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VARIOUS CONFESSIONS

IT was not, we have no doubt, an anti-religious person, but simply an honest man, who pointed out some years ago that if modern Western society were to undertake the serious practice of the Sermon on the Mount, it could not possibly last three weeks. For this to be said openly probably gave the cynics of the day a small confirming satisfaction but it must also have made other honest men more comfortable with their private thoughts, since pretense does not sit well with anyone who tries to follow some rule of integrity in his life.

Yet this candid confession, whatever its virtue as truth-telling, can also be seen as a license to ignore even the restraints induced by hypocrisy, lending considerable strength to the claim that our society is really not "Christian," any more. Passing by the tinselled opportunity to discuss the question, "Was it ever?", we might note that the tough-minded judgments of Bonhoeffer and recensions of his views among the Death-of-God theologians are shock-producing evolutions of this criticism.

What we should like to examine, here, is the proprietary or managerial implication of all such views. One does not have to be a learned exegete of Christian teaching to argue that Jesus never addressed himself to the managerial class as such. He talked to individuals. He didn't expect much of states except that they would be very bad. He had something to say about how to live a good life in spite of the state, and he certainly didn't expect the Beloved Community to arise out of sagacious planning by experts for something called "social morality."

So you could say that *of course* society would collapse if it started to practice the Sermon on the Mount. "Society," after all, is a complicated collection of infra-structures embodying the motivational heritage of centuries—a very mixed bag at best. Society is the context, not the instrument, of the change men are called to make in themselves by the Sermon on the Mount. So there is really nothing dramatically daring or new in the charge that "society" would collapse from attending to such counsels. It is a charge which can be taken seriously only by those schooled in collectivist theory, for whom "reality" is socio-historical and nothing else. For men so persuaded, "Come ye out and be ye separate" has practically no meaning at all. These men are prophets and soothsayers of the herd or the hive, who, incidentally, may also be held responsible for the unavoidable "guilt" felt by seriously religious people who are obliged to live out their lives under the cloudy conviction that, socially speaking, they cannot possibly do what they ought to do. This is a considerably different burden from admitting that what they ought to do is very hard.

Doing the impossible requires nothing short of a miracle, and once moral progress is conceded to be social, peace of mind requires that a miracle be promised, whether in behalf of other-worldly objectives, such as translation to a heavenly state, or to obtain a this-world paradise. The Vicarious Atonement is the miraculous means to otherworldly salvation, while the Dictatorship of the Proletariat is the earthly wonder-worker which, by a scheduled return performance, is to "wither" into the classless society. Neither miracle has occurred. The promise of both seems to have ended in nerveless failure. The other-worldly miracle has been rejected by reason, while the this-world one has been negated by history. Meanwhile the human and moral issue, which remains, is still the unlovely character of the status quo and how to change it. This is of course a collectivist way of speaking of the problem, yet

something hardly avoidable, today, if a discussion is to be listened to at all.

There are two ways to generalize about the status quo. One is to present a full spectrum of statistics. The other is to take a sampling of human attitudes. Since the statistical portrait of the world is either familiar or accessible, and since its psychological effect seems mainly a confirmation of the doctrine of Original Sin, it may be more useful to try the sampling of attitudes. For this purpose the novelist is indispensable. Attitudes are his stock in trade. John Knowles' recent book, *Indian Summer,* is the story of Cleet, a young man who after the War (II) goes to work for his boyhood friend. This friend belongs to a family which has a hundred million dollars. Cleet, who is one quarter Indian, is a kind of "splendid savage" who doesn't understand why nothing in this situation works out the way he expects it to. Finally the rich man's wife, who sees more clearly, explains:

> "Don't you understand the Reardons after all these years?"
>
> He shook his head.
>
> "The Reardons are very rich, so they change their minds all the time. They're always changing their minds. Nothing ever satisfies them. They feel people are taking advantage of them. They feel their fortune isn't respected enough. They're perfectionists. Whatever they have, they feel they've made a mistake, they should not have that, they should have something else. They feel imposed on and impatient, and they don't care who knows it. Neil *meant* to go along with your idea and so did his father. But they just lost interest in that, they thought another solution would be fairer to . . "
>
> He was listening now. "Yeah?"
>
> "Well, to themselves."
>
> "Oh," he said flatly.
>
> "They can only think of themselves, they're afraid if they don't, constantly, other people will take advantage of them. They feel a duty to be selfish. Otherwise, they'd be undermining the free enterprise system. You've got to be patient with them."
>
> "Patient!"
>
> "Yes. You've got to wait. . . ."

