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ECONOMICS AND CONSERVATION

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I

I HAVE set myself the task of studying in particular how economics relates to the protection and conservation of the environment in which we live. I very much welcome the opportunity of doing this because I have been worried for some time about certain misunderstandings about the nature and relevance of economics, that seem to me to exist not only among laymen but also among many of the economists themselves, misunderstandings inimical to conservation. When the economist delivers a verdict to the effect that this or that activity is "uneconomic," two important and closely related questions arise: first, what does this verdict mean? And, second, is the verdict conclusive in the sense that practical action can reasonably be based on it?

Going back into history we may recall that when there was talk about founding a professorship for political economy at Oxford some 150 years ago, many people were by no means happy about the prospect. Edward Copleston, the great Provost of Oriel College, did not want to admit into the University's curriculum a science "so prone to usurp the rest"; even Henry Drummond Esq. of Albury Park, who endowed the professorship in 1825, felt it necessary to make it clear that he expected the University to keep the new study "in its proper place."[1] The first professor, Nassau Senior, was certainly not to be kept in an *inferior* place. Immediately, in his inaugural lecture, he predicted that the new science "will rank in public estimation among the first of moral sciences in interest and in utility" and claimed that "the pursuit of wealth . . . is, to the mass of mankind, the great source of moral improvement."[2] Not all economists, to be sure, have staked their claims quite so high. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) looked upon political economy "not as a thing by itself, but as a fragment of a greater whole; a branch of Social Philosophy, so interlinked with all the other branches that its conclusions, even in its own peculiar province, are only true conditionally, subject to interference and counteraction from causes not directly within its scope."[3] And the great John Maynard Keynes, some 80 years later, admonished us not to "overestimate the importance of the economic problem, or sacrifice to its supposed necessities other matters of greater and more permanent significance."[4]

Such voices, however, are but seldom heard today. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that, with increasing affluence, economics has moved into the very centre of public concern, and economic performance, economic growth, economic expansion, and so forth have become the abiding interest, if not the obsession, of all modern societies. In the current vocabulary of condemnation there are few words as final and conclusive as the word "uneconomic." If an activity has been branded as uneconomic, its right to existence is not merely questioned but energetically denied. Anything that is found to be an impediment to economic growth is a shameful thing, and if people cling to it, they are thought of as either saboteurs or fools. Call a thing immoral or ugly, soul-destroying or a degradation of man, a peril to the peace of the world or to the well-being of future generations; as long as you have not shown it to be "uneconomic" you have not really questioned its right to exist, grow and prosper.

But what does it *mean* when we say something is uneconomic? I am not asking what

most people mean when they say this; because that is clear enough. They simply mean that it is like an illness: you are better off without it. The economist is supposed to be able to diagnose the illness and then, with luck and skill, remove it. Admittedly, economists often disagree among each other about the diagnosis and, even more frequently, about the cure, but that merely proves that the subject matter is uncommonly difficult and economists, like other humans, are fallible.

No, I am asking what *it* means, *what sort of meaning the method of economics actually produces.* And the answer to this question cannot be in doubt: something is uneconomic when it fails to earn an adequate profit in terms of money. The method of economics does not, and cannot, produce any other meaning. Numerous attempts have been made to obscure this fact, and they have caused a very great deal of confusion; but the fact remains. Society, or a group or individual within society, may decide to hang on to an activity or asset *for non-economic reasons*—social, aesthetic, moral, or political—but this does in no way alter their *uneconomic* character. The judgment of economics, in other words, is an extremely *fragmentary* judgment; out of a large number of aspects which in real life have to be seen and judged together before a decision can be taken, economics supplies only one—whether a thing yields a money profit *to those who undertake it* or not.

Do not overlook the words "to those who undertake it." It is a great error to assume, for instance, that the methodology of economics is normally applied to determine whether an activity carried on by a group within society yields a profit to society as a whole. Even nationalized industries are not considered from this more comprehensive point of view. Every one of them is given a financial target—which is, in fact, an obligation[5]—and is expected to pursue this target without regard to any damage it might be inflicting on other parts of the economy. In fact, the prevailing creed, held with equal fervor by all political parties, is that the common good will necessarily be maximized if everybody, every industry and trade, whether nationalized or not, strives to earn an acceptable "return" on the capital employed. Not even Adam Smith has a more implicit faith in the "hidden hand" to ensure that "what is good for General Motors is good for the United States."

