

Up from Liberalism

RICHARD M. WEAVER

A vigorous writer and influential scholar from western North Carolina, Professor Weaver describes the origins of his conservative convictions. Other autobiographical essays by leading conservative thinkers will appear in subsequent issues of this review.

THERE IS A SAYING by William Butler Yeats that a man begins to understand the world by studying the cobwebs in his own corner. My experience has brought home to me the wisdom in this; and since the contemporary ideal seems to run the other way, confronting the youth first with the abstractions of universalism, collectivism, and internationalism, I propose to say something on behalf of the historic and the concrete as elements of an education.

The discovery did not come to me as a free gift, for practically every conviction I now hold I have had to win against the propositional sense and general impetus of most of my formal education. This was owing partly to special circumstances, but mainly, I now believe, to the fact that the United States tends to institutionalize the chaotic and superficial type of education and to impose it with an air of business efficiency. This is not to imply that I was wiser than my generation, for I was filled with the formless aspirations which make such an education look like a good

thing, and I fell into most of the pitfalls that were left open. But I hope that a retrospect of twenty-five years, involving much change of opinion, gives some right to pass judgment; and furthermore I wish, in this testament, to discuss education as one of the proven means of doing something about the condition of man.

I was born in the Southern section of the United States, and at the age of seventeen I entered the University of Kentucky. I have more than once recalled how well Charles Peguy's description of himself at the beginning of his career at the *Ecole Normale* fitted me at this time: "gloomy, ardent, stupid." The University of Kentucky was what would be called in Europe a "provincial university," but I have since come to believe that if it had been more provincial in the right way and less sedulously imitative of the dominant American model, it would have offered better fare. Like most of our state-supported universities during the period, it was growing in enrollment and physical plant and losing

in character; moreover, it was given to the "elective" system, whereby seventeen-year-old students, often of poor previous training and narrow background, tell the faculty (in effect) what they ought to be taught. After many wayward choices I managed to emerge, at the end of my undergraduate course, with a fair introduction to the history—but not the substance—of literature and philosophy.

The professors who staffed this institution were mostly earnest souls from the Middle Western universities, and many of them—especially those in economics, political science, and philosophy—were, with or without knowing it, social democrats. They read and circulated *The Nation*, the foremost liberal journal of the time; they made sporadic efforts toward organizing liberal or progressive clubs; and of course they reflected their position in their teaching very largely. I had no defenses whatever against their doctrine, and by the time I was in my third year I had been persuaded entirely that the future was with science, liberalism, and equalitarianism, and that all opposed to these trends were people of ignorance or malevolence.

That persuasion was not weakened, I must add, by the fact that my class graduated in May, 1932, at almost precisely the time that the Great Depression reached its lowest point on the economic charts. College graduates were taking any sort of job they could get, however menial or unrelated to their preparation, and many, of course, were not getting jobs at all. It seemed then that some sort of political reconstruction was inevitable, and in that year I joined the American Socialist Party. My disillusionment with the Left began with this first practical step.

The composition of our small unit of the Socialist Party was fairly typical, I have since learned, of socialist organizations throughout the world. There was on the one side a group of academic people—teachers and students—who were intellectually trained and fairly clear in their objectives, but politically inexperienced and

temperamentally not adapted to politics. On the other side was about an equal number of town people who cannot be described for the good reason that they were nondescripts. They were eccentrics, novelty-seekers, victims of restlessness; and most of them were hopelessly confused about the nature and purpose of socialism. I remember how shocked I was when a member of this group suggested that we provide at our public rallies one of the "hillbilly bands" which are often used to draw crowds and provide entertainment in Southern political campaigns. This seemed to me entirely out of tone with what we were trying to do. I have since had to realize that the member was far more astute practically than I; the hillbilly music would undoubtedly have fetched more auditors and made more votes than the austere exposition of the country's ills which I thought it the duty of a socialist to make. But I am sure that the net result would not have been socialism. The two groups did not understand one another, and it is a wonder to me that they worked together as long as they did.

In the course of a membership of about two years, during which I served as secretary of the "local", as it was called, I discovered that although the socialist program had a certain intellectual appeal for me, I could not like the members of the movement as *persons*. They seemed dry, insistent people, of shallow objectives; seeing them often and sharing a common endeavor, moreover, did nothing to remove the disliking. I am afraid that I performed my duties with decreasing enthusiasm, and at the end of the period I had intimations, which I did not then face, that this was not the kind of thing in which I could find permanent satisfaction.

