

... Tangents by Thane

THE PROSPEROS P O BOX 8336 WAIKIKI STATION HONOLULU HAWAII

VOL. II ISSUE 38

The time has come for man to step into self-directed evolution.

Dear Student-Friend:

Correspondence and conversations regarding these lessons on fear assert that my viewpoint is gloomy. Still, agreement is unanimous in what I've said. In light of the night of Caliban it certainly seems we should be allowed this mood of gloom. Actually, it isn't justifiable if everything is considered. There are present difficulties but they are enduring and the dangers surmountable. The future predicates a gloomier picture. The case for despair is estimated correctly. Nevertheless, there has never been in the history of man more foundation for optimism than now.

At first glance the reason for optimism seems like one of the greatest of fears. It is the shocking statistic: that automation is eliminating over a million jobs a year. I'm quoting from Walter Winchell's column of April 11, 1963 which is almost word for word from the President's recent economic report.

This need not be a fear. The age of automation can bring the leisure to fix our thoughts on a science-of-man. It is easy to see that enmities which once had a biological and geographical justification are now nothing but myths in this compact world. And we should, with our vaunted intelligence, be able to discern and dissolve these myths. As man perceives this is the age of self-directed evolution this can be accomplished.

The relationship of leisure to philosophy, theology and the good life is coming in for quite a bit of discussion these days; it will become more pertinent. Of course, some of the things that must be said about it will be considered pure heresy but heresy is a sort of political philosophy. All heretical ideas, which are sometimes elevated at the expense of orthodox thought, are subject to the same tests of truth and falsity as are the ideas commonly accepted by the majority. But we have to regard the dialectic of history as a total process and leisure is certainly going to be a part of history. It will call for revised ideas, beliefs, individual expressions. The social, cultural, political and economic framework that is producing the coming age of leisure is certainly going to have to be viewed differently from the way contemporaries see it.

It goes back much further than our Puritan Fathers' concepts but we can thank them that in America we have a tremendous block and/or trauma that produces the triumph of an attitude of "work for work's sake" and a distortion of the use of time, through guilt about the whole idea of leisure.

The American saying, "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise" haunts almost every person who takes an extended vacation. Dickens said, "... if you swab a deck you should swab it as if Davey Jones was after you."

Here are some more bits of philosophy, some of which are quoted out of context just as you and I have always heard them used; used to make us ashamed of not working.

"The labor of the body frees us from the pains of the mind, and thus makes the poor happy," La Rochefoucauld. "Do all the work you can: that is the whole philosophy of the good way of life," Eugene Delacroix. "Work! God wills it. That, it seems to me, is clear," Gustave Flaubert. "One must work, nothing but work," David Grayson. "You work that you may keep pace with the earth and the soul of the earth." Kahlil Gibran. "The test of a vocation is the love of the drudgery it involves," Logan Pearsall Smith. "An ounce of work is worth many pounds of words." St. Frances de Sales. "Employment... and hardships, prevent Melancholy," Sam Johnson.

Remember, some of these are quoted out of context but they are accurate quotations nonetheless, and the American tradition that work and frugality are the way to success and happiness is so strong within us that the average man has a great sense of guilt when he is not busy doing something.

The time has come to see what some of the heretics have had to say of the same subject. Mark Twain caused much laughter and at the same time brought criticism upon himself when he said, "Let us be grateful to Adam our benefactor. He cut us out of the 'blessing' of idleness and won for us the 'curse' of work."

For Bertrand Russell really got himself in trouble when he wrote, "I think that there is far too much

work done in the world, that immense harm is caused by the belief that work is virtuous, and that what needs to be preached in modern industrial countries is quite different from what always has been preached." He said this long before automation and Labor Unions' demanding a thirty-six hour week. Charles Lamb wrote, "Positively, the best thing a man can have to do is nothing, and, next to that, perhaps, good works."

Of course, much depends on what one considers work. I have always felt that Emerson was writing for me when he said, "The crowning fortune of a man is to be born to some pursuit which finds him employment and happiness, whether it be to make baskets, or broadswords, or canals, or statues, or songs." Strangers often ask me what work I do for a living, and though I put in a grueling twelve to eighteen hours a day (only eight since my illness), seven days a week, I always reply truthfully, "I don't work for a living." Stephen Leacock explains this with, "What we call 'creative work' ought not be called work at all, because it isn't....I imagine that Thomas Edison never did a day's work in his last fifty years."

The immediate problems of today in the work field are indicated by Shaw's, "The very last thing the ordinary industrial worker wants is to have to think about his work," and Baudelaire's, "One must work, if not from inclination at least out of despair--since it proves, on close examination, that work is less boring than amusing oneself," and the old saw to the effect that idle hands will get into mischief.

Leisure is a problem to

most people and most have no idea of how to prepare for it. Norman Cousins recently editorialized that most Americans confronted with the promise of leisure are reacting as though they had been handed a sentence of doom....they attach shrill sounds to their apprehensions, making it appear that an ominous blight is about to descend..."they cry out that forces must be mobilized to forestall these grisly events."

Recently Joseph Whitney (Mirror of Your Mind) calls attention to the fact that many people find leisure a bore. He says this boredom will "worsen with increased automation." Dr. James C. Charlesworth, University of Pennsylvania, recently urged educators to "strike out on a bold new program" to extend existing recreational programs in scope and depth. He said leisure activities, mental and physical, should be taught throughout school attendance, with emphasis on activities that encourage pride of doing and development of the mind and spirit.

