MORE "NEW ECONOMICS"

No one knows the precise moment when Robert Owen, an Englishman who was the boy wonder of the industrial revolution, got the idea of conducting the enormous mills of New Lanark, employing two thousand people, "on higher principles than the current commercial ones." Such beginnings remain wrapped in obscurity, but may be worth inquiring into, because of their beneficent effect. In any event, the changes Owen introduced in those closing years of the eighteenth century, greatly improving the conditions and rewards of work, the housing of the workers, the education of their children, and fostering habits of cleanliness, order, and thrift, are now a matter of history, and all this was accomplished without the slightest interference with the "success" of the industrial enterprise. Owen was probably the first cotton spinner in England, and he went from industrial to social innovations with the confidence of a man convinced that he knew exactly what he was doing. He was, you could say, a "Walden II" sort of social thinker, believing that "man's character is made not by him but for him; that it has been formed by circumstances over which he had no control; that he is not a proper subject either of praise or blame—these principles leading up to the practical conclusion that the great secret in the right formation of man's character is to place him under the proper influences—physical, moral and social—from his earliest years."

Owen was thus a believer in "positive reinforcement," and the effects of his efforts at New Lanark and the surrounding community made the mills a Mecca for the social reformers of his time. The outcome of his subsequent experiments in communistic society—he invented the word "Socialism"—may reflect the problems which arise for conditioning-theory educators who rush into projects for which there are no existing models on which to base their reinforcement techniques. But Owen's "failures" are

unimportant in contrast to the inspiration of his achievements.

Another level of social achievement becomes manifest in the career of Marcel Barbu, the Frenchman whose initial inspiration led to the development of the "Communities of Work." Barbu was brought up in an orphanage. As a young man he found office work unpleasant and decided to learn a trade, getting, as he put it, "a first-hand knowledge of what bosses are worth and also workers." The trade was watch-case making, and he soon had his own business. He became what would be called a "model employer," then wondered what else he could do. France fell to the Germans at about this time and the resulting shake-up of all human relationships stirred Barbu to make an entirely new beginning. He was bored with being a successful capitalist and wanted to start an enterprise very differently conceived. Experienced mechanics in his trade, however, were not interested. As Claire Bishop relates in *All Things Common*:

So he went out in the streets and corralled a barber, a sausage-maker, a waiter, anyone, except .specialized industrial workers. He offered to teach them watch-case making, provided they would agree to SEARCH with him for a setup in which "the distinction between employer and employee would be abolished."

The first of the history-making "Communities of Work" was the result. There are a number of such communities today in France, and some in other European countries. Barbu's influence has spread widely, attracting the attention of thinkers like Arthur Morgan and Erich Fromm, and stimulating a wide variety of innovations in the laborcapital relationship, in some cases the object being to dissolve the relationship into unity. One businessman who followed Barbu's example told Miss Bishop:

"Capitalists are crazy. They think that if they go communitarian they will lose everything, right down to their car and bath-tub. Actually, if they really knew their business they could easily be elected Chief of Community at a high salary. The workers want chiefs who have experience and ability."

". . . It's the only, only thing to do. It is to the interest of the heads of firms to do it. Prosperous firms, understand? You don't go communitarian because you have failed economically as a capitalist."

Owen's projects broke down when he deserted practice for theory—or adopted theories involving steps which were either precocious to the times or inadequate in their grasp of the psychological dynamics of social change. "Positive reinforcement" will not succeed without unambiguous models, and when models are lacking there must be an appeal to the imagination and a daring, experimental mood. Barbu seems to have been equal to this. So were the associates he found. At the outset they made no rules. They knew they needed an ethical ground, but they took their time in spelling it out. There was no preconceived master-plan, no ideology. Finally they formulated a "common ethical minimum" which they said could not be an arbitrary convention since it must grow from experience. (An arbitrary convention, Mazzini pointed out, was Rousseau's fatal mistake.) The principles of the Community of Work were developed from practice, declared after being "tried in real life, everyday life, everybody's life." The original members—all young men "under thirty"—prefaced their statement by saying:

We express them [the common ethical principles] badly. For a long time we have hesitated to write them down because we know the ferocity, the sectarianism of the thinking brutes. We distrust philosophers and doctors.

The young men apparently did not need to read books like *The God That Failed* to find these things out.

One more discovery of the fellowship of Boimondau (the name of the watch-case makers' plant and community) seems important:

Doing away with private ownership and profit will cure many ills, but it cannot be a final aim. What man has to create is a manner of living in which he has the maximum possibility of being free.