Meanwhile another experience had occurred which was to turn my thoughts in the same direction. I had gone as a graduate student to Vanderbilt University to pursue an advanced degree in literature. Vanderbilt was another provincial university, but it had developed in the hands of men intelligent enough to see the possibili-

ties that exist in a reflective provincialism. It was at that time the chief seat of the Southern Agrarian school of philosophy and criticism. This was one of the most brilliant groups in the United States, but its members held a position antithetical in almost every point to socialism and other purely economic remedies. By some their program was regarded as mere antiquarianism; by others it was attacked as fascist, since it rejected science and rationalism as the supreme sanctions, accepted large parts of the regional tradition, and even found some justification for social classes. But here, to my great surprise and growing confusion, I found that although I disagreed with these men on matters of social and political doctrine, I liked them all as persons. They seemed to me more humane, more generous, and considerably less dogmatic than those with whom I had been associated under the opposing banner. It began to dawn upon me uneasily that perhaps the right way to judge a movement was by the persons who made it up rather than by its rationalistic perfection and by the promises it held out. Perhaps, after all, the proof of social schemes was meant to be *a posteriori* rather than *a priori*. It would be a poor trade to give up a non-rational world in which you liked everybody for a rational one in which you liked nobody. I did not then see it as quite so sharp an issue; but the intellectual maturity and personal charm of the Agrarians were very unsettling to my then-professed allegiance.

Moreover, during my residence at Vanderbilt University I had the great good fortune to study under John Crowe Ransom, a rare teacher of literature and, apart from this and in his own right, a profound psychologist. Of the large number of students who have felt his influence, I doubt whether any could tell how he worked his effects. If one judged solely by outward motions and immediate results, he seemed neither to work very hard at teaching nor to achieve much success. But he had the gift of dropping living seeds into minds.

Long after the date of a lecture—a week, a month, a year—you would find some remark of his troubling you with its pregnancy, and you would set about your own reflections upon it, often wishing that you had the master at hand to give another piece of insight. The idea of Ransom's which chiefly took possession of me at this time was that of the "unorthodox defense of orthodoxy," which he had developed in his brilliant book *God without Thunder*. I began to perceive that many traditional positions in our world had suffered not so much because of inherent defect as because of the stupidity, ineptness, and intellectual sloth of those who for one reason or another were presumed to have their defense in charge.

This was a troubling perception, because the 1930's were a time when nearly all of the traditional American ideologies were in retreat, and I had never suspected that this retreat might be owing to a kind of default. If there was something to be said for them, if their eclipse was due to the failure of their proponents to speak a modern idiom or even to acquire essential knowledge, this constituted at least a challenge to intellectual curiosity. I had tried some of the Leftist solution and had found it not to my taste; it was possible that I had been turned away from the older, more traditional solutions because they wore an antiquarian aspect and insisted upon positions which seemed irrelevancies in the modern context. Actually the passage was not an easy one for me, and I left Vanderbilt University poised between the two alternatives. I had seen virtually nothing of socialism and centralism in practice, and the mass man I had never met; there was also reluctance over giving up a position once publicly espoused, made somewhat greater by a young man's vanity. Nevertheless, I had felt a powerful pull in the direction of the Agrarian ideal of the individual in contact with the rhythms of nature, of the small-property holding, and of the society of pluralistic organization.

I had left the University to take a teaching post in a large technical college in Texas. It has been remarked that in the United States California is the embodiment of materialism and Texas of naturalism. I found the observation true with regard to my part of Texas, where I encountered a rampant philistinism, abetted by technology, large-scale organization, and a complacent acceptance of success as the goal of life. Moreover, I was here forced to see that the lion of applied science and the lamb of the humanities were not going to lie down together in peace, but that the lion was going to devour the lamb unless there was a very stern keeper of order. I feel that my conversion to the poetic and ethical vision of life dates from this contact with its sterile opposite.

I recall very sharply how, in the Autumn of 1939, as I was driving one afternoon across the monotonous prairies of Texas to begin my third year in this post, it came to me like a revelation that I did not *have* to go back to this job, which had become distasteful, and that I did not *have* to go on professing the clichés of liberalism, which were becoming meaningless to me. I saw that my opinions had been formed out of a timorous regard for what was supposed to be intellectually respectable, and that I had always been looking over my shoulder to find out what certain others, whose concern with truth I was beginning to believe to be not very intense, were doing or thinking. It is a great experience to wake up at a critical juncture to the fact that one does have a free will, and that giving up the worship of false idols is a quite practicable proceeding.