However that may be, about the *fragmentary* nature of the judgments of economics there can be no doubt whatever. Even within the narrow compass of the economic calculus, these judgments are necessarily and *methodically* narrow. For one thing, they give vastly more weight to the short than to the long term, because in the long term, as Keynes put it with cheerful brutality, we are all dead. And then, secondly, they are based on a definition of cost which excludes all "free goods," that is to say, the entire God-given environment, except for those parts of it that have been privately appropriated. This means that an activity can be economic although it plays hell with the environment, and that a competing activity, if at some cost it protects and conserves the environment, will be uneconomic.

Economics, moreover, deals with goods in accordance with their market value and not in accordance with what they really are. The same rules and criteria are applied to primary goods, which man has to win from nature, and secondary goods, which pre-suppose the existence of primary goods and are manufactured from them; and among primary goods no distinction is made between renewable and non-renewable goods, although from many points of view this is the most vital distinction of all. All goods are treated the same, because the point of view is fundamentally that of private profit making, and this means that it is inherent in the methodology of economics *to ignore man's dependence on the natural world.*

It is not surprising, therefore, that the idea of conservation has no home in economics. It is obviously an uneconomic idea, an impediment to

the maximization of immediate profits. You may have noticed this in connection with the discovery of gas in the North Sea. In ministerial speeches and leading articles in *The Times* it was announced as an obvious and unquestionable truth that any failure to exploit this new power resource with the utmost speed and at the highest possible rate would be grossly uneconomic.

Now, there would be no need to enlarge on these points, if everyone were aware of the extreme narrowness of the base on which such judgments are built. Nor would there be any cause for criticism, for it is the acknowledged right of any specialist to specialize as narrowly as he wishes. The trouble is, however, that the words "economic" and "uneconomic" (as we have observed already) have acquired an infinitely wider meaning than they can legitimately claim: they are taken as almost synonymous with good and bad, or useful and useless.

It is a remarkable fact: the gloomy forebodings of the Oxford dons 150 years ago have come true—economics is indeed a science "so prone to usurp the rest." In spite of its palpable and obvious narrowness, it has been enthroned as universal judge. In spite of its specialization on private profit, verdicts are taken as equally applicable to the public interest. In spite of its concentration on the short term, which may be sufficient for the purposes of private persons, its doctrines are being applied to the affairs of nations whose life-spans are counted in centuries, if not millennia. Instead of using economics as a useful, if narrowly specialized, tool, modern society has embraced it as its primary religion, thereby laying itself open to dangers of an unprecedented kind.

It is obvious that the idea of conservation is more than ever in need of support, as the tempestuous advances of science and technology multiply the hazards. But as I said before, it is an uneconomic idea and has therefore no acknowledged place in a society under the dictatorship of economics. When it is occasionally introduced into the discussion, it tends to be treated not merely as a stranger but as an undesirable alien, probably dishonest and almost certainly immoral. In the past, when religion taught men to look upon Nature as God's handiwork, the idea of conservation was too self-evident to require special emphasis. But now that the religion of economics lends respectability to man's inborn envy and greed and Nature is looked upon as man's quarry to be used and abused without let or hindrance, what could be more important than an explicit theory of conservation? We teach our children that science and technology are the instruments for man's battle with nature, but forget to warn them that, being himself a part of nature, man could easily be on the losing side.

Modern economic thinking, as I have said, is peculiarly unable to consider the long term and to appreciate man's dependence on the natural world. It is therefore peculiarly defenceless against forces which produce a gradual and cumulative deterioration in the environment. Take the phenomenon of urbanization. It can be assumed that no-one moves from the countryside into the city unless he expects to gain a more or less immediate personal advantage therefrom. His move, therefore, is economic, and any measure to inhibit the move would be uneconomic. In particular, to make it worthwhile for him to stay in agriculture by means of tariffs or subsidies, would be grossly uneconomic. That it is done none the less is attributed to the irrationality of political pressures. But what about the irrationality of cities with millions of inhabitants? What about the cost, frustration, congestion and ill health of the modern monster city? Yes, indeed, these are problems to be looked at, but (we are told) they do not invalidate the doctrine that subsidized farming is grossly uneconomic.