Whether or not you think this is an accurate portrait of the very rich, and whether or not there are lots of nice exceptions, the analysis is psychologically shrewd enough to sum up the attitudes of many men who exercise power in Western society. And the fact is that they think of themselves as very conscientious people, coping as best they can with the facts of life. They make a lot of moral decisions. They feel great responsibility. And since they accumulated all their money and influence ("leadership") by paying attention to what they regard as the facts of life, they keep on reminding themselves of those facts. Having enormous power, and believing that they use their power in accord with "the facts," there is not much chance of them changing unless they become acquainted with more persuasive ideas.

We now need a non-statistical but generalizing view for contrast and to complete the briefest sort of outline of the status quo. Writing on poverty in the *Christian Science Monitor* for Oct. 13, Joseph C. Harsch starts out with the undeniable fact that the United States is the wealthiest country in the world. Then, after discussing the countries where extreme poverty exists—India and other Asian countries, Africa, and Latin America—he says:

> But if my own personal observations as a reporter over some 38 years of roaming around the world are valid then the United States is unique in having serious massive poverty in the midst of affluence. Not in the whole of Western Europe together would it be possible to find 30 million persons who live in the prospect of wasted lives.
>
> It would be fascinating to know whether there is in the Soviet Union a segment of the whole which could be said to live in relative poverty. Poverty is, after all, relative. A person could have a wasted life in the United States at IO times the annual wage of a successful person in India.

While Mr. Harsch found "pockets of underprivileged" in Britain, France, and Italy, a slum in Poland, and unpleasant areas in Denmark and Germany, the numbers so afflicted are not

numerous, by comparison with those in the United States. He adds this important distinction:

> Nor does the squalor of even a Sicilian slum debase the self-respect of its dwellers as does the rotting center of many an industrial city in the United States. And the dividing line surely, is drawn not by money income but by whether one is needed, or unwanted.

During his eight years in London Mr. Harsch was often asked by American visitors to see some slums. He would take them to "the poorest, shabbiest, most neglected, most race-tension-ridden parts of London," and the reaction was always the same: "But this isn't a real slum!" The person who has seen Detroit or Harlem, Chicago's skid row, or the poor of Washington, D.C., can't find what he thinks of as "poverty" in London, Paris, Rome, Naples—"or Moscow (?)," Mr. Harsch adds. Every European city has its sordid spots, every country its neglected poor—

> But the cold fact is that the United States has tolerated within its midst a degree and quantity of poverty which other advanced societies do not tolerate. On this scale of values the United States is the most backward of modern Western countries.

We can leave unanswered the question of whether these slum-dwelling American poor owe their special plight to the side-effects of advanced technology—a diagnosis which gives little reason for underdeveloped countries to submit to "Americanization"—or to a peculiarly American kind of indifference to human values. While the situation is shameful enough, there is no reason to think that a solution will be obtained by locating a special brand of wickedness in the United States. Nor is there any particular significance to be found in Mr. Harsch's slightly daring compliments to the Soviets, which, one supposes, are intended to "wake us up." The fact is, as China ragingly declares with every press release, that the Soviet Union has made its adjustments with "bourgeois" notions of the good life; and if Mr. Harsch expects to see no important slums in Russia, an independent socialist critic, Michael Harrington, finds reason to fear that the two major world powers, Russia and the United States—which seem to be composing many of their differences—"may end their conflict by a gentlemen's agreement between rich Northerners to keep the Southerners of the planet poor." (*Dissent*, September-October.)

What really needs to be called into question is the assumption, made by very nearly everyone who examines the agony of the age from a "social" point of view, that the behavior patterns and moral ideas of the technological West are unchangeable by any means except some kind of "total" revolution. The fact that there have been and are societies pervaded by very different *attitudes* seems almost entirely ignored. It is a simple truism that human attitudes control everything else.

These societies have been described. For example, in an address before the New England Psychological Association in 1963, A. H. Maslow told of experiences, early in his career, among the Blackfoot Indians:

> I remember my confusion as I came into the society and tried to find out who was the rich man and found that the rich men had nothing; and when I asked the white secretary of the reserve who was the richest man, he mentioned a man whom none of the Indians had mentioned—that is, the man who on the books had the most stock, the most cattle and most horses. When I came back to my Indian informants and asked them about Jimmy McHugh, how about all his horses, they shrugged with contempt. He keeps it. And they hadn't even thought to regard him as a wealthy man. White Head Chief was wealthy even though he owned nothing. What were the rewards for this? In what way did this virtue pay? The men who were formally generous in this way were the most admired, the most respected, and also the most loved men in the tribe. I think if we can get ourselves into this, I think we can understand it, get the feel of it. These were the men who benefited the tribe. These were the men whom they could be proud of. These were the men whom it warmed their hearts to see walking around.