Anyhow, at the end of that year I chucked the uncongenial job and went off to start my education over, being now arrived at the age of thirty.

In the meantime I had started to study the cobwebs in my own corner, and I began to realize that the type of education which enables one to see into the life of things had been almost entirely omitted from my program. More specifically, I

had been reading extensively in the history of the American Civil War, preferring first-hand accounts by those who had actually borne the brunt of it as soldiers and civilians; and I had become especially interested in those who had reached some level of reflectiveness and had tried to offer explanations of what they did or the manner in which they did it. Allen Tate has in one of his poems the line "There is more in killing than commentary." The wisdom of this will be seen also by those who study the killings in which whole nations are the killers and the killed, namely, wars. To put this in a prose statement: the mere commentary of an historian will never get you inside the feeling of a war or any great revolutionary process. For that, one has to read the testimonials of those who participated in it on both sides and in all connections; and often the best insight will appear in the casual remark of an obscure warrior or field nurse or in the effort of some ill-educated person to articulate a feeling.

I once heard of a man who made it a lifetime hobby to study the reasons that people in various circumstances gave as to why they felt it necessary to tell a lie. I believe that it is equally worthwhile and perhaps more interesting to study the reasons that people have given for passing from the use of reason to the use of force. At what point does reason tell us that reason is of no more avail? The American Civil War, because it was a civil struggle, with an elaborate ideology on both sides, left a rich store of material on this subject.

From the viewpoint of my general purpose, I had come to believe that one way to achieve the education which leads to understanding and compassion is to take some period of the past and to immerse oneself in it so thoroughly that one could think its thoughts and speak its language. The object would be to take this chapter of vanished experience and learn to know it in three if not four dimensions. That would mean coming to understand why certain actions which in the light of retro-

spect appear madly irrational appeared at that time the indisputable mandate of reason; why things which had been created with pain and care were cast quickly on the gaming table of war; why men who had sat in the senate chamber and debated with syllogism and enthymeme stepped out of it to buckle on the sword against one another. Almost any book of history will give you the form of such a time, but what will give you the *pressure* of it? That is what I particularly wished to discover.

I am now further convinced that there is something to be said in general for studying the history of a lost cause. Perhaps our education would be more humane in result if everyone were required to gain an intimate acquaintance with some coherent ideal that failed in the effort to maintain itself. It need not be a cause which was settled by war; there are causes in the social, political, and ecclesiastical worlds which would serve very well. But it is good for everyone to ally himself at one time with the defeated and to look at the "progress" of history through the eyes of those who were left behind. I cannot think of a better way to counteract the stultifying "Whig" theory of history, with its bland assumption that every cause which has won has deserved to win, a kind of pragmatic debasement of the older providential theory. The study and appreciation of a lost cause have some effect of turning history into philosophy. In sufficient number of cases to make us humble, we discover good points in the cause which time has erased, just as one often learns more from the slain hero of a tragedy than from some brassy Fortinbras who comes in at the end to announce the victory and proclaim the future disposition of affairs. It would be perverse to say that this is so of every historical defeat, but there is enough analogy to make it a sober consideration. Not only Oxford, therefore, but every university ought to be to some extent "the home of lost causes and impossible loyalties." It ought to preserve the memory of these with a certain discriminat-

ing measure of honor, trying to keep alive what was good in them and opposing the pragmatic verdict of the world.

For my part, I spent three years reading the history and literature of the Civil War, with special attention to that of the losing side. The people who emerged were human, all-too-human, but there was still the mystery of the encompassing passion which held them together, and this I have not yet penetrated. But in a dozen various ways I came to recognize myself in the past, which is at least an important piece of self-knowledge.

Toward the end of this inquiry, I published my first article, "The Older Religiousness in the South." It was an attempt to explain why the South, although it was engaged in defending institutions which much of the world was condemning on moral grounds, seemed to exhibit a more intense religiosity than its opponents. It was a first effort toward an unorthodox explanation of an orthodoxy, and it showed me how much more was to be done in historical revision of the kind before the shallow liberal interpretation could be exposed in its inadequacy.