It is not surprising, therefore, that all around us the most appalling malpractices and malformations are growing up, the growth of which is not being inhibited, because to do so would be uneconomic. Something like an

explosion has to occur before warning voices are listened to, the voices of people who had been ridiculed for years and years as nostalgic, reactionary, unpractical and starry-eyed. No one would apply these epithets today to those who for so many years had raised their voices against the heedless economism which has turned all large American cities into seedbeds of riots and civil war. Now that it is almost too late, popular comments are outspoken enough: "Throughout the U.S., the big cities are scarred by slums, hobbled by inadequate mass transportation, starved for sufficient finances, torn by racial strife, half-choked by polluted air." And yet: "The nation's urban population is expected to double by the beginning of the next century."[6] You might be tempted to ask, Why? The answer would come back: Because it would be uneconomic to attempt to resettle the rural areas. The American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, has brilliantly shown how the conventional wisdom of economics produces the absurdity of "private opulence and public squalor."[7]

Other changes, equally destructive or even more so, are going on all around us, but they must not be talked about because to do so might cause alarm and even impede economic growth. All the same, we cannot claim that we have not been warned. For instance, in spite of enormous advances in medicine, on which we do not fail to congratulate ourselves, there is a relentless advance in the frequency of chronic illness. The U.S. Public Health Service states that "About 40.9 per cent of persons living in the United States were reported to have one or more chronic conditions. While some of these conditions were relatively minor, others were serious conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, or mental illness."[8] "We are exchanging health for mere survival," writes Lewis Herber in his comprehensive and invaluable book on *Our Synthetic Environment.* "We have begun to measure man's biological achievements, not in terms of his ability to live a vigorous, physically untroubled life, but in terms of his ability to preserve his mere existence in an increasingly distorted environment. Today, survival often entails ill health and rapid physical degeneration."[9] Even the achievements in prolonging life are not impressive, except for the very young. In America, the life expectancy of a white male aged 45 years has increased by only 2.9 years since 1900, and that of a 65-year-old man by only 1.2 years. Considering the enormous economic advances in America since the beginning of this century, these results are astonishingly small. "Almost any improvement in social conditions or medical techniques," comments Lewis Herber, "would have rescued large numbers of people from premature death and added substantially to their life span . . . Nevertheless, most of the increase in longevity is due to the fact that more children survive the diseases of infancy and adolescence today than two generations ago. What this means, in effect, is that if it weren't for the extraordinary medical advances and great improvements of the material conditions of life, today's adult might well have a much shorter life span than his grandparents had. This is a remarkable indication of failure."[10] At the same time, the expenditure on medical services in the United States now amounts to some 50,000 million dollars a year, or about *five dollars a week* for every man, woman, and child, on average.

It is not my purpose to investigate the causes of this extraordinary development. It is well known that the infectious diseases, which were the principal causes of death in 1900, have been reduced almost to vanishing point; but that deaths from the so-called degenerative diseases have greatly increased, particularly deaths from cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, involving increasing numbers of children and young adults. "Many individuals seem to be succumbing to degenerative diseases long before they reach the prime of life. Not only is cancer a leading cause of death in childhood and youth, but . . . many American males between 20 and 30 years of age are on the brink of a major cardiac disease. . . . If diseases of this kind represent the normal deterioration of the body, then human biology is taking a patently

abnormal turn. A large number of people are breaking down prematurely."[11] Deaths from infectious diseases are now so low that further medical advances in this field cannot have a large impact; yet the growth of the degenerative diseases continues. The time may not be far off when death rates overall start rising in the most "advanced" countries. The real costs of a deteriorating environment are heavy indeed.

Developments of this kind are invariably the result of imbalance and disharmony. In the blind pursuit of immediate monetary gains modern man has not only divorced himself from nature by an excessive and hurtful degree of urbanization, he has also abandoned the idea of living in harmony with the myriad forms of plant and animal life on which his own survival depends; he has developed chemical substances which are unknown to nature and do not fit into her immensely complex system of checks and balances; many of them are extremely toxic, but he none the less applies them or discharges them into the environment, as if they would be out of action when they had fulfilled their specific purpose or could no longer be seen.

The religion of economics, at the same time, promotes an idolatry of rapid change, unaffected by the elementary truism that a change which is not an unquestionable improvement is a doubtful blessing. The burden of proof is placed on those who take the "ecological viewpoint": unless *they* can produce evidence of marked injury to man, the change will proceed. Common sense, on the contrary, would suggest that the burden of proof should lie on the man who wants to introduce a change; *he* has to demonstrate that there *cannot* be any damaging consequences. But this would take too much time, and would therefore be uneconomic.