We don't know much about how these attitudes were generated among the Blackfoot Indians. We know only that they exist—or once

existed. There have been other such societies. The question of why they have not survived is one that need not be answered immediately, nor, perhaps, at all. No past society we know of survived indefinitely—became immortal—although some great civilizations lasted for thousands of years, much longer than ours will, from present indications. We are trying to find out here what is *possible*, not what can claim to be socially eternal. Consider the following description of the life of the people of Upper Burma during the closing decade of the last century, as described by Fielding Hall in *The Soul of a People*—a life, we ought to note, achieved without the counsels of Adam Smith and unaided by the anger of Karl Marx:

> . . . all the people are on the same level. Richer and poorer there are, of course, but there are no very rich; there is none so poor that he cannot get plenty to eat and drink. All eat much the same food, all dress much alike. The amusements of all are the same, for entertainments are always free. So the Burman does not care to be rich. It is not in his nature to desire wealth, it is not in his nature to care to keep it when it comes to him. Beyond a sufficiency for his daily needs money has not much value. He does not care to add field to field or coin to coin; the mere fact that he has money causes him no pleasure. Money is worth to him what it will buy. With us, when we have made a little money we keep it to be a nest-egg to make more from. Not so a Burman: he will spend it. And after his own little wants are satisfied, after he has bought himself a new silk, after he has given his wife a gold bangle after he has called all his village together and entertained them with a dramatic entertainment—sometimes even before all this—he will spend the rest on charity.
>
> He will build a pagoda to the honour of a great teacher, where men may go to meditate on the great laws of existence. He will build a monastery school where the village lads are taught, and where each villager retires some time in his life to learn great wisdom. He will dig a well or build a bridge, or make a rest-house. And if the sum be very small indeed, then he will build, perhaps, a little house—a tiny little house—to hold two or three jars of water for travellers to drink. And he will keep the jars full of water, and put a little cocoanut-shell to act as cup. . . .
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> There are rest-houses everywhere. Far away in the dense forests by the mountain-side you will find them, built in some little hollow by the roadside by someone who remembered his fellow-traveller. You cannot go five miles along any road without finding them. . . .
>
> But do not suppose that the Burmese are idle. Such a nation of workers was never known. Every man works, every woman works, every child works. . . . There is not an idle man or woman in all Burma. The class of those who live on other men's labour is unknown. I do not think the Burman would care for such a life, . . . And so I do not think his will ever make what we call a great nation. He will never try to be a conqueror of other peoples, either with the sword, with trade, or with religion. He will never care to have a great voice in the management of the world. . . . He will never be very rich, very powerful, very advanced in science, perhaps not even in art, though I am not sure about that. It may be he will be very great in literature and art. But, however that may be, in his own idea his will always be the greatest nation in the world, because it is the happiest.

The problem for the Western reader, in accepting what this author says, is to be able to concede that the values he finds realized in the daily lives of the Burmese people were somehow obtained without any of the social planning and technological devices that we have become convinced are necessary for reaching these goals. There is a profound feeling that any such utopian condition ought not to be possible without some form of mighty striving. It will come, we think, as a triumph of activist achievement, after generations of heroic "problem-solving." Utopia, we believe, *must* await the deliberate application of all our technical and humanist intelligence to the reduction of obstacles and to the evolution of ideal patterns of relationships, born from "great new insights" into the essentials of the good society.

It is true enough that the age of industrialism stands between this Burmese culture and our own. No one can deny that to think about "simplicity of life" in the terms in which it appears in Fielding Hall's account seems almost impossible. But we must recognize, also, that a vast manifold of

dichotomies has grown out of our problem-solving activities, so that the forms in which inequity appears have geometrically progressed along with the techniques of resolving difficulties. Yet this, we feel, is something that we *had* to do. It may be so.

But what, at the same time, is slowly becoming evident is that the levels at which we do our generalizing, in order to meet all these problems, are simply not universal enough. We can't hold the variables in our heads. City planners, urban renewal experts, social scientists, and even, in another way, mathematicians, are coming to this conclusion. As George Schnurr put it recently:

> Recent psychological studies have indicated that the brightest minds can interrelate no more than seven or eight variables at a time. Most of us have difficulty with two or three. . . . Technology contributes to the art of living when our activism for a defined future is balanced by a perceptive appreciation for the latent present. Perhaps the best word for this willingness to be surprised is "love."

This is quite a jump—obviously too much of a jump—from the complex variables of technological integration to an emotion so ungraded and undistributed in meaning that, despite the probable truth in the idea, it threatens to fail through reduction to passionate slogan. We know, at any rate, that love which is not ordered by understanding of authentic needs creates emotional vacuums which are soon filled by its opposite. Think of the generalizations of hate which have grown from the parent stem of high social idealism—from heart-felt declarations of the "solidarity of mankind," and from dreams of a classless society; and think of the wonderfully undifferentiated "revolutionary love" men experience at the barricades, which gives way, almost in a matter of hours, to the ruthless devices of an authority which the lack of humane infra-structures makes absolutely necessary. The only ameliorating influence, in all such circumstances, lies in comprehensive *attitudes*—attitudes based on the disciplined ability to hold in suspension in the mind the many contradictions which can be resolved only by slow growth-changes in a sufficient number of individuals.