The Socony Oil Company already has an educational program that starts preparing employees for leisure twenty years before retirement. They even have a text-book for it.

Not only the coming leisure but the present leisure as something to be feared is frenzied nonsense. The thing to be feared is the flight of ingenuity and the collapse of moral imagination, not the innovation of leisure brought about by automation and/or peace. "...we ought to be directing our attention to the shortage of imagination and intelligence that stands in the way of the fuller life that is now clearly attainable. It may well be that such study will

indicate that a three or even a two-day work week for many people is a practical and desirable development.

"The fundamental problem will be represented by the ability of people to make productive use of their time. Here, then, is the ultimate test of a free society. What happens when people have maximum freedom? When peace and plenty are genuinely attainable, will this result in suffocating boredom or in a vast release of creative energy?" (1)

Plato was the first of a long line of philosophers who have addressed themselves to the problem of leisure. He wrote, "But the Gods, taking pity on mankind, born to work, laid down a succession of recurring feasts to restore them from their fatigue....so that nourishing themselves in festive companionship with the Gods, they should again stand upright and erect."

Thoreau wrote, "He enjoys true leisure who has time to improve his soul's estate," and I feel this is the greatest boon that can come of automation. However, there is another face to the coin that may seem more practical to some. Walter Cannon recalls that Michael Foster, the English physiologist, once remarked that "leisure is the mother of discovery." Every great creative person that has ever lived has known the verifiable truth of this.

Many "hopes, misty and unattainable in the past, are now a tangible prospect. The generation stands apart from all previous generations not just in the harm man can do to man but in man's practical ability to make of the planet a good earth, hunting down and banishing the

so-far incurable diseases, nourishing the body with vital foods grown on once-arid soil, collecting and utilizing energy from matter or from the sun or from the air itself, building schools by the thousands--not just for youngsters but for people of all ages who have come to comprehend that neither knowledge nor the human brain has any boundaries or limitations."

(2)

We now have the opportunity to develop our most valuable and powerful resource--mind. Education can be the greatest of all adventures, one exciting search leading to another. We can now have enough time to learn to distinguish between personal growth and impersonal accumulation and, above everything else, freedom from drudgery can bring appreciation of the difference between concepts and things.

You see, I am not calling for hedonism though many science fiction writers, and other prophets envision this as the future. Nor do I deprecate work. Rather I am trying to call forth, in these frantic days, a scale of values similar to the perspectives that enabled the great communities of the past to turn their attention from mere existence to the proper role of man, which is to live deeply and fully and to assume direction of his evolution.

I am not suggesting, as some, a planned and ordered recreation which is simply a means of marking time. I am writing of the art of silence and contemplation, of meditation and the pursuit of insight, wisdom and the deeper pleasures of the spirit and the intellect. I reaffirm that man does not, indeed he cannot live by bread alone.

I believe that mankind is in serious trouble. I equally believe that he need not be. I do not intend any political direction and I was not "a Kennedy man" but I agree that on November 22, a hand reached out of the darkness and destroyed a man who expressed his faith in the future in eloquent words. Like him, we must be aware of the threat to all mankind and we must not turn to the past for answers or solace. There is much to be gained from history but most historians believe so much in history that in the end they also believe backwards, to paraphrase Nietzsche.

The virtues that have sustained men in the past are not enough to sustain them in the future. I am hopeful and see promise in the new age. I welcome the challenge to lead others to it in my small way. In America, and probably elsewhere, we have the inertia of prosperousness and the power of the past in our own and other societies slows us down. I affirm the power of man's mind to surmount all challenges to society.

I believe that science is a great new force in the struggle for a better future and I strive in Translation, which is a marriage of science and philosophy, to provide something for men to use in the approaching age of leisure.

The question is whether a shocked, dismayed and indignant People will support the irksome and tenuous discipline required for the ascent of consciousness and the self-directed evolution. Will man lose himself further in emotional conflicts and sullen frustrations, and repeat his history? Certainly the spirit of violence in the world points to

troubled days ahead.

We must never forget "the focus of all life is in the life of a single person." We must not stand mute, helpless, and guilty. Self and society are two constants and I make no more brief for heresy than I do for orthodoxy. "Fundamental values seem to lie in certain desirable states of society and of the...self.. We cannot ask a man to degrade himself on behalf of society or society to degrade itself on behalf of individual man. Integrity, wholeness of conscience, is perhaps the chief personal good; unity, harmony, the chief social." (3)

If in our leisure we will use the same approach to the humanities as science, we can translate the

new philosophy and the new religion into political terms that will bring a maximum of freedom for the expression of the individual. We will be able to see that our basic strength comes from the Great Diversity and from a variety of belief. Then we shall behave in all areas of life as we behave in science, and we shall have peace.

If Michener's Golden Man, or Heard's "leptoid" man, is to leap from the bonds of biological evolution and history it will be, partially at least, the product of therapeutic and psychophysical education. We must all become good teachers, "a trainer, an educator who can instruct and inspire (children) to not merely adapt to and serve the present, but to advance into and create the future."

We can all begin with ourselves.

Alcha blessings,

Thane

(more)

Hermosa Beach, California
January 31, 1964

- (1) Norman Cousins
- (2) Norman Cousins
- (3) Josef Pieper's LEISURE: The Basis of Culture