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(*To be concluded*)

NOTES

1. *Cf.* A. Dwight Culler, *The Imperial Intellect,* Yale University Press, 1955, p. 250
2. Nassau Senior, *An Introductory Lecture on Political Economy*, delivered before the University of Oxford on the 6th of December, 1826, London, 1827, pp. 1 and 12.
3. John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography,* 1924 ed., pp. 165-6.
4. John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Persuasion,* London, 1933, p. 373.
5. *Cf. The Financial and Economic Obligations* of *the Nationalised Industries,* Command 1337, H.M.S.O., London, 1961.
6. *Time,* Aug. 26, 1966, p. 11
7. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society,* Penguin, 1962, p. 211.
8. U.S. Public Health Service, Health Statistics from the *U.S. National Health Survey,* Series C, No. 5, Washington D.C., 1961, p. 1
9. Lewis Herber, *Our Synthetic Environment,* London, 1963, pp. 198-9
10. *Ibid.* pp. 197-98.
11. *Ibid.* pp. 8-9; *Medical Tribune,* Vol. 2, No. 29 (1961), p. 16.

REVIEW
AN ALL-PERVASIVE ILL

THE impenetrable self-righteousness encountered by Harry Ashmore and William Baggs in their effort to work through "channels" for peace in Vietnam (reported in *Mission to Hanoi*) is carefully anatomized by John Kenneth Galbraith in *The Triumph.* This is a novel in which the former U.S. ambassador to India, and author of *The Affluent Society* and *The New Industrial State,* reveals his full comprehension of why a nation supposed to be committed to democratic ideals finds itself on the wrong side of nearly every manifestation of social struggle around the world. The portraiture is so deft, the analysis so complete, that the reader is likely to agree with Mr. Galbraith that "there are truths which best emerge in fiction." Perhaps the most devastating conclusion of his romance of American support to a Latin American dictator is the manifest fact that the responsible policy-makers and diplomats are neither stupid nor "bad" men. They are sagacious political operators working in behalf of what they conceive to be the "national interest."

That Mr. Galbraith saves the situation for authentic social reform in this small Latin American country, producing an extraordinary young man who, endowed with all the correct liberal opinions, happens also to be the popular son of the unseated dictator, is perhaps the only fictive element in the book. It adds an element of sheer delight to a story that could otherwise have been only depressing. Mr. Galbraith must have enjoyed himself in putting this tale together, and his didactic intentions, admitted in a foreword, interfere not at all with the reader's enjoyment.

But why, one must ask, do these people who believe in *power* always, or almost always, win? Perhaps their monotonous victories are due very largely to the fact that their political opponents—the people who object to the misuse of power and want it properly controlled—are also, in their own way, believers in power. When they write, they contend mainly about power situations. You get the impression, even from them, that only power situations are *real.* So, conceivably, these good men, the men who hold what all of us enlightened people regard as the right opinions, who argue for moral decisions in public policy, may be even more effective than the Machiavellians in teaching the rest of the well-intentioned members of the population that power, after all, is the thing.

It is natural enough, of course, to say that a society which totally ignores power is just inconceivable. You can't order affairs with "absolutes" like that. Maybe so. Maybe no society could survive by practicing the total rejection of power. But maybe, also, the rule of survival will some day disclose itself to be that people who want to survive must *try* to live in the total rejection of power. Saying it won't work is not the point. Absolute power doesn't work, either. The point is that men may have to figure out a way of putting their failures in relation to power *on the other side of the line.* Maybe making their rejection of power absolute is the only way to keep power from absorbing their lives. Maybe a nice, rational balance in this matter is no longer feasible—can no longer be either balanced or rational. Maybe power, in the modern world, stands in the same relationship to human survival as alcohol to an alcoholic. One drink will finish him off.

This, in a way, was Gandhi's point. He was a kind of absolutist. At any rate, it took an absolutist like him to spread the idea of non-violence all over the world. Just possibly, the liberal formula of applying as much goodness and virtue to human affairs as seems "practical" will always result, in the end, in submission to the go-for-broke determination of men who put their faith in power.

Meanwhile, the wrong sort of absolutism is spreading as rapidly as the Black Plague spread in the Middle Ages. James A. Wechsler, an editor of the *New York Post,* writes in the *Progressive* for May:

> The case for outrage in this spring of 1969 is everywhere and overwhelming . . . The real question increasingly confronting many of us is whether the response to the failures and frustrations of our age will take the form of a revolt against reason, with liberalism as the major target of a mindless militancy on the left that inflames a new era of know-

> nothingism on the right. A Harris Poll reports that sixty-eight per cent of those interviewed regard campus demonstrations as unjustified, eighty-nine per cent would support college presidents who call in troops, and seventy-two per cent backed withdrawal of Federal scholarships from lawbreaking protectors—all this at a time when other surveys showed an unprecedented degree of public disaffection with the Vietnam war.