Why isn't more known, generally, about such experiments? Because, in view of our "statistical"

way of identifying reality, they don't seem important. These changes in economic relationships, in comparison to the status quo of industrial enterprise, are about as numerous as germ cells are in proportion to somatic cells in the human body. And how many people are ready to admit that the time has come for a great mutation in the typical patterns of economic endeavor?

There are probably not more than a hundred, if that many, of such adventures going on in the world today. Yet this in no way invalidates the meaning of their example for the future. There is a sense in which, as practical achievements, they speak in concrete terms to the dreams of present-day youth. Whether they are recognized as such, or not, they represent what men can do for one another, and for the common future, in economic terms. And the best thing about them is their diversity of form, their admitted "incompleteness" in achievement. In projects which depend for their success upon a collaborative use of the imagination, finished plans may be fatal to growth, blueprints a stultification or a formula for disguised tyranny. *Nobody* can plan or shape another man's moral decisions, and a loose consensus among people of like mind is probably the optimum in cooperation for such social undertakings.

A recent book in which all these considerations are central is *Work and Community*, by Fred H. Blum (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, £2.5s.) . It is a study of the Scott Bader Commonwealth in Wollaston, England. The Commonwealth is the company which owns the Scott Bader Company, manufacturer of the materials used in the plastics industry, and the Commonwealth is owned by the 350 employees. This impressively successful transition from a conventional to an employee-owned enterprise was gradually achieved, and watched over with care and devotion by Ernest Bader, the founder of the manufacturing company. Today, the author of *Work and Community* is convinced that the Commonwealth is a forerunner

of radically new forms of socio-economic cooperation. As Mr. Blum says:

This book deals with the significance of the Commonwealth for the development of a social order in which human values are central and whole people can grow. Neither the "capitalist" countries of the West nor (as far as I know) the "Socialist" countries of the East have yet given adequate attention to the development of human potentialities. Both have comparable technological achievements but neither one has found a way to make man central in the organization of industry. . . .

The Scott Bader Commonwealth must be seen in this perspective. Though relatively small in size, it has the typical problems of industrial organization. It is large enough to offer a microscopic replica of the problems of our industrial civilization. Its experience with new ways of organizing work and new modes of participation is, therefore, essential for all those concerned with the human problems of our time.

The history and structure of the Bader enterprise are examined in intimate detail. The step-by-step increase in the ownership and managerial responsibilities of the employees is traced through the years since 1951, when the transfer began. Much space is given to the results of interviews with the employee-owners, every sort of question being asked. A key inquiry, however, sought to determine how each individual thought of the Scott Bader Commonwealth. In general, the author believes that while the Commonwealth has achieved success in abolishing the conflicts between capital and labor, by merging the two, and while it has supplied both field and structure through which "true freedom and new creative tensions may develop because the adjustment of the goals of the people and of the organization follows a new dynamics," a much wider realization remains to be attained. Often the workers thought of themselves as "part-owners" instead of participants in an undistributed whole. And the whole, after all, *cannot* be cut up and privately possessed.

Could we [asks Mr. Blum] possibly divide the factory among the people who work at Scott Bader? Which part would we give to whom? Who would get the boilers? the reactors? the transformers? the

pipes and lines connecting them? the instruments through which the chemical processes are controlled?

To raise these questions is enough to show their meaninglessness. Yet many people find it easier to think in terms of owning a part rather than in terms of common ownership.

Well, an ideal, holistic spirit of this sort seems a great deal to expect from less than twenty years of experience in social innovation and reform. And whether such profound psychological and moral insight can be generated simply from a changed work situation or relationship is a question that must be asked. Involved are ultimate matters of cosmology and philosophy—the basic relation of individuals to wholes, the idea of human "participation" in universal processes—considerations reaching far beyond the scope of economic reform, however excellent or desirable. Only a culturally impoverished society could look to economics for this instruction. There are world philosophies which provide ground for feelings of identity with the whole of life, for leading the individual to see his daily duties and joys as analogues of the functions and fulfillments of the whole vast panorama of nature. But for such feelings and attitudes to gain natural expression in the Western world would require great reforms in both education and religion—reforms every bit as radical as the ones now beginning in the economic sphere. Ancient peoples expressed these attitudes of wholeness spontaneously, but St. Francis was the last man of the West to ask a return to holistic, almost pantheistic unity with all life, and his appeal was not heard.

