

The most bloodcurdling crimes are done not by criminals but by perfectionists. This article provides an answer.

THE UNADJUSTED MAN

*— last refuge of
civilization's
secret fires*

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Today Americans have no outer or geographic frontier left to conquer. This pushes us, instead, to increasingly inward conquests. Therefore, let us stop being defensive, stop being apologetic about affirming the dignity and importance of the so-called impractical: namely, the humanistic and the spiritual studies. Today, in the campus curricula, they receive more lip service than a decade ago but they are more squeezed in practice. These curricula reflect an atomic age which puts a new premium on the technician and on practical outer applications of inner theory. Yet without the understanding of man's inner nature, which impractical art

and literature gives us, and without the inner ethical restraint which religion gives us, our outer practical and mechanical progress is paving our road to hell with good inventions.

The number of cells in the brain and the number of the stars in the universe are said to be exactly equal in number. So-and-so-many trillion units apiece. From this unprovable fancy emerges a metaphor: the gigantic dream versus matter is balanced exactly evenly, at the fulcrum of the forehead. Soul versus cosmos: imagine them balancing with a one-to-one correspondence between the units without and within the skull;

between the stars and the no less radiant brain-cells.

This true metaphor is defied—this scale is upset—by any philosophy which deems either side of the equal scale as "more real." If this were a universe of the Middle Ages, I might argue against one-sided overemphasis on the inward dimension. But in the case of America, there is no danger of overweighing the inner side, the esthetic and spiritual side. America's danger is overemphasis of the outward side: the star-matter, not the gray-matter.

The dimension behind the forehead has two functions: the unleashing function of creative imagination, and the restraining function of the Christian-Judiac ethic. These two different functions of inwardness are often found apart and often battle each other in an inner civil war. Yet, even when at war both need each other. Neither is enough by itself to sustain a culture. The esthetic imagination without ethics degenerates into irresponsible, anti-social bohemianism; ethics without beauty degenerates into the "seven deadly virtues" of a preachy, devitalized

aridity. Here it seems appropriate to recall the so-to-speak deathbed-repentance of a very great thinker who had neglected inwardness. I wonder how many of my readers will reorganize its author:

If I had my life to live over again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature. This was no ivory-tower esthete speaking, but a great scientist and a rather hard-boiled one. Namely, Charles Darwin.

When I hear of our American delusion of "producing" creatively by expensive outer equipment instead of unbuyable inner equipment, I remember my first meeting with Albert Einstein, seeing him in New York, strolling along Riverside Drive, absentmindedly scribbling notes on the back of a torn old envelope. From a scrawl on a

penny's worth of scrap paper, by a man whose inner genius was never adjusted away at age six, and not from tears endowed by foundations with electric typewriters and filing systems came the greatest scientific discoveries of the century, including those super-practical H-bombs. In short, without an ornery, unadjusted inner spark, our present drive for outward techniques is not enough to save us either spiritually or militarily.

Let us educators not be intimidated by the practical folk the so-called realists and experts. Let us not be afraid to listen to the so-called impractical people, the so-called unrealistic people. Every overadjusted society swallows up the diversities of private bailiwicks, private eccentricities, private inner life, and the creativity inherent in concrete personal loyalties and in loving attachments to unique local roots and their rich historical accretions. Apropos the creative potential of local roots, let us recall not only Burke's words on the need for loyalty to one's own "little platoon" but also Synge's words, in the

Ireland of 1907, on "the springtime of the local life," where the imagination of man is still "fiery and magnificent and tender." The creative imagination of the free scientists and free artists requires private elbow-room, free from the pressure of centralization and the pressure of adjustment to a mass average. This requirement holds true even when the centralization is benevolent, and even when the mass average replaces sub-average diversities.

Admittedly certain kinds of diversity are perfectly dreadful; they threaten everything superior and desirable. But at some point the cure to these threats will endanger the superior and the desirable even more than do the threats themselves. The most vicious maladjustments, economic, moral, or psychiatric, will at some point become less dangerous to the free mind than the overadjustment needed to cure them.

In the novel and in the poem, the most corrupting development of all is the substitution of technique for art. What once resulted from the inspired audacity of a heartbreakingly lonely crafts-

man is now mass-produced in painless, safe, and uninspired capsules. This process is taking over every category of education and literature. The stream of consciousness for which James Joyce wrestled in loneliness with language, the ironic perspective toward society which Proust attained not as entertainment but as tragedy, the quick, slashing insights for which a Virginia Woolf or a Katherine Mansfield bled out her heart, all these intimate personal achievements of the private life are today the standard props of a hundred hack imitators, mechanically vending what is called "*The New Yorker*-type story." Don't underestimate that type of story; though an imitation job, it is imitation with all the magnificent technical skill of America's best-edited weekly. And think of the advantages: no pain any more, no risk any more, no more nonsense of inspiration. Most modern readers are not even bothered by the difference between such an efficient but bloodless machine job and the living product of individual heart's anguish.