Anyone who has tried to understand the trouble on the campuses knows how meaningless it is to say you "approve" or "disapprove" what is happening. Taking a poll of opinions of this sort is about as constructive and informing as it would be to ask a group of doctors what they think about the symptoms of measles—would it be better, for instance, if children didn't break out in little red spots? Most doctors would probably prefer to have the spots, which at least tell them that something is wrong. But inviting people to take a position on student disorders substitutes democratic ritual for intelligent inquiry, and makes the resulting sanction of power inevitable.

There is hardly any difference between these people who take a "hard line" in telling the pollsters what they think college presidents ought to do to suppress student uprisings, and the tough-minded diplomats in Mr. Galbraith's book, for whom power has become the equivalent of Divine Providence. And it isn't the toughness so much as the *piety* of this reliance on power that makes the situation so discouraging.

Where, really, does the weakness lie? It lies, quite plainly, in the universal preoccupation of good as well as bad men with power relationships as the important ones in human life. So, as an antidote, we may find it necessary to begin to treat power relationships with a total therapeutic neglect.

Not long ago a college president resigned from his job. It seemed to him that the situations with which he was confronted had no solution save through the exercise of power, and this, in his view, meant the end of education. He said he would return to work when circumstances made education possible. What better way could there be to impress students with the futility of using power to gain their ends?

It is the most natural thing in the world that students have been able to invade and interrupt educational processes with little or no opposition. Of course they can do this easily. Education has no defense against violence or power. Its vulnerability is negative evidence that it exists at all. So the students have not triumphed over anything important. They are not revolutionary heroes. No toughness was required for what they did. Archimedes was no challenge to the Roman soldier who killed him. The students have just made education—what little may have been going on—stop altogether. And now some of them seem to be suffering from a Jack Homer complex.

Perhaps this has had to happen, to open up the way for something better. It takes social intelligence to establish social forms which are generous to innovation. It takes vision and ingenuity to turn outmoded forms into the basis for constructive change. Perhaps we do not have what it takes. It seems obvious that instead of trying to comprehend the needs of continuous growth, we—both students and adults—are more interested in finding scapegoats, people to blame for the results of a common lack of imagination. For lack of imagination is surely what the present scene exhibits, on practically all fronts. From Mr. Galbraith's novel to the depressing facts recited by Mr. Wechsler, the diagnosis must be, not lack of righteousness—we have righteousness to burn—but lack of imagination.

What can we do to remedy this defect? The question is rhetorical and it *has* to be rhetorical, since use of the imagination defies programmatic solutions, especially at the beginning. There is no second-hand act of the imagination. There is no hearsay "spiritual" inspiration. We have, in fact, to learn to do what we have long believed is not real and has no practical effect.

COMMENTARY
BLAKE'S DIAGNOSIS

A GOOD book to read in connection with the discussion in this week's Review—the modern preoccupation with power—would be Ronald V. Sampson's *The Psychology of Power* (Pantheon, 1966). Mr. Sampson teaches politics at the University of Bristol. In this book he looks at the underlying assumptions of a self-destructive civilization as the first requirement for finding better ones.

A passage from an article he recently contributed to the *Nation* (May 5) will illustrate his approach. Considering the question, "What Is a University?", he says:

> The truth of the matter is that the new generation, from which the students are drawn, can see clearly enough that the world directed by their elders, themselves burdened by an evil past legacy, is headed for disaster. They naturally feel an urgent need to understand the causes of what has gone wrong, and a very human laudable desire to mitigate the terrible suffering which has ensued—particularly for people in Vietnam, Biafra, Algeria, Palestine, Latin America, South Africa, but also for the hosts of poor and deprived people in the Western industrial heartlands themselves. As the natural sciences offer them no means of understanding what are essentially human problems, as these disciplines are indeed directly implicated in the production of some of the worst evils from which escape is sought (atomic weapons, biological chemical warfare), students increasingly seek entry into the frequently overcrowded lecture halls and libraries of the humanities and social sciences. What must be their frustration and disillusion when all too frequently they are proffered, in the name of science, not ruthlessly honest analysis of existing social evils but a framework in which problems are defined in terms of existing culture whose presuppositions are never called into question, since to do so is ruled out of order on the ground that one is appealing to a metaphysical dimension of experience, the existence of which is excluded by the rules of positivistic science.
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> "Man," wrote William Blake, "must and will have some Religion: if he has not the Religion of Jesus, he will have the Religion of Satan and will erect the Synagogue of Satan, calling the Prince of this World, God, destroying all who do not worship Satan under the name of God." We have neglected this truth at our ever increasing peril; and today as a consequence the young are in open revolt, openly contemptuous of the values of their elders. Our universities are temples of science but science perverted to the service of false values. The young feel a keen sense of frustration and anger, knowing something is radically wrong, but confused and unsure as to the correct diagnosis of the malaise.