Looking back over this discipline, I feel confident enough of its principle. The aim is to strip aside the clichés of generalization, the slogans which are preserved only because they render service to contemporary institutions, and of course to avoid the drug of economic interpretation. Henry Adams felt an impulse to do something like this amid the hullabaloo of his America, and his inquiry led him—this bloodless, self-questioning descendant of New England Puritans—to ponder the mystery of the Virgin. It seems to me that in some corresponding way the process will compel any honest seeker to see that the lines of social and political force are far more secret than the modern world has any mind to recognize, and that if it does not lead him to some kind of faith, it will lead him safely away from the easy constructions of those who do not wish to understand, beyond grasping what can be turned to serve

a practical purpose. Whereas conventional schoolbook history leaves men cocksure and ignorant, this multidimensional kind ought to leave them filled with wonder. Long before, I had been impressed by Schopenhauer's statement that no one can be a philosopher who is not capable at times of looking upon the world as if it were a pageant. This kind of detachment, produced by a suppression of the instinct to be arbitrary, seems to me a requirement for understanding the human condition.

The attempt to contemplate history in all its dimensions and in the fullness of its detail led directly to the conviction that this world of substantial things and substantial events is the very world which the Leftist of our time wishes to see abolished; and such policy now began to appear egotistical and presumptuous. I am disinclined to the view that whatever exists necessarily has a commission to go on existing. On the contrary, I have a strong tendency to side with the bottom dog, or to champion the potential against the actual if the former seems to have some reason behind it; and I am mindful of the saying that God takes delight in bringing great things out of small ones. To this extent I am a reformer or even a subverter. But I feel that situations almost never present themselves in terms so simple. They usually appear in terms like these: we have before us a tremendous creation which is largely inscrutable. Some of the intermediate relationships of cause and effect we can grasp and manipulate, though with these our audacity often outruns good sense and we discover that in trying to achieve one balance we have upset two others. There are, accordingly, two propositions which are hard to deny: we live in a universe which was given to us, in the sense that we did not create it; and, we don't understand very much of it. In the figure once used by a philosopher, we are inhabitants of a fruitful and well-ordered island surrounded by an ocean of ontological mystery. It does not behoove us to presume very far in this situation. It is not a mat-

ter of affirming that whatever is, is right; it is a recognition that whatever is there is there with considerable force (inertia even being a respectable form of force) and in a network of relationships which we have only partly deciphered. Therefore, make haste slowly. It is very easy to rush into conceit in thinking about man's relationship to the created universe. Science paved the way for presumption, whether wittingly or not; and those political movements which appeal to science to vindicate their break with the past have often made the presumptuous attitude one of their tenets. I found myself in decreasing sympathy with those social and political doctrines erected upon the concept of a man-dominated universe and more and more inclined to believe with Walt Whitman that "a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels."

As a further consequence of reflecting upon this problem, I began to see it in theological terms. As I have suggested, "the authority of fact" is a phrase that I am a little uncomfortable with, because it is readily turned, unless one is vigilant, into an idolatry of circumstance, and this is the most unspiritual of all conditions. Nevertheless, there is a way in which "the authority of fact" carries a meaning that we can accept. It merely requires that we see "fact" as signifying what the theological philosophers mean by the word "substance." Now the denial of substance is one of the greatest heresies, and this is where much contemporary radicalism appears in an essentially sinful aspect. The constant warfare which it wages against anything that has *status* in the world, or against all the individual, particular, unique existences of the world which do not fit into a rationalistic pattern, is but a mask for the denial of substance. If one benighted class of men begins by assuming that whatever is, is right, they begin by assuming that whatever is, is wrong. Had we to decide between these two—and I hope to make it clear that I do not think we have to decide thus—the latter would

appear more blasphemous than the former because it makes a wholesale condemnation of a creation which is not ours and which exhibits the marks of a creative power that we do not begin to possess. The intent of the radical to defy all substance, or to press it into forms conceived in his mind alone, is thus theologically wrong; it is an aggression by the self which outrages a deep-laid order of things. And it has seeped into every department of our life. In the reports of the successful ascent of Mt. Everest, the British members of the expedition talked of "conquering" the mountain, but the Nepalese guide who was one of the two to reach the summit spoke of a desire to visit the Buddha who lives at the top. The difference between these attitudes is a terrible example of the modern western mentality, with its metaphysic of progress through aggression.

