

NEW MAN IN A NEW WORLD

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Modern techniques are rapidly changing the face of our cultural pattern. Nowadays there are living and working ten times as many scientists as there ever have been in the past. We are living in a world of electronics, automation, organization and abundance of information. No doubt that this necessarily must deeply influence our pattern of living as it influences wide-spread education and the process of fundamental democratization. By the latter I understand the involvement of ever more people in an ever broader field of human endeavour. This implies an ever increasing freedom of choice which carries an ever increasing and often overwhelming responsibility. In a sense it means that we are really living in a new world.

Our cultural climate is more and more conditioned by the scientific and technical revolution that is going on. The most remarkable consequences of it are the explosive industrialization, urbanization and prosperity; and also social and geographical mobility and abundance of information and possibilities of communication.

Moreover we are confronted with an explosion of population, and therefore also with a proportionally great number of youngsters. They are — also as a result of the modern means of communication — already soon and undisguisedly challenged by the problems of our period. At the same time there is a relatively high percentage of aged people who hardly can keep in pace with the quick changes in society. All this causes exceptional tensions.

Another aspect of the present situation is the extraordinary development of purposeful interference brought about by the revolutionary development of knowledge and techniques. But the insight that it requires, is — even in an increasing degree — the field of specialists, so that it impedes a justified participation of the individual. This causes a peculiar antagonism between a remarkably increased feeling of responsibility and a wide-spread feeling of inability that originates even from this responsibility.

We are living in a period with unknown possibilities, but at the same time we are confronted by unheard risks too. We face both a powerful human development and a terrible, destructive catastrophe. It depends on our ingenuity and devotion which of these possibilities will be realized.

Modern industrialization puts on the whole of Western culture an urban stamp. And in a rapid pace the same is happening in other parts of the world. Advantages of this development are mobility, education and information as we already saw before. But it also carries the difficulties of solitariness (as different from solitude) in an impersonal urban pattern. This solitariness is even stressed by the competitive achievement-character of modern society as it finds expression in the utilitarian appreciation of schoolmarks, diplomas, promotions, profit-capacity and intellectual and artistic exceptionality.

Prosperity — be it badly divided — puts the immediate care of existence in the background and together with it the need for security. And this bears consequences for cultural stability. Mobility is promoted by it and a continuous need for change. But from a relative prosperity and the striving after efficiency rises the menace of boredom. It contributes to an urge towards playfulness and the continued search for all that appears romantic shocking and sensational.

Increasing school education and information through mass media have stimulated the emancipation of modern man from various conventional and obsolete thinking and living habits. But mental emancipation does not include that man knows how to give significance to life; nor does it mean that he succeeds in giving content to new forms of society. To that end it is necessary that one assimilates one's experiences in such a way that they contribute to the notion of participation in a significant development. Therefore a modern philosophy of life is required that makes the abundant information manageable and offers a perspective to the unconscious desires. Such a philosophy of life would not only indicate a direction, but would also lead to acknowledging the engagement of thinking and acting. And when we speak of engagement, not so much final purposes are at stake, but rather means and methods. Everyone is against inhumanity, but what counts is the strengthening of humanity by concrete forms of thinking and living. True engagement appears from continuous devotion to human means and methods. In that way mental emancipation turns into maturity.

The cultural climate in a revolutionary period like ours is not favourable for such maturity. The developments mentioned before furnish promising possibilities for prosperity and welfare, for emancipation and deployment. But the speed of change naturally causes much confusion and insecurity. Traditional concepts and rules of behaviour are no longer valid. But new ideas and forms must still grow or are not yet really assimilated. This increases the insecurity with the older generations, while youth needs more time to attain maturity as society becomes increasingly intricate.

Thus one perceives on the one hand desire without content, disproportionality of means and ends, distrust of a chaotic and intricate reality; and on the other hand one notices spasmodic tenacity of tangible achievements, fear of change and renewal, mixing up of authority and prestige. Here public criticism comes into the picture. But the so-called shocking criticism of society is often too much a function of this society itself to provide for new developments. It leads to further disintegration, often without offering starting-points for new integration.