Well, so are we all. Perhaps the first positive step must be the realization that we cannot leave this diagnosis to others. Neither can we "explain" it to others. Paradoxically, we have to meet this situation together, yet by ourselves.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
REFLECTIONS ON LIBERAL EDUCATION

[This article is a much condensed version of a paper by W. H. Ferry which first appeared in the *Wascana Review*, published in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. The paper had been presented at the Regina campus of the University of Saskatchewan.]

IN talking about education I try, though not always successfully, to remember two things. The first is that no important proposition about education can be proved. It can be believed in, and argued fiercely. But its validity cannot be demonstrated, only asserted. Consider the strife, brisk to this very moment, between the exponents of permissive and non-permissive education. The unprovability of any important hypothesis about education is one of the reasons why the school boards that make U.S. education such a patchwork affair are happiest when they are arguing about grades of grass-seed and not about educational policy. It is easy to prove, by experience, the relative value of grass-seeds, but impossible to demonstrate the superior value of trigonometry to advanced stenography.

Professor Edward C. Moore of the University of Massachusetts magnificently illustrates this point in the following:

> On what grounds is cosmology more valuable than plumbing? Or theoretical physics superior to fly-casting? This is not to demean cosmology or theoretical physics, but plumbing and fly-casting and ballet dancing and music appreciation and marriage counselling and child-raising are intrinsically important to the happiness of mankind, and for those whose talents lie in these directions, a democracy has the same obligation to allow them the opportunities to develop their potentialities as it has to provide opportunities for the theoretical physicist, the philosopher, or the linguist who can speak five languages.

The second thing I try to keep in mind is that the quality of education and of its machinery is determined by the ends it is asked to serve. Society provides the primary objects. But this is not to say that education, particularly at its highest levels, is to foreswear responsibility for the shaping of the community's goals. It is just here that the highest responsibility is imposed, the most difficulty encountered, and the delinquency most marked. The depth and virulent possibilities of the issues confronting Western man are a rough measure of education's failure to keep pace and to live up to its seminal role.

I propose to examine the present and prospective novelty of our situation under three headings. In advance I should like to dispose of charges of utopianism. Of course I am a utopian. Utopians are the people who make the most sense to me these days. No so-called practical politician that I know of, for example, is willing to say that we should refuse under any circumstances to take part in nuclear war. This is called the realistic, or non-utopian, or practical view. The utopian says we should under no circumstances engage in nuclear war, not only because it would be wrong but because national suicide or near-suicide is the ultimate in impractical policy. The utopian is today's ultra-practical man. I turn now to look at the present scene and its novelties.

First, it is becoming plain that we are advancing toward a workless world, one in which the historical connections between work and reward will one after another break off. In the West they are already doing so. This will mark the end of today's basic economic theory, the end of full employment as a major national goal, the beginnings of a new sociology and social psychology, and finally, the understanding that ethics in politics is an obligatory rather than optional exercise. The prime mover, technology, is also carrying us rapidly into the bureaucratized community, in which the ancient values of individualism crumble before the impersonal organization and the cybernated activities that more and more characterize it. We shall surely live inside national and international plans of various sorts. Just as surely we shall live under

the black shadow of a military technology that so far shows no sign of becoming permanently manageable. For the indefinite future we lucky few in the white affluent world will feel the increasingly heavy guilt and apprehension engendered by growing billions of dark and impoverished neighbors.

Second, I come to new circumstances crowding around our own doorsteps. A new industry is growing up to deal with the proliferation of knowledge in every field. This consists mainly of the mountains of scientific papers that we hear so much about, and the foothills of information surrounding each of the manifold specialized activities of man, from business administration to social statistics and international relations. Fritz Machlup of Princeton says that the knowledge industry accounts for 29 per cent of the Gross National Product of the United States.

Third, it is becoming evident that technological change does not equal progress except in the most limited sense. One could argue from the present state of Western culture that one of the chief outputs of the techno-scientific age is cultural depravity and spiritual degradation.

By now we sadly realize that it is ingenuous to expect progress in our cultural and political life commensurate with the achievements of the machines we so adroitly hitch together. Some will think that depraved is too strong a word for the current situation, and they may be right; yet events north and south, from Birmingham to Chicago to Dallas indicate that we Americans are in more brutalized condition than we have been willing to admit. At any rate, there is no doubt about wholesale alienation, apathy, boredom, anomie, and other psychic ailments in the community.