Here again was an invitation to ponder one of the oldest and deepest of human attitudes, which is generally expressed by the word "piety". The war of the radicals against substance is a direct repudiation of this quality. It is true that a great many instances of sham, in both word and deed, have been associated with this term, so that one runs a danger by bringing it into

any modern discussion of ethics and religion. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it signifies an attitude toward things which are immeasurably larger and greater than oneself without which man is an insufferably brash, conceited, and frivolous animal. I do not in truth see how societies are able to hold together without some measure of this ancient but now derided feeling. The high seriousness of this life expresses itself as a kind of *pietas*, or a respect for the tragedy of existence, if nothing else. Piety is another one of those orthodoxies which have broken down because the defenders have not been able to show what is necessary in them. They have erected their defenses on positions quite easily overrun, and the places they could easily have defended they have left unmanned. As long as the term is associated exclusively with the avoidance of foibles and minor vices, there seems no hope of restoring the vital idea for which it stands. But when one shows that the habit of veneration supplies the whole force of social and political cohesion, one hits at its enemies where the blow cannot be ignored.

The realization that piety is a proper and constructive attitude toward certain things helped me to develop what Russell

Kirk calls "affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life". I feel now, in looking over the course of things, that such an attitude has always been in my nature, but that it had been repressed by dogmatic, utilitarian, essentially contumacious doctrines of liberalism and scientism, so that it was for me a kind of recovery of lost power or lost capacity for wonder and enchantment. The recovery has brought a satisfaction which cannot be matched, as far as my experience goes, by anything that liberalism and scientism have to offer.

It is what I feel when I return to the South, as I do each summer. There are numberless ways in which the South disappoints me; but there is something in its sultry languor and in the stubborn humanism of its people, now battling against the encroachments of industrialism—and with so little knowledge of how to battle—which tells me that for better or worse this is my native land. It is often said today that the hope of the world lies in internationalism. That may be true, but it is also true, and true with a prior truth, that there can be no internationalism without a solid, intelligent provincialism. That is so because there is nothing else for internationalism to rest on. And if philosophical sanction for this is wanted, there is the wise and beautiful saying of Thoreau: "I think nothing is to be hoped for from you, if this bit of mould under your feet is not sweeter to you to eat than any other in the world, or in any world."

Nevertheless, it is most important, as I have tried to suggest earlier, to draw a line between respect for tradition because it is tradition and respect for it because it expresses a spreading mystery too great for our knowledge to compass. The first is merely an idolatry, or a tribute to circumstance, which has engendered some of the most primitive, narrow, and harmful attitudes which the human race has shown. There is a worship of tradition and circumstance which is all fear, distrust, and feebleness of imagination, and to this the

name "reaction" is rightly applied. There can be no hope for good things from an attitude as negative as this. But the other attitude is reverential and creative at the same time; it worships the spirit rather than the graven image; and it allows man to contribute his mite toward helping Providence. Obviously free will would be meaningless if the world were to be left entirely untouched by us. Some things we have to change, but we must avoid changing out of *hubris* and senseless presumption. And always we have to keep in mind what man is supposed to be.

At the same time that the radical is engaged in denying the substance, he is engaged in denying the existence of evil, which is another great heresy. This takes the form today, as we all recognize, of assuming the perfectibility of man, the adequacy of social and political measures for the salvation of the individual person, and all the means of state engineering which are supposed to take the place of the old idea of redemption. Apart from the dilemma that the denial of evil involves us in, it brings into our moral, intellectual, and cultural life a number of destructive fallacies. It brings in, for example, the flattery of the popular will, the idealization of the mediocre, and along with these a spirit of rebelliousness toward anything that involves self discipline, sustained effort, and service to autonomous ideals. There is abroad in democracies today an idea that to criticize anybody for anything is treasonable, that the weak, the self-indulgent, and the vicious have the same claims toward respect and reward as anybody else, and that if a man chooses to be a beast, he has a sort of natural, inviolable right to be one. As far as I can see, there is no possible way of opposing this idea until we admit the existence of evil and the duty of combatting it. Here modern radicalism has failed again to interpret the issue.