COMMENTARY PLATO'S "LAWS"

OUR lead article for this week, needless to say, is not concerned with defending *en masse* the practical legislative recommendations of the "Athenian" in Plato's *Laws*. It is early explained in this last of Plato's dialogues that the constitution there developed is a tract for the times—a scheme of social organization with some hope of immediate political influence, and not an expression of Plato's highest vision. Indeed, he suggests in the *Laws* that ancestral "organic" communities needed no laws at all, but were ruled by some kind of primeval social instinct, or by the wisdom of the gods. An ideal society, moreover, he says, would have no notion of "ownership," since all citizens would be sufficiently godlike to live and act in the common service—"a criterion of their excellence than which no truer or better will ever be found." Such a society, obviously, would require few laws. Then, launching into the possibilities of second- or third-rate states, he argues for an extensive variety of particular laws. Yet, as the editors of the most recent collected works of Plato say in their foreword to the *Laws*, "whoever persists will find Plato again and again treading the sunlit heights. He cannot keep long on the level of the commonplace."

The harshest thing that can be said of the *Laws* is by one of Plato's chief admirers, A. E. Taylor, who charges him with being "the inventor, so far as European society is concerned, of the proposal to make an official creed for the State and to treat dissent from it as criminal." It is hardly an extenuation of the death penalty the Athenian would impose on persistent atheists to say that, in Plato's apparent meaning, the atheist is a man who rejects the common grounds of reason in human affairs; yet it seems worth while to point out that in modern times the atheist is often rather a man who *insists* upon reasoning, regardless of orthodox opinion. So eminent an authority as Tillich, in the field of religious thought, seemed to

assent to this view. And Socrates, after all, was called an atheist.

But whatever Plato meant, there can be no defense here of theocracy and death penalties. We live now in times which are almost ready to abandon capital punishment—at least as a "domestic" penalty—and it seems fair to conclude that, were he a modern man, Plato might write a very different "tract for the times"—something much closer to the *Republic* in its "practical" proposals. The social failures of the present press the necessity of "ideal" social relationships with an urgency that could hardly be felt in Plato's time.

Meanwhile, as Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns suggest, the *Laws* reach many "sunlit heights" and should not be avoided. The volume quoted in this issue, edited by these two, is *Plato—The Collected Dialogues, including the Letters* (Bollingen Series LXXI, Pantheon Books, 1961, 1743 pages, \$7.50)

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves HELP FROM TOLSTOY

THE now emerging issue in education—which is not really new, but continually finds new forms—is whether the young should be taught how to "keep up" with their times, or be helped to find out about themselves and the meaning and purpose of their lives. The fact that this second objective can hardly be isolated from the circumstances and problems of the times too often obscures its purpose, especially when the "times" have grown as complicated as they are today.

The prevailing view of the role of education is plain from a brief portion of the report by Emmanuel G. Mesthene on the preliminary findings of the Harvard University Program on Technology and Society. Dr. Mesthene speaks of the widening gap between ordinary citizens and the highly trained persons who are becoming the technocratic managers in both government and industry—people skilled "in the computer-based analysis needed to sort out the complexities and subtleties of a rapidly evolving and highly interdependent society." Keeping up with these experts, he says, poses "a major problem." As put in a *New York Times* summary of his views:

. . . 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 skills. He acknowledged in the interview that this posed a crucial and continuing dilemma.

If we convert this dilemma into educational terms, we have the sort of questions found so troubling by the critics of Clark Kerr's book, *The Uses of the University*, where it becomes plain that many educators believe that this "chase" by the ordinary man after the special knowledge of the technocratic managers must be continued

whether or not we like or approve of it—and, indeed, whether or not the ordinary man has any hope of catching up with the experts—because *there is nothing else to do*.

Hardly anything can be said to people who reach this conclusion. They are resigned, perhaps reluctantly, to an élitist society. Involved is a fatalism which seems to claim that there could be no other possible use and development of technology than the ones we know—that the imperatives of this system must be submitted to as though they were "laws of nature." For people so convinced, the fact that these imperatives create a morally intolerable situation for education is itself an intolerable view.

That it *is* an intolerable situation for education is clear from what Tolstoy wrote many years ago about the problem of "keeping up." He began by pointing out that the chief purpose of education is to establish *equality* between teacher and learner. The object is to make the pupil independent of the teacher. That is how the pupil attains maturity. There is no other way. If education is so arranged that this equality becomes impossible, then the educational process is corrupted. Instead of helping the young to become independent, education acquires quite other aims. These false aims are listed by Tolstoy:

- (1) Learning on the basis of obedience; (2) learning on the basis of egotism; and (3) learning on the basis of material advantage and ambition.