This is the world before us, beset by novelty on every hand, already deeply perturbing to the individual personality, changing by the hour, promising mainly the unexpected, and conspicuously lacking a doctrine of man. The problem is how to prepare to live in such a world and contribute to it. The program I have in mind would seek, first, to implant the quest for self-improvement in students as a lifelong preoccupation.

Second, it would seek to pull away the obstructions that lie in the way of understanding the realities of political and economic life. By obstructions I mean the rubbish produced by any status quo and by its confederates in the mass media for their own protection and enrichment. I mean the corpus of myth and falsehood and semi-truth that J. K. Galbraith labelled the "conventional wisdom." Ours is a complicated and dangerous world which we can at best hope to see not very clearly, and at the least we ought to be given a chance to see and understand what is really going on. The people are sovereign, but a sovereign that can be deceived by his employees and servants, as is happening in many allegedly democratic countries, is a sovereign on the way out.

Third, the program would develop critical intelligence, and the sense of self-respect needed to exercise it. I believe that individualism is done for, suffocated by bigness. I also believe we must do our best to keep individuality alive, and that the primary means to its survival is the exercise of critical intelligence.

Fourth, the program would cultivate the political openness that permits the contemplation of all plans for human betterment, however radical or varnished over by epithets they may be. H. G. Wells said, "The inertia of dead ideas and old institutions carries us on toward the rapids."

The problem is the inculcation of civic and personal virtue and the nourishing of wisdom. This sounds like rhetoric and is rhetoric; but I believe it to be intensely practical as well. It takes only a moderately long view to perceive ideas and practices now current that had better be put on the ash-heap if the future is to be properly served.

It is not practical to train men and women for disappearing occupations. It is not practical to

teach traditional individualism in a society that is inexorably collective in its trends. It is not practical to try to give students a grasp of all the branches of knowledge, nor to expect them to "master the main facts of the modern world." It is impractical to teach nationalism and independence in an international and interdependent world. It is impractical to teach competition when cooperation is the price of survival. It is impractical to teach classical economics when it is being rapidly eroded by the waves of technology.

Perhaps the single best thing we can do for our students is, as I said earlier, to start them on the road to lifelong education. To this end I would propose the cultivation of intellectuals. In my dictionary an intellectual is a person who is serious about his mind and makes the best use he can of it. We are opting for the man prepared to deal with swiftly altering patterns and problems of the new world. This means, in my definition, opting for the intellectual; not necessarily for the intellectual life, though we cannot have too much of that, but for the intellectual outlook. Even here we walk in dangerous ways, for "the intellect is man's peculiar pride, and pride is man's undoing."

It may sound apocalyptic, but I think that man's only chance of escaping the technological dungeon he is fashioning for himself is through a self-conscious and sedulous attack by reason. Lewis Mumford remarks that "we seem to be paying for an excess of physical power by our spiritual impotence, and for an excess of automatism by our inability to control the process once it is started." I agree with him that it is a central issue whether we can bring our technical achievements under political control, and put them to the service of man, rather than the other way around. This control, after all, has never yet been achieved. Technical advance has been a self-evident good, and encouraged to go according to its own imperatives. The results are all around us, from the slums and dirty air of Megalopolis to the thermonuclear and neutron bombs.

What the acceptance of these reflections and surmises would mean, in course offerings and disciplines, in comprehensive and specialized programs, in teaching methods, and in the length of time spent in the institution I propose to leave for discussion. In most colleges it would mean radical changes in what is taught and how. I am aware of the many topics not even mentioned. Least of all have I touched on those prudential factors that must color, though not govern, all discussions of this kind. The final authority is somewhere in the "public" domain. We cannot do just as we like, even should we agree. There are always other powers and principalities to be considered and reconciled, alas not all of them endowed as we are with rare good judgment and the ability to look beyond the horizon. Not that we delude ourselves that the conflicts in and around the House of Intellect will be resolved solely by reason, abetted by patience. I agree with F. M. Cornford on this subject. He said to the aspiring young academic reformer: "You think (do you not?) that you have only to state a reasonable case, and people must listen to reason and act upon it at once. It is just this conviction that has made you so unpleasant."

Educators today are not troubled by indifference and lack of attention. There is no vacuum around public education, but a windy firmament full of clashing sounds and voices. It is hard to think of a subject which is at once so unanimously approved and so divisive of opinion. But we are all committed to it because education is, from any point of view, man's best enterprise.