It has been said that a disillusionment with human nature most often turns the mind toward Christianity. I know that in

my period of jejune optimism the concept of original sin seemed something archaically funny. Now, twenty years later, and after the experience of a world war, there is no concept that I regard as expressing a deeper insight into the enigma that is man. Original sin is a parabolical expression of the immemorial tendency of man to do the wrong thing when he knows the right thing. The fact of this tendency everyone should be able to testify to, not only from his observation but also from his personal history. And it is the rock upon which nine tenths of the socialist formula for universal happiness splits. The socialists propose to offer man peace and plenty; and they seem not to realize that he may reject both for crime and aggrandizement. He has done so before in both the individual and the national units. It would be more realistic for the reformers to start with the old assumption that the heart of man is desperately wicked and that he needs external help in the form of grace. At least, we cannot build on the quicksand that he is by nature good, for he is not. Whether he has inherited his sin from Adam is perhaps a question for another level of discussion; the plain situation is that he has inherited it, and that it will sink any scheme which is founded on a complacent faith in man's desire always to do the good thing. Nothing can be done if the will is wrong, and the correction of the will is precisely the task which modern radicalism fails to recognize.

It is only realistic to point out that the concept of original sin, if not anti-democratic, is at least a severe restraint upon democracy. Democracy finds it difficult ever to say that man is wrong if he does things in large majorities. Yet even politically this notion has to be rejected; and that is why constitutions and organic laws are created in nearly all representative governments, and are indeed regarded as the prime unifiers of such governments. A constitution is a government's better self, able to rebuke and restrain the baser self

when it starts off on a vagary. If the mass of every electorate were wholly right at every period, constitutions would be only curious encumbrances. This means of distinguishing what is right deeply and naturally from what is wrong needs to be carried over also into our individual lives, where it sets a limit on indulgences of the self.

For all these reasons, those who say that evil is but a bad dream or an accident of history or the creation of a few antisocial men are only preparing us for worse disillusionments and disasters. It is necessary to recognize evil as a subtle, pervasive, protean force, capable of undoing plans that promise the fairest success, but also capable of being checked by proper spiritual insight and energy. This makes the problem of improving the individual and society continuous with known human history and not different according to different phases of economic and technological development.

The persistence of the fact of evil was then being underlined for me by the dreadful events of the Second World War. A question was posed in sharp form when the claims of modern and "advanced" civilization were being refuted by the presence of this greatest creator of misery. Wars not only were becoming more frequent, they were also becoming more absolute or more indiscriminating in their ends and means.

The prosecution of the war by the Western allies was to me a progressive disillusionment. My study of the American Civil War had made me acquainted with the principle that as a war continues, the basis of the war changes, but I had not been prepared to see the extent to which the moral aim may deteriorate. My faith in the honesty of our case was shaken by an incident that occurred about the middle of the conflict. The incident is not very well remembered because it concerned chiefly a small country, and what does a small country count for in a world where everything is decided by a Big Four or

a Big Three or a Big Something? This was the abandonment of Finland by Britain and the United States, who had previously bucked up her morale and to some extent her strength against the Russian foe. I felt that if Finland could be cheerfully thrown to the wolves in the haste for victory and vengeance, much worse things must be anticipated, and so it has proved. And the Yalta Conference seemed to me at the very time when the newspapers were crowded with the most fantastic tributes and eulogies a piece of political insanity.

In sum, I felt that, thanks to our wonderful press and our Office of War Information and our political leaders, almost nobody in the United States knew what the war was really about. I recall sitting in my office in Ingleside Hall at the University of Chicago one Fall morning in 1945 and wondering whether it would not be possible to deduce, from fundamental causes, the fallacies of modern life and thinking that had produced this holocaust and would insure others. In about twenty minutes I jotted down a series of chapter headings, and this was the inception of a book entitled *Ideas Have Consequences*. At first it seemed destined to have only a *succès de scandale*, since it was so out of line with most current thinking on the subject. But many letters I later received from readers convinced me that other minds were tormented by the same questions, and that I had only gone to the point of saying what numerous people were thinking. The kind of opposition it aroused too seemed a confirmation.

It may sound odd, but it is true that the thesis of this book was first suggested by the bygone ideal of chivalry. My reading of history had encouraged the belief that at one time this had been an ideal of considerable restraining power, and that it contained one conception that seems to be absent from all the contemporary remedies for curing war—the conception of something spiritual which stood above war itself and included the two sides in any conflict. I have never had any faith in the

notion of ending wars by fighting one war to a victorious and sweeping conclusion. The idea of a “war to end all wars” is worthy only of a mountebank. What such an attempt does in actuality is to scatter the seeds of war more widely, and possibly plant them more deeply. It does not take into account the intransigency of human nature.