What then, is the test for telling the real inspiration

from the just-as-good, the coffee from the Nescafe? The test is pain. Not mere physical pain but the exultant, transcending pain of selfless sacrifice. The test is that holy pain, that brotherhood of sacrifice, that aristocracy of creative suffering of which Baudelaire wrote. "*Je sais que la douleur est l'unique noblesse.*"

In other words, in a free democracy the only justified aristocracy is that of the lonely creative bitterness, the artistically creative scars of the fight for the inner dimension against outer mechanization:—the fight for the private life.

Nothing can mechanically "produce" unadjustedness. But at least some studies—the "impractical" literary classics—provide it with more fertile soil than does "education for citizenship." The latter slogan has led to over-adjustment in life, McCarthyism in education. The stress of many liberals on teaching ephemeral civic needs instead of permanent classics gave the antiliberal demagogues their opening for trying to terrorize education into propagandizing "Americanism."

What "progressive education" forgot was this: its favorite word "citizenship" would often be defined in practice not by some lofty John Dewey but by some thought-controlling politician, interested in garnering not wisdom but votes.

Yet all these seemingly irresistible pressures of overadjustment can be triumphantly resisted, after all, if the Unadjusted Man makes full use of his many available burrows. I am thinking of Kafka's story, "The Burrow." The very vastness of America's machinery of depersonalization makes it easier in America today than in "old cultured Europe" to safeguard undisturbed the burrows of the creative imagination. They often occur where least expected: in the drabest, most bustling metropolis.

To rely on burrows does not mean to become isolated, deracinated. Such sane asylums for individuality, spreading contagious health amid mechanized conformity, need never degenerate into the inhuman aloofness of the formalist, ivory-tower pose, so long as their

quarrel with America remains a lovers' quarrel.

Without the inner dimension, outer civil liberties are not enough. We can talk civil liberties, prosperity, democracy with tongues of men and angels, but it is merely a case of "free from what?" and not "free for what?" if we use this freedom for no other purpose than to commit television or go lusting after supermarkets. In contrast with earlier eras ever more colleges want to know: is the applicant well-adjusted, a good mixer, chockful of leadership qualities? To any student reckless enough to ask my unstreamlined advice, I can only growl: "Why not for once have the moral courage to be unadjusted, a bad mixer, and shockingly devoid of leadership qualities?"

From being well-adjusted for its own sake, what a short step to becoming overadjusted: the public-relations personality of public smile, private blank. In effect, an ecstasy of universal lobotomy. This kind of overadjustment does not mean merely the stampedes toward "normalcy" that have periodically characterized our less mecha-

nized past; rather, the new trend means a bed-of-Procrustes, shaped by a continuous secret Gallup Poll, for whose pseudo-norms our genuine inner spontaneity is continually slaughtered.

From this trend a new American idol emerges: the Overadjusted Man. Against it a new liberator emerges, a bad mixer and scandalously deviod of "education for citizenship": the Unadjusted Man. Unadjustedness seems the only personal heroism left in a machine-era of which William Faulkner said at Stockholm: "We all had better grieve for all people beneath a culture which holds any machine superior to any man."

Today the humanist, the artist, the scholar can no longer be the prophet and seer, the unriddler of the outer universe; modern science has deprived him of that function. His new heroism, unriddling the inner universe, consists of this: to be stubbornly unadjusted toward the mechanized, depersonalized bustle outside. The Uandjusted Man is the final, irreducible pebble that sabotages the omnipotence of

even the smoothest running machine.

The unadjusted should not be confused with the maladjusted, the merely crotchety; nor with the flaunted grandstand-nonconformity of bohemia's "misunderstood genius" act. The alternative to these mere caricatures of the Unadjusted Man is a viewpoint more selective in its non-adjusting—a viewpoint whose coin has two reciprocal sides: adjustment to the ages, nonadjustment to the age. The meaningful moral choice is not between conforming to the ephemeral, stereotyped values of the moment but conforming to the ancient, lasting archetypal values shared by all creative cultures.

The sudden uprooting of archetypes, which had slowly, painfully grown out of the soil of history, was the most important consequence of the world-wide industrial revolution. This moral wound, this cultural shock was even more important than the economic consequences of the Industrial Revolution. Liberty depends on a substratum of fixed archetypes, as opposed to the arbitrary shuffling

about of laws and institutions. The distinction holds true whether the shuffling about be done by the *a priori* abstract rationalism of the eighteenth century or by the even more inhuman and metallic mass-production of the nineteenth century.