Gandhi's theory of trusteeship, seen in this light, is actually a hard-headed view of the only workable *modus operandi of* change. It depends entirely on those gradual changes in attitude which reduce the number of variables by taking action only at a level of functional simplicity. He began an exposition of this theory with these words:

> I suggest we are thieves in a way. If I take anything I do not need for my own immediate use, and keep it, I thieve from somebody else. I venture to suggest that it is the fundamental law of Nature, without exception; that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day, and if only everybody took enough for himself and nothing more, there would be no pauperism in this world, there would be no man dying of starvation in this world. But so long as we have got this inequality, so long we are thieving. I am no Socialist and I do not want to dispossess those who have got possessions; but I do say that, personally, those who want to see light out of darkness have to follow this rule. I do not want to dispossess anybody. I should then be departing from the rule of Ahimsa. If somebody else possesses more than I do, let him. But so far as my own life has to be regulated, I do say that I dare not possess anything which I do not want. In India we have got three millions of people having to be satisfied with one meal a day, and that meal consisting of a *chapati* containing no fat in it, and a pinch of salt. You and I have no right to anything that we really have until these three millions are clothed and fed better. You and I, who ought to know better, must adjust our wants, and even undergo voluntary starvation in order that they may be nursed, fed, and clothed.

This, one may say, is a high rule of life. It is not for ordinary people. But the Burmese of Fielding Hall's time were ordinary people. Somehow, according to their lights, they absorbed at least the basic principles of Gandhi's view. It would be an abject confession of failing intelligence to argue that the circumstances of high technology stand in the way of a similar understanding in the West.

REVIEW
AN INDEPENDENT MIND

IN his latest book, *And Even if You Do* (William Morrow, $6.50), Joseph Wood Krutch wrestles with the problem of defining the "Humanities," finding it useful to suggest that they represent a "large area of elusive truth which it would be fatal to neglect, but which nevertheless cannot be dealt with by any scientific method." Since we live in an age when a great many people are persuaded that matters inaccessible to scientific method are not quite "real," a considerable art is needed to demonstrate their substance and illustrate the penalties of neglecting them. The skillful practice of this art is Mr. Krutch's contribution to his time.

An earlier book in the same vein, *If You Don't Mind My Saying So,* took its title from the heading of a department contributed by Mr. Krutch to *The American Scholar* and offered a number of the essays which appeared there. The present volume is made up of more of these essays, together with some which appeared in the *Saturday Review* and in one or two other magazines. It is true enough that the work of this widely eclectic humanist has from the days of *The Modern Temper* been concerned with the price paid by human beings for neglect of the Humanities—whose content, as he points out, is subject to "doubt and dispute"—but a more positive view of Mr. Krutch's lifelong engagement is obtained by saying that he consistently seeks out and supports activities which increase the best qualities of human beings, and opposes and exposes ideas which have a reductive effect on man. He is, in short, the only sort of moralist to whom rational intelligence can hearken, since the test of what he says lies in its inherent reasonableness.

It might be said that Mr. Krutch reaches a number of lucid conclusions in this book, but that is hardly his aim. Purists of one sort or another may legitimately find things to disagree with, but this is hardly important. The value in writing of this sort is the value one finds in the dialogues of Plato—not closely argued conclusions but a temper of questioning which generates the *ethos* of man in unremitting search. To seek without prejudice is doubtless the most difficult of undertakings, yet it is the only thing worth doing with one's mind. To declare this principle, and to admit and risk its hazards, over and over again, is to contribute to the atmosphere of high culture. It is to give life to an order of dialogue which in time comes to embody and diffuse those subtle common denominators of "man thinking" which need not be represented by identical conclusions in thought, but which achieve something far better through many original forms of expression.

There is a sense in which the Humanities should never submit to final definition. The ambiguity for which they are condemned is the law of their survival, since the life of the truth they represent depends upon *individual* recognition of its meaning. To codify Humanist truth would be to embalm it in sectarian formula. High metaphysics might give the Humanities abstract form, but the problem of luminous expression by individuals would still remain.

Mr. Krutch enables his readers to see how the devastations of "finality" have been illustrated in a cycle of Western history:

> Since the days of Francis Bacon there have always been individuals who maintained that only "facts"—positive and verifiable knowledge—are worth bothering with. But never before our own, has there been an age when most people made this assumption so uncritically, that they ask in all innocence for so much as a single example of something important and knowable which cannot be measured or made the subject of an experiment.
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> Suppose we consider, for example, that reality which is called "happiness." Pope described it as "our being's end and aim," and though there have always been some—Bernard Shaw is a modern instance—who dismissed happiness as unimportant, even scientists admit that most of us continue to pursue it whether we ought to or not. Yet "happiness" is something which falls almost completely outside the purview of science. Its various degrees cannot be

measured. The conditions which produce it cannot be controlled. We cannot demonstrate that an individual man either is, or is not, happy. In fact, his emotional state cannot even be safely inferred. We know perfectly well that many a man who "ought to be happy" and many a man who "acts as though he were happy," isn't.