Because of the pace of development many can hardly follow and achieve awareness of the disintegration of the traditional world. This leads more than once to feelings of frustration. But also convinced renovators experience frustration, as the purposeful renewal of society lags behind the cultural revolution.

It increases the confusion and hampers the communication. The indispensable conveyance of competences to mandatories conflicts in every field with the demands of critical participation. But critical participation is only possible on a basis of communication; and where can we find such a basis in our highly technical society?

We cannot go back and we must not. Technics are the basis of our prosperity, health, information, mobility and deployment. It is foolish to consider them with belittlement. But they require a proceeding organization of society and cause at the same time an ineluctable independence of the individual. It is clear that these are controversial tendencies that must lead to intensification of the conflict between individual and society.

Through all this the solitariness increases rapidly. Until solitariness becomes a hell of distrust, neurosis and destruction. For hell, that is not the others as Sartre says, but it is precisely solitariness that becomes unbearable in the end. Then the condition exists for a process in which the idea of a true human society can inspire broad circles and so become a real factor. Then a renewal of society is possible in such a way that playfulness, originality and pluriformity get their chances. Independent individuals will then no longer live "against" each other, but "with" each other.

If we understand our duty we must already now lead the way. In solidarity with protest and criticism, as they indicate real shortcomings. However solidarity does not mean identification. For we do not derive our strength from protest and criticism, but from the notion of human fellowship and creative self-realization. Our aim is co-operation in a world of competition, construction in a world of destruction, devotion in a world of aggression. That requires self-consciousness in order to stimulate modern man to constructive activity in society and personal life.

To these questions we have no ready-made answers, but at least we should realize what approach is required. In the field of instruction, particularly in vocational instruction, people often speak nowadays of problem-solving methods. What is meant, is this: in a world that is rapidly changing one cannot teach knowledge that will be up to date in ten, twenty years when the pupil will need it. But what he should learn is how he can acquire the knowledge, the skill and the team spirit that he will need at that time to solve his problems. After the primary instruction it is necessary to learn the methods of problem-solving.

This applies also to moral conviction. One cannot furnish recipes that fit into all situations in a continuously changing world. But one can indicate methods of problem-solving. The humanist method is that of openness to all knowledge of man and society that is available with the intention to using it for living together as mature beings, and thus making life worthwhile. In my opinion this is the gist of humanism.

Humanism considered in comparison with the great religions does not provide final answers to fundamental questions. But how does it deal with the problems of evil, sorrow and death? What does it offer in the field of purpose, certainty and security? The first clarification that is needed here is that humanism does not pretend to give another answer to the same questions that are put by the traditional faiths, but it puts different questions. Man creates the world he lives in by his expectations and ideas and the ways in which he interprets and manages his experience. The humanist is not a christian stripped of his christian expectations and attitudes; he makes a different approach.

Of course he cannot and does not deny evil, sorrow and death, but he conceives them as the natural seamy side of his aspirations. As a painting is unthinkable apart from the surface on which it is laid out, so all our experience is not merely intermingled with the threats to human existence, but is constituted by them. It is what it is by its perilous nature. Therefore humanism does not offer another certainty for the certainty of the gospels, nor another security for the security in God, nor another ultimate goal for eternal salvation. It simply assumes the possibility of a significant life in trial and error, with no other guarantee than man's inextinguishable endeavour, and without any other-worldly purposes. Life in the humanist conception bears its ultimate goals in itself.

All humanist varieties represent an approach to reality, relying on natural and social resources, without assuming a cosmic mind or purpose. They take human values as final. Moreover, in their modern form, they aim not only at interpreting man and the world in a human way, but also at providing a basis for human living that fully meets human needs in everyday life. How shall we do this: furnishing a basis for human life that can satisfy human needs. Modern man is living in a new world in which traditional patterns of behaviour do not apply anymore. It makes him often confused, anxious, suspicious and aggressive, even if he does not realize it. He can hardly contribute meaning to his existence in an alienated world. And still it is true, as psychologists point out, that men need a meaningful existence for sane living. But from what should he derive meaning, if he is thrown back upon himself?