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FRONTIERS

Humanist Reading

AMONG the MANAS exchanges and publications from other sources we sometimes come across material that seems valuable enough to be made part of the curriculum of general education for everybody—from high-school age on. Recent examples are Peter Drucker's article on Government in *The Public Interest* (reviewed in MANAS for March 19) and the February *Natural History* Supplement on ecology (see MANAS for April 9). The non-ideological economics of E. F. Schumacher ought to have similar circulation, also the exposition of rural economics reviewed last week—the *Community Comments* essay by Griscom Morgan. This material could all be understood by high school students, and would provide them with basic orientation in respect to issues which have been made obscure by elaborate technical discussion.

Such educational resources are actually *hard to find* because of the enormous quantity of unimportant material put into print. The good stuff is covered up, "dated" almost immediately. This typical fate of important reading is illustrated by the comparative obscurity of a book that should have wide attention today—*The Treason of the Intellec*tuals by Julian Benda. First published in 1928, this lucid exposure of the collaboration of educated men in what Ortega termed *The Revolt of the Masses* (first published in 1930) is an indispensable tool for students of intellectual and moral history. Its importance is made plain by a quotation printed on the cover (of the 1969 Norton paperback edition):

> Our age is the age of the intellectual organization of political hatreds. It will be one of its chief claims to notice in the moral history of humanity.

Many of Benda's citations (he was a French *literateur* born in 1867) are of writers most Americans have not heard of, but this reduces the impact of the analysis very little. The book is a penetrating and conclusive study of what intellectuals as a class thought about man during the fifty years from 1875 to 1925. Benda is a tired and occasionally cynical humanist. Unfortunately, he has reason to be. But the book has many strengths to balance this obvious shortcoming.

The French title of the book is *La Trahison des Clercs.* Benda's intention is to show that the profession of the "clerk"—by which he means the calling of educated men and professional scholars—was once to draw the attention of the world to universal truths, to transcendental ends, but that, with a handful of exceptions, the modern "clerks," now referred to as intellectuals, have become apologists of material interests and defenders of partisan objectives. They have, he maintains, betrayed their traditional calling. There is a sense in which they have abolished the moral struggle for individual man, transferring its obligations to partisan political institutions. Benda's analysis fits perfectly with that made by Nicola Chiaromonte in *Dissent*:

> . . . the difference between modern and ancient tyranny lies in the fact that modern tyranny is dominated, first of all, by the idea of the conquest of nature on the part of man (collectively organized) thanks to science, and, second, by the vulgarization of scientific and philosophical knowledge, which produces a new and, one should add, completely unexpected kind of dogmatism and conformism, since it is based on the idea of a continuous criticism of reality and on empirical knowledge, not on any sort of revealed truth.

Benda writes:

> I said that the modern "clerks" teach man that his desires are moral insofar as they tend to secure his existence at the expense of an environment which disputes it. In particular they teach him that his species is sacred insofar as it is able to assert its existence at the expense of the surrounding world. In other words, the old morality told Man that he is divine to the extent that he becomes one with the universe; the new morality tells him that he is divine to the extent that he is in opposition to it.

It is a terrible conversion—this winning over of "philosophers" and scholars to the claims of the nationalists and the ideologists:

> Modern Europe is like the brigand in one of Tolstoi's stories, who made his confession to a hermit, and the hermit said in amazement: "Others were at least ashamed of being brigands; but what is to be done with this man, who is proud of it?"

We would quote more, but the book deserves careful reading. It is short, but long enough to generate impressive grounds for intellectual and moral resistance to *anyone's* partisan oversimplifications of the nature of man.

How can we restore to coming generations this strength of authentic humanism? How can men become immune to the plausible lies told by self-interest, whether of the brazen egoist or the wrathful collectivist? People need to study, not what they—young and old—study now, which is of little or no importance, but the great documents concerned with what the best men have thought of man. Such a curriculum might for a start include: selections from the *Upanishads,* the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the *Tao Te King,* the *Dhammapada,* portions of the *New Testament,* some of Plato's Dialogues—first, perhaps, the *Apology,* the *Crito,* and the *Phaedo;* then, to represent the Renaissance, Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man;* among moderns such writers as Ortega and Benda; Dwight Macdonald's major contributions to *Politics,* also Chiaromonte's; for philosophy W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation* (Galaxy paperback); and for psychology the writings of A. H. Maslow. The current material they'll get to know anyhow—you can't escape it. None of these writers has a "line"; all of them are concerned with freeing the mind from the insidious influence of "lines," as the prerequisite of being human, in order to act as a man.