To banish these undoubted facts the positivist is forced into an absurd and disastrous subterfuge. Knowing that science cannot deal with subjective states and being committed to the contention that only scientific knowledge is useful, he cannot escape the conclusion that such subjects as happiness are not worth thinking about at all. We should, he says, devote ourselves instead to those objectively measurable and controllable factors which, he so blandly assumes, determine subjective states. Since we can make some sort of approximate measurements of "the standard of living" we will adopt the convenient assumption that happiness varies directly with the standard of living. Hence, though we cannot talk profitably about happiness, we can talk (and how!) about welfare. The two ought to be, approximately, the same thing.

No assumption could, of course, be falser. Literature may be unscientific but it has never made the mistake of assuming that prosperity is the same thing as happiness, or that people are happy when "they ought to be." Yet this simple fact is in itself enough to suggest both what the subject matter of the humanities is, and one of the functions humane works of literature, or art or philosophy *do* perform. . . . Because the Founding Fathers were essentially humanists they asserted man's right to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. If they had not been humanists, it would have been to the Pursuit of Welfare, or even a High Standard of Living!

It is evident that a large part of humanist inquiry in the present is the art of *detecting*—discerning and pointing out the man-excluding and man-reducing assumptions in both learned theories of knowledge and popular attitudes. Since ideologies at both extremes of the political spectrum are guilty of such assumptions, the humanist critic seldom finds allies among the righteous doctrinaire; and since, also, the humanist confessedly lacks the potent certainties of true believers—humanist affirmation rests entirely on the promise of potentialities—even the middle-of-the-roaders, people who fancy that muddling "averages" between extremes can safely solve all problems, often see him as only an indecisive and always questioning man.

The strength of the humanist is his *independent* mind, his capital a deep awareness that the most precious of man's endowments is his capacity *to become*. The humanist's principal role, today, is to make sensitive identification of the barriers we erect against becoming, in order, as we imagine, to make progress a "sure thing." It is for this reason that the practicing humanist, when he succeeds, is one who continuously illustrates in his own thought-processes the kind of self-reliant thinking which any man can or ought to learn to do if he would improve his quality as a man. The practicing humanist will also illustrate the restraint and measure of a man who is constantly reminded of his own ignorance, but who becomes its practical master by never indulging in pretense. This Socratic ignorance is somehow the parent of an irenical confidence in the capacity of man to know for himself. Ignorance is no more than the raw material of knowing.

Thus, while the humanist virtues can and ought to be admired, they cannot be copied. An imitated virtue is for the humanist at once a counterfeit, although, paradoxically, a man may perhaps learn a little by copying others, so long as he is careful never to mistake his copies for the real thing. Since we can't really help copying now and then, the examined life is the only protection against self-delusion.

Anyone who reads Mr. Krutch's book will soon see why we so strongly recommend it. It reflects an immense range of interests, including areas beyond what is commonly thought of as the province of a man of letters. He has been drama critic, teacher, and amateur naturalist. Among his books are biographies of Thoreau and Samuel Johnson, and rich philosophical studies such as *The Measure of Man* and *The Great Chain of Life*. His material is therefore diverse, yet united by an underlying theme. Scenery, circumstances, and forms of confrontation change with the

passage of time, but the project of being human does not. There is for example the following passage in an essay, "Is Homer Obsolete?":

> People like me then stand revealed, not as the sturdy defenders of the humanities in an age that tends to de-emphasize them, but simply as "dropouts" from the civilization of which we refuse to be a part. What used to be described as "the best that has been thought and said" should be forgotten as soon as possible. After all, Matthew Arnold lived in the dark age before computers and atomic fission. Mechanized brains had not yet been developed beyond Babbage's elementary contraptions and even dynamite was a new invention. What could he know of good and evil, of wisdom and folly? . . .
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> To my obsolete ears the language written by my more up-to-date contemporaries does not seem to be an improvement on that of the older cultural tradition, as when, for instance, an enthusiastic proponent of a thoroughly mechanized world wants to say that man can be as happy in a very big city as anywhere else but prefers to speak of the "hedonic potential" of Megapolis. . . .
>
> From certain other contributors to this alarming issue I do find some support. Thus when Buckminster Fuller writes that "all life has been able to succeed owing to the anticipatory design of a regenerative ecological energy exchange," it takes me a little while to understand the language, but I think he means very much what Thoreau meant when he said: "In wildness is the preservation of the world," and what I meant by glossing that passage by a comment to the effect that, of all cybernetic machines, the balance of nature is the most perfect. I am also reassured when the same contributor quotes Dr. Wilder Penfield, head of the Neurological Institute at McGill University, who wrote: "It is much easier to explain all the data we have regarding the brain if we assume an additional phenomenon 'mind' than it is to explain all the data if we assume only the existence of the brain."