Only now people begin to realize what it means when Nietzsche said: God is dead and we have killed him. (By our secular culture). It was no triumphal cry, as is sometimes assumed, but a cry of despair. Is there still under and above, he added; that is: is there still any meaning in life? For God was not only the creator of heaven and earth, but also the guarantee for meaning; he warranted the sense of existence, whether here or hereafter. But secular man must create his own meaning and even modern christianity with its God-is-dead theology stays in the same position. Even therefore

a humanist is someone else than just a christian without God. This is in my opinion the real challenge to humanism: to answer the quest for meaning within the present situation. One cannot assume that this can be done in a simple way. Humanists do not have automatic recipes nor magical sentences. They insist on everyone solving his own problems, and indeed it cannot be done otherwise, for it is not a matter of words but of personal experience. Nevertheless, humanists may explain where and in which way they think to find meaning in life: It is a matter of problem-stating and problem-solving.

The problem is, indeed, how to make life worth while. That is a matter of experience and reflection, that must be achieved through self-education. There are experiences in life that are meaningful in themselves without any external guarantee; one may think of a concert, a theatre performance, or simply of a festivity. They really do not serve any purpose; they carry their meaning in themselves. They are worthwhile because they perform a satisfying piece of experience. And in the same way we might search for a way of living that also carries its meaning in itself, because it makes existence worthwhile.

There is one aspect of life that I want to stress. I would call it the aspect of creativity. And speaking of creativity I do not only point at the scholar's or the artist's creativity, but rather at everyone's possibilities to develop his capacities in personal life and in society, even by just planting a tree where there stood one before. This strengthens his self-consciousness and this is a necessary condition for a self-destination that indeed contributes meaning to life. For I agree with what Fromm says in *Man for himself*: "The selfish person does not love himself too much, but too little". He neglects his own real value and tries and compensates it by false values.

But there is also another decisive aspect in human existence: The relation of individual creativity and personal self-destination with our fellow-men. For human self-realization is always self-expression that is directed towards others. Even the most individualistic artist cannot refrain from this indispensable communication with others that furnishes the framework of human activity.

For solidarity is the other power of life that can make life worthwhile. It points at the social character of human existence. And together they contribute meaning to life that must be experienced before it can be convincing. To quote a top-hit of the Beatles, I should say: All you need is love. Creativity and solidarity, self-destination and fellowship, these are the humanist directives to face the uncertainties of our world and to escape suicide by a meaningful existence. For that indeed is the choice if once one puts seriously the question of the human lot. It is a matter of choices. But what is the good of choice? Apparently that it makes life worth while. That is a matter of experience, not only of the individual but of the whole of mankind. And what is the answer of experience? According to humanists it lies in the sphere of participation and disposition; acceptance of the challenge of reality in relatedness with the world; self-realization in mutuality towards, respect for, and solidarity with fellow-men. This is also conceived as a directive of interhuman validity as a response to futility and solitariness by which modern man is threatened. Still, is it not acquired? But one can only acquire what one is disposed for, and one only acquires what in the pattern of culture is the result of the aims and judgements of innumerable human generations.

Man's self-realization in connectedness with others can both enrich personal existence and provide a directive for association with others in sexual and family life, education and profession. Notwithstanding the abyss of sorrow, guilt, disease and misery through which a man often must go, his commitment to human living can make human existence really worthwhile.

But human living means living in community; human achievement depends on social culture. Conversely society is bound to furnish the conditions for the welfare of its members. Its progress is progress in freedom of choice, in that more people can do or renounce more things. And this freedom is naturally connected with justice as equity of choice. This equally applies to world society. Hence the humanist commitment to the cause of underdeveloped areas, world order and world peace. For mankind is not an addition of nations and races but a unity of men, implying a common responsibility of all men for all men.