Tolstoy next compares the results of learning to achieve equality with what happens when false aims prevail:

By admitting that the equality of knowledge is the aim of the learner's activity, I see that upon reaching this aim the activity itself stops; but by assuming obedience, egotism, and material advantages as the aim, I see, on the contrary, that however obedient the learner may become, however he may surpass all the others in worth, no matter what material advantages and civil rights he may have obtained, his aim is not reached and the possibility of the activity of education does not stop. I see, in reality, that the aim of education, by admitting

such false bases, is never attained, that is, the equality of knowledge is not acquired, but there is obtained, independently of education, a habit of obedience, an irritable egotism, and material advantages. The adoption of these false foundations of education explains to me all the errors of pedagogy and the incompatibility of the results of education with the demands inherent in man, made upon it, to which these errors lead.

How does this apply to modern education? Well, if the central problem of our society, as defined by Dr. Mesthene, is that "the ordinary citizen must 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," we plainly have a situation in which advanced technocratic skills are asserted to be the path to the highest good. And if these rather special talents are the only true road to human progress, then it follows that all men must either acquire them, or, failing in this, be taught to admire their possessors from some lower and humbler estate. Which is one way of saying that "ordinary citizens" who cannot gain equality of knowledge with the technical élite will need to learn obedience instead. It can hardly be concealed that "ordinary citizens" are thus likely to remain forever in an inferior condition, for how could they, especially in just their spare time, acquire a technical understanding in any way equal to that of the men who are using it every day?

If you look at recent criticisms of education, you find that already this basic inconsistency has assumed manifold forms. How, it is asked, can professional scholars, interested chiefly in training graduate students to be technical experts like themselves, possibly contribute to the "general education" of ordinary people? Method is the thing. Science has reasons the heart cannot know.

In the academic world, of course, a student can refuse to specialize, and take the leavings of scholarly specialization in lieu of a general education, but subsequently, in the situation which Dr. Mesthene describes, the individual will be confronted as a citizen by the choice between

becoming a specialist and becoming a True Believer.

What then can be done?

The alternative is fairly simple, and a few schools are choosing to move in this direction. It is to regard the *students* as the important consideration in the educational process, and not the need to make them "keep up" with runaway technological imperatives. It would be better to let the machines break down, if they have to. It would be better to lose a war if we have to. (The fact that losing the present war might be the noblest achievement of the century is a point worth some attention.)

Nor does the alternative require a Luddite abandonment of all technology. It begins with the assumption that human beings are basically competent to live human lives, and that education, whatever else it does, should not be a means of convincing the young of their incompetence. It is the young, after all, who must learn how to create a society which does not depend on obedience to a technological elite for its survival.

Evidence of the trend in this direction is provided in a recent announcement by Noel McInnis, of the Center for Curriculum Design at Kendall College, Evanston, Illinois. Prof. McInnis writes:

The motto of the Center for Curriculum Design is Bucky Fuller's observation, "There is no such thing as genius. Some children are less damaged than others." Our children, whether geniuses or not, are rather consistently damaged by an educational establishment which is overwhelmingly remedial in its emphasis. Our educational system communicates quite clearly to students that they are in it to overcome their ignorance. During 12 to 16 years of education designed to remedy this ignorance, students tend to develop a very negative self-image.

The Center for Curriculum Design is devoted to the encouragement of instructional formats which emphasize the development of competence rather than the overcoming of ignorance. Even with little change in existing instructional techniques, the

conversion of a remedial to a developmental ethos would work wonders in our educational system.

Prof. McInnis gives some examples of achievements along this line in particular colleges and high schools. A word, however, on "ignorance." There is really nothing wrong with the idea of overcoming ignorance. It becomes vicious only when the implicit contention of the educational system is that the pupil's ignorance is infinite and will remain so; that he will never catch up with the all-knowing specialists who are running things so well for everybody. In the context of this contention, specialists must function as secular priests, since they control the salvation of ordinary folk who cannot save themselves, no matter how hard they try. Ordinary folk can of course become secular priests themselves, and some do, but the man who decides to become an authority instead of an equalizer has no business in education. In fact, he has no legitimate business at all.

FRONTIERS

A Calculus of Sin

THE chief qualification in the high art of stone-throwing, in addition to accurate aim and good choice of missiles, is the capacity to demonstrate freedom from sin. One does this by championing the virtues all sensible people believe in. For example, if the object is to discredit a certain segment of present-day youth, it is hardly necessary to listen to what they say if you can show that they don't take enough baths. After all, it isn't as though they don't have access to tubs or showers; one thing America *has* achieved is adequate plumbing. And what sort of person would be dirty when it's so easy to be clean? There are other arguments, of course, and we know what they are. Mainly, they concern the incomprehensible stubbornness of a portion of the next generation that refuses to make normal use of advantages and opportunities offered by a civilization which, while admittedly not perfect, is almost certainly the best one yet. But when you explain these things to them, as patiently as you can, they don't hear you. They just go on being dirty, indifferent, and *different*. How can you deal with such people?