Our quotations, while enlightening, give little indication of the pleasures in Mr. Krutch's lightheartedness and humor, or of his generosity of mind. There is also a candid critique of the nihilistic side of Existentialist influence—something often neglected by those who celebrate its heroic aspect. In a world in which so few men remain determined to live and to advocate the civilized life—which is hardly anything more than the examined life—the example set by Mr. Krutch becomes valuable indeed.

COMMENTARY
A NOTE BY PICASSO

SINCE we often print material concerning the stubborn courage of the Existentialists, we shall use this space for Mr. Krutch's comment on their alienation. (See Review.) He is talking about modern painting—of those "who profess to paint nothing but paint":

> They do not believe there is anything inherently beautiful in nature, just as the existential moralizer refuses to believe that there is any suggestion of moral values in the external universe. The great literature and painting of the past have almost invariably been founded on assumptions the exact opposite of these. They expressed man's attempt to find an appropriate beauty and meaning in an external world from which he was not alienated, because he believed that both his aesthetic and his moral sense correspond to something outside himself.
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> Salvador Dali (whom, in general, I do not greatly admire) once made the remark that Picasso's greatness consisted in the fact that he destroyed one by one all the historical styles of painting. I am not sure that there is not something in that remark; and if there is, then it suggests that in many important respects Picasso is much like the workers in several branches of literature whose aim is to destroy the novel with the anti-novel, the theater with the anti-theater, and philosophies which consist, like logical positivism and linguistic analysis, in a refusal to philosophize.

Returning to painting, Mr. Krutch confesses to wondering "if the new styles created by modern painters—pointillism, cubism, surrealism, and the mechanism of Leger (to say nothing of op and pop) ought not to be regarded as gimmicks rather than natural styles," and he found a quotation from Picasso which seemed to confirm this opinion. Picasso declared that by the end of the 1880's, great art was "dying, condemned, and finished," subsequent "pretended artistic activity" being nothing but "a manifestation of its agony." The cause, he said, lay in the fact that men had "given their hearts to the machine, to scientific discovery, to wealth, to the control of natural forces, and of the world." These excitements led the artist to "exteriorize his talent" in "all kinds of caprices and fantasies, and in all the varieties of intellectual charlatanism." Critics, he said, admire most what they least understand. The concluding sentences translated by Mr. Krutch from Picasso are these:

> Today, as you know, I am rich and famous But when I am alone with my soul, I haven't the courage to consider myself as an artist. In the great and ancient sense of that word, Greco, Titian, Rembrandt and Goya were great painters. I am only the entertainer of a public which understands its age.

There is also food for thought, here, on the questions raised in Frontiers.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY

ONE distinctive quality of Ortega y Gasset's thought flows from the fact that there is no trace of bad-guy, good-guy psychology in what he says. He finds no segregated enemy. He opposes human ignorance, but this, in his view, is not the specialty of any class or group. He finds it everywhere. He writes for everyone who honestly seeks to overcome ignorance, which appoints him a spokesman for the entire human community.

This makes for a certain boredom on the part of the ideological reader, who waits for Ortega to get to the *point;* and when, as he finds, Ortega never does get to any ideological point, he puts the book down. But Ortega has many other readers, and a growing number of people have begun to try to think in behalf of the whole community—people increasingly distrustful of writers who devote themselves to partisan causes.

Ortega's slight volume, *Mission of the University,* is made from a lecture on the reform of education, given in 1930 at the request of the Spanish Federation of University Students. As with everything with which Ortega concerned himself, he starts with basic considerations. Why, for example, is the university, or education generally, so enormous and elaborate an institutional undertaking? To get at this question, he offers the proposition that all institutions exist for the task of overcoming difficulties. Those who declare for a human association without institutions are obliged to insist that many difficulties are unreal:

> Anarchy is logical when it declares all institutions to be useless and thus pernicious, for it starts with the postulate that every man is extraordinary by birth—i.e. good, prudent, intelligent, and just. . . . But institutions exist—they are necessary and have meaning—because the ordinary man exists. If there were none but extraordinary creatures, it is very probable that there would be no institutions, either educational or political. It is necessary therefore to consider any institution with reference to the man of ordinary endowment. For him it is made and he must be its unit of measure.