Not in the sense of any political party (least of all America's Old Guard Republicans), nor in the sense of intolerant social prejudices, but in the sense of a pessimistic view about perfecting outward social progress and in a preference for inner spiritual and cultural growth, in that nonpolitical, nonreactionary sense, the inner dimension of man tends toward a conservative rather than liberal view of human nature. "How can a mere political innovation," asked Nietzsche, "ever suffice to change men once and for all into happy inhabitants of the earth?"

So long as people believe in the perfectibility of outward society, they will continue to use those freedom-destroying "bad means" (totalitarianism) that promise "good end." According to the quickest short-cut to this

the perceptive Polish poet and anti-Communist, Czeslaw Milosz, "A gradual disappearance of the faith in the earthly paradise which justifies all crimes is an essential preliminary to the destruction of totalitarianism." By rejecting the possibility of an earthly paradise, cultural conservatism rejects all brands of Rousseauistic perfectibility of man, rejecting the *a priori* utopias not only of Jacobinism and of socialism but also of doctrinaire laissez-faire capitalism.

Earth is one of the uninhabitable planets. Unlike the habitable ones, Earth is a planet with a built-in cellar of error, death, decay. If frail children scrawl blueprints of progress on the ceiling, how will that conjure away the reality of the house, including the ceiling itself, rest on the foundation of that cellar of error, death, decay? Just as our planet is uninhabitable, so our society is indefensible. This is the stubbornly conservative, and un-Jeffersonian, truth of the human condition. Yet somehow we must live. Then is any social betterment possible at all? Sustained better-

ment never; fluctuating betterment often. Gradual, limited reform can indeed be accomplished, always working within a rooted framework, moving always from particular to particular. Such humane reforms can be achieved and urgently ought to be. We must build what society we can out of what clay we have: the clay of decay, the clay of frailty and constant unpredictable blunder.

But the good builder builds with the clay at hand; never does he pile up utopias from some ideal airy clay that does not exist on his particular planet. *The most blood curdling crimes are done not by criminals but perfectionists.* Criminals normally stop killing when they attain their goal: loot. Perfectionists never stop killing because their goal is never attainable: the ideal society.

It is not a question of being inhumanely blind to the monstrous faults of the order, of all old orders. It is simply a matter of learning inductively the impossibility of any new program too sweeping, any progress long sustained. Only dead chemicals can be sweepingly reorganized, sus-

tainedly perfected; everything alive is indefensible because infinitely precarious. Humanity is willful, wanton, unpredictable. It is not there to be organized for its own good by coercive righteous busybodies. Man is a ceaseless anti-managerial revolution.

Whenever enlightened reformers expect the crowd to choose Christ, it cheers for Barabbas. Whenever some Weimar Republic gets rid of some old monarchy, the liberated crowd turns its republic over to some Hitler. Then what consolation remains for the brute fact that sustained progress is impossible? Sheer self-deception is the hope of overcoming man's doom by founding a more exact social science. How can there ever be an exact science dealing with man? Science is exact when dealing with predictable chemicals; only art can deal with flesh. There are indeed consolations for man's precariousness, but they consist not of trying to end it but of learning to find in it not only the lowest but the highest reaches of the spirit, not only cruel social wrongs but the holy welding-flame of

the lyric imagination, transfiguring frailty into beauty. This is the Baudelairean truth that the best roses grow from manure.

The refusal of society to be a social science, outwardly conditioned, its insistence on remaining an art, inward, spontaneous, unpredictable—all these human realities forever wreck the most scientific polls and blue-prints. The Economic Man of Smith and Marx, with his famous Economic Motives, has never existed. You can only achieve the goals of outward materialism by an inward idealism. You can only make lasting your outward economic gains

by inward values that subordinate economic gains to individual freedom. If you base society on the idea of techniques and economic gains, then you lose not only the freedom but the economic gains. Without spiritual know-why, you lose even your technical know-how. In place of the economic capitalist philosophy of Adam Smith and its parallel, the economic socialist philosophy of Marx the world through trial and error will come to see the economic necessity of an anti-economic philosophy, the material necessity of antimaterialism. Pragmatism is unpragmatic; it won't work.—*The Saturday Review*.

Freedom of teaching and of opinion in book or press is the foundation for the sound and natural development of any people. The lessons of history—especially the very latest chapters—are all too plain on this score. It is the bounden duty of everyone to stand with every ounce of energy for the preservation and enhancement of these liberties and to exert all possible influence in keeping public opinion aware of the existing danger.—Albert Einstein.