Still, one of them might say: "Yes, we're dirty, and so is Lake Erie! Why don't you do something about that and leave us alone?" He could also reasonably ask, "Have you been to Santa Barbara lately? Take a look at the beaches." Or perhaps make a friendly warning: "Don't draw a deep breath in Los Angeles; you might die." He could even request a list of American rivers it's safe to drink out of without a big filtering set-up to remove the various poisons that get worse every year. And then, walking away, he might add, "Man, we're *all* dirty; we wear our dirt differently, and we don't bother to pretend it isn't there."

So. dirt, or dirtiness, we are obliged to admit, is of various sorts. And in these days of "lesser of two evils" justifications for practically

everything, the young may have the better of the argument, if such victories have importance. You can get away from noisy, unwashed people, but there's no escape from smog.

Comparisons could go on. Many adults show little patience with student violence, yet they have been singularly long-suffering when it comes to violence in the entertainment on which these young were brought up. According to the *Saturday Review* for April 12, the federal government—which has its own real-life problems of conscience in this respect—is about to investigate "possible health hazards from violence on-television." Spurred by a request from the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare will try to find out how televised brutality affects the mental condition of young Americans. Meanwhile, Jack Gould, a leading television critic, reports that while educators, intellectuals, and some politicians often object to violence in television, "the volume of complaining mail from average viewers is negligible."

The *SR* Communications Editor quotes from Lawrence J. Friedman of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytical Institute:

"If a child watches enough television, he will automatically become violent, because he has nowhere else to go with his normal aggressive energy he should be working off in creative activity." Dr. Friedman had three young patients aged eleven, nine, and seven, each of whom regressed to bed-soiling, and it took him a whole year to convince their parents that long hours of sitting in front of the TV was making the children regress. When the parents finally agreed to take the television away, the passivity disappeared and the bed-soiling stopped. Dr. Friedman is really saying that a generation that grew up just pushing a button to be entertained is finding it extremely difficult to establish objective relationships with other human beings. Dr. Friedman concludes that "the consequences of TV are much more far-reaching than ever described."

Maybe some of the young don't *want* "objective relationships" with this society. One of the moodier comments of Paul Goodman, who

meets a lot of young people, is along these lines. Writing in the *New York Review of Books* for April 10, he says:

The young are quick to point out the mess we have made, but I don't see that they really care about that, as if it were not their mankind. Rather, I see them with the Christmas astronauts flying toward the moon and seeing the earth shining below: it is as if they are about to abandon an old house and therefore it makes no difference if they litter it with beer cans. These are bad thoughts.

Well, the young are not all like that, but why are there enough of them like that to give point to Goodman's sad generalization?

Another Goodman—Walter Goodman, in the *American Scholar* for this Spring—has a paragraph of diagnosis concerning the less attractive forms of the new individualism; it makes you wonder if there's anything to the old saying, "Like father, like son." This Mr. Goodman writes:

We are, by all tests and signs, in the midst of an epidemic of the ailment known as doing-one's-thing. Carried into the Western world originally along with an innocent cargo of psychological doctrine, the germ resulted in nothing more harmful for many years than an outbreak of permissive child-rearing; it festered in sinister quiet until, in this decade, the needed conditions presented themselves, and the time was ready for the infection of our entire cultural scene, from the tinselly halls of television to the heady spaces of modern poetry and painting. The two danger signs of the disease are excessive self-indulgence and self-delusion.

But this "self-indulgence" is sort of the road to progress in a consumer civilization, isn't it? Keeping it going is certainly an approved way of moving goods off shelves. Finally, it is hardly out of order to suggest that the stalwarts of industry and trade who can't get the ear of talented young men under thirty, even with offers of well-paying jobs, are precisely the people who have been endlessly willing to dirty up the air with the most elaborate trivia Madison Avenue can imagine. Mr. Goodman puts it so accurately:

One finds oneself oohing and ahing over the exciting new TV commercials neglecting to note that

they are inseparable from the silly programs—two symptoms of one malaise. It is as though one were catering a banquet, and all the trappings were of surpassing elegance and the service exquisite, only the food was terrible.

Well, as someone sagely remarked, a democracy is a society in which everybody must learn to dispose of his own dirt. This applies to both the righteous and the delinquents although, usually, the righteous have the nastiest and most persistent messes to clean up.