Ortega now examines what he calls the "principle of economy," and then applies it to education. Economy, he points out, is the discipline which copes with any form of scarcity. Einstein, he recalls, often said that "if perpetual motion existed, there would be no such thing as physics." Equally, in a land of unqualified material plenty, Ortega says, there would be no "economic activity, and consequently no science of economics." This is the curious theoretical vacuum in which social planners counting on the promise of cybernetic abundance are now trying to invent a new discipline to take the place of vanishing economic science.

But Ortega is concerned with education. There is a vital scarcity in education. This scarcity is not knowledge; on the contrary, knowledge is extensive and growing by leaps and bounds. The *scarcity* is itself an effect of the enormous accession of knowledge in our time. As Ortega says:

> Man is occupied and preoccupied with education for a reason which is simple, bald, and devoid of glamour: in order to live with assurance and freedom and efficiency, it is necessary to know an enormous number of things, and the child or youth has an extremely limited capacity for learning. That is the reason. If childhood and youth lasted a century apiece, or if the child and the adolescent possessed intelligence and the power of attention practically without limit, the teaching activity would never exist. Even if those appealing, transcendental reasons [for education given by the romantics] had never operated at all, mankind would have had to develop that variety of the species known as the teacher.
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> Scarcity of the capacity to learn is the cardinal principle of education. It is necessary to provide for teaching precisely in proportion as the learner is unable to learn.

Two things, therefore, must be done. First, the volume of information to be imparted must be pruned as much as possible—a principle of economy. He then says:

> The principle of economy not only implies that it is necessary to economize in the subject matter to be offered. It has a further implication: that the organization of higher education, the construction of the university, must be based upon the student, and not upon the professor or upon knowledge. The university must be the projection of the student to the scale of an institution. And his two dimensions are, first, what he is—a being of limited learning capacity—and second, what he needs to know in order to live his life.

Ortega turns to the student movement of the day. Much of it, he tells his student audience, is "pure buffoonery," but there are three interests of the students which, he says, "are absolutely reasonable and more than justify the whole student agitation." He lists them:

> One is the political unrest of the country: the soul of the nation is perturbed. The second is a series of real though incredible abuses on the part of a few professors. And the third, which is the most important and decisive, influences the students without their realizing it. It is the fact that neither they nor anybody in particular, but the times themselves, the present circumstances in education throughout the world, are forcing the university to center itself once more on the student—to *be* the student, and not the professor, as it was in the heyday of its greatness. The tendencies of the times press on inevitably, though mankind, impelled as it is by them, may be unaware of their presence, and quite unable to define them or give them a name. . . .
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> We must begin, therefore, with the ordinary student, and take as the nucleus of the institution, as its central and basic portion, *exclusively* the subject matters which can be required with absolute stringency, i.e. those a good ordinary student can really learn.

The university is of course occupied with other things, which Ortega does not neglect, but on its central role he is uncompromising:

> The concept that the university is the student is to be carried out even to the point of affecting its material organization. It is absurd to consider the university, as it has been considered hitherto, the professor's house in which he receives pupils. Rather the contrary: put the students in charge of the house and let the student body constitute the torso of the institution complemented by the faculties of professors. The maintenance of discipline through beadles gives rise to shameful squabbles, and organizes students into a rebellious horde. The students themselves, properly organized for the purpose, should direct the internal ordering of the university, determine the decorum of usages and manners, impose disciplinary measures, and feel responsible for morale.

But what if the students don't seem *competent* for these great responsibilities? Ortega apparently does not think this question worth discussing, although he would be bound to say, as a consequence of other views he has expressed, that in such case the entire society must be at fault, and should call itself, not just the students, to account.

This book is valuable, not as a tract for the times, but as an assemblage of principles applicable to any time. Ortega makes no separation between education and general culture, and he points out that education can hardly be better than the culture in which it pursues its ends. The edition we have been discussing is a paperback issued by the Norton Library in 1966—95 cents.

FRONTIERS

They've Gone About as Far . . .

THE key figure in John McHale's discussion, in *Dot Zero,* No. 3, of our technology-transformed world is the artist or artist-designer. This article, "The Plastic Parthenon," is mostly an objective review of what has happened to the meaning-bearing symbols which frame human life. Mr. McHale suggests that the mass production of these symbols has made their forms ephemeral. He sets the problem in this way:

> Past traditional canons of literary and artistic judgment which still furnish the bulk of our critical apparatus, are approximately no guide. . . . They tend to place high value on permanence, uniqueness and the enduring chosen value of chosen artifacts. Æsthetic pleasure was associated with conditions of socio-moral judgment—"beauty is truth," and the truly beautiful of ageless appeal! Such standards worked well with the "one-off" products of handcraft industry and the fine and folk arts of earlier periods. They in no way enable one to relate adequately to our present situation in which astronomical numbers of artifacts are mass produced, circulated and consumed. These products may be identical, or only marginally different, in varying degrees; they are expendable, replaceable, and lack any unique "value" or intrinsic "truth" which might qualify them within previous artistic canons.

This is a way of saying that the things we use in daily life now whiz by us instead of being lovingly handled and cherished. Art forms haven't even time to gain approval from the "Academy." They are too soon replaced. Periods telescope through instant reproduction of mood pieces from any age, and canons collapse from the dissolution of all practical limitations. The capacity to make objective anything we like nullifies the object as the bearer of meaning. The objects are too easy to make and there is too swift a succession of them. Mr. McHale concludes:

> The future of art seems no longer to lie with the creation of enduring masterworks but with defining alternative cultural strategies, through series of communicative gestures in multimedia forms. As art and non-art become interchangeable, and the master work may be only a reel of punched or magnetized tape, the artist defines art less through any intrinsic value of art object than by furnishing new conceptualities of life style and orientation. Generally, as the new cultural continuum underlines the expendability of the material artifact, life is defined as art—as the only contrastingly permanent and continuously unique experience.

This amounts to saying that art will become more deliberately subjective—but the means of achieving this desired goal seem to involve, initially, an extraordinary collaboration between common folk and enormously sophisticated or intuitively endowed artists who work in the new media with full self-consciousness. Assuming that such artists will agree upon a Hippocratic oath of their own, and reject all siren devices of mass persuasion, finding art, whatever its form of expression, to be only that which ennobles and emancipates men from psychological bondage—how, it must be asked, will a consensus on these delicate matters be achieved? How will an artist, turned loose among the ingenious apparatus of total synesthesia, distinguish between emotion-manipulating Walden II conspiracy and Tolstoyan uplift? Can we be sure that technology will make such dilemmas irrelevant?

There is also the question of whether any "real" artists can be made available. In a guest editorial in the *Saturday Review* for Oct. 14, Archibald MacLeish writes glowingly of this "unbelievable age" of scientific and industrial accomplishment. "Fire," he says, remembering the minor exploit of Prometheus, "has been stolen not from the Olympic gods but from the sun itself." Our options have been fantastically multiplied to the point where, through the surrogates of preternaturally skilled astronauts, "the most absolute limitation on our freedom has been abolished: we can leave the earth." However, another side of this picture is then inspected:

> But what is true of the accomplishments of our age is not true of our feelings for it. It would be impossible to find in the literature of any epoch a more nearly unanimous repudiation than in the plays, fictions, commentaries, poems which regard themselves as most expressive of our time. It is

> commonly said, as every college freshman learns, that the hero has been replaced by the anti-hero, but the change is more extreme than that. Ordinary, unheroic man has dwindled until nothing but his morbid fears, his exceptional vices, his "extreme situations" are significant, and common life itself has lost its literary interest; only its "absurdity" inspires a novel or a play.
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> In most ages it is the arts which are creative and believe the men of action who despair. With us, physics and chemistry and biology move forward toward the world beyond while the arts retreat. The discoveries of contemporary literature are old discoveries long since made: the discovery that men do truly die; the discovery that mortal life is meaningless; the discovery that nothing is real but the convulsions of sex, which are not real, either. "Vanity of vanities," said the preacher thousands of years ago.
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> But all this merely fortifies the contradiction. The paradox remains. Einstein and Bohr discover the height from which the universe can be seen, and Samuel Beckett buries his characters to their necks in sand to give the age its metaphor.
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> Why? Because Beckett is blind? Because the arts are wrong? . . . There is in truth a terror in the world, and the arts have heard it as they always do. . . . It is the silence of apprehension and the reason we do not trust our time is because it is we who have made the time, and we do not trust ourselves. . . . we do not trust ourselves as gods. We know what we are.

Can anyone close the abyss between such high optimism and such inert despair? The abstract technological vision surely has some truth in it, but so has the deep distrust. And there is no way to add them together so that they will cancel each other out. It seems evident that a technology which drives art back into subjectivity through its prodigious productivity of forms needs all the old canons of subjective excellence that have been outlawed by the unambiguous rules of external progress thus far. These artists with fear and loathing in their hearts may not be "whole" men, but a certain honesty is in them. If they are not strong enough to "overcome," they will at least not pretend. And if the top management of the world of technology is still so inattentive to the warnings of its own best men—a Buckminster Fuller, for example—how can we claim that the tormented cries of the artist belie the promise of that world?

No doubt, in time, every man will learn to internalize his image of the good, the true, and the beautiful—to make it into a formless wonder which, having no specific embodiment, will seep into all he does and make his life an art. But if he is stripped of his mere half-god attainments before he is ready—how shall we be sure that he is not also being emptied from within? Can the arts accomplish a managerial revolution, or will an attempt to make one merely separate the men from the boys? In any event, one may doubt that the men will ever be led into the stanchions of advanced technology—not, at least, until they have a lot more to say about what is to be "produced." The medium is *not* the message for people who have something to say.