The profoundly interesting feature of chivalry was that it offered a plan whereby civilization might contain a war and go on existing as civilization. It did not premise itself upon simplifications which are soon rejected, such as the proposition that “all war is murder.” On the contrary, it tried to treat war or human combat as one of the activities of civilization, a dangerous one, to be sure, but one that could be kept under control. War under the code of chivalry might be likened to what the insurance companies call “a friendly fire.” It is a useful thing to man as long as it is kept in a furnace or whatever place is intended for it. But a fire which gets out of the place created for it ceases to be friendly; it is a foe and can spread quick and terrible devastation. Thus the warfare controlled, or the war of limited objectives, is the friendly fire; but a war which has unlimited objectives has broken out of control and may, with the weapons now available, be capable of consuming civilization in a holocaust. Hence the problem is: what kind of thing is capable of controlling war, or of keeping it *within* civilization? It would be absurd to claim that chivalry accomplished all that the ideal pointed toward; there were episodes in the age of chivalry which make unpleasant reading. Nevertheless, it was a moderating influence; and it did one thing which makes it appear realistic in comparison with the solutions which are being proposed today. It insisted that even in war, when maximum strain is placed upon the passions, man may not become an absolute killer. In war there are some considerations which must not be crowded out by hatred and fear. This is true because even your

foe has some rights, and these rights you must respect although your present course has his destruction in view. This may seem to some too paradoxical, but let us consider it in terms of an analogy. Modern wars have tended increasingly to resemble lynching parties. A lynching party acts in the belief that the guilt of the victim is absolute and unqualified, and that the only thing that matters is to put him to death immediately. Any means will do: beating, pistol fire, a tree and a rope. Of course this idea is contrary to that of juridical procedure. The law never takes the view that a man's guilt is so absolute and so completely known that he is not allowed to say a word in his defense. On the contrary, the most atrocious murderer is given police protection and a trial according to forms of law, with a chance to state his side of the affair.

The law is in such instances upholding an idea similar to that of chivalry, inasmuch as it takes the position that no one — not even an "enemy of society" — can be denied rights entirely. In modern international warfare, however, the idea of a binding agreement such as this is being abandoned rapidly. The object now is to pulverize the enemy completely, men, women, and children being lumped into one common target; it is to reduce a country to "atomic ashes", to recall a frightful phrase which I saw recently in a newspaper. And then, if anything remains, the next step is the unethical one of demanding unconditional surrender. No further analysis should be needed to show that this moves in a direction opposite to that of the chivalric ideal, in that it pulls everything into the madness and destruction of war and leaves nothing, as far as I can see, to help pull even the victor out again.

There are those who maintain that modern technology, when applied to war, makes all such concepts as the one upheld by chivalry simply fantastic. There is no way of restraining a technology, they say, which is so developed that it cannot produce anything short of annihilation once

it is turned to destructive ends. Perhaps this cannot be disputed as a fact. Yet if it is a fact, it seems one more proof that we have allowed science to reach a point at which it no longer allows us to be human beings. If we have got ourselves into a position where our only choice is to blow up or be blown up, this circumstance refutes the idea that we have increased the mastery of our lives.

There cannot be any improvement in the world's condition until the human spirit has counterbalanced and more than counterbalanced the hectic brilliance of technological invention. The deadly trap into which the pride of the modern world in technology and invention has led us is not often described in its real nature. It has produced a world condition of unheard-of instability. The only way in which this instability can be overcome even temporarily is through rigid, centralized control of the national life. And the only way that a rigid, centralized control can be maintained is to keep the people living in a mentality of war. One can do this by filling them with desire of conquest, or one can do it by keeping them fearful of a real or imaginary enemy. Then one has a trump card to play on every occasion. If there is any relaxing or any resentment of controls, one has only to invoke "the national security" to silence opposition and even render it disreputable. We in the United States are living under the second of these policies now. The choice appears to lie between chaos and perpetual preparation for war, and the trouble with preparation for war is that it always issues in war. Here again technology steps in to make the dilemma more cruel, since it causes warfare to be increasingly total and nihilistic, and increasingly beyond the power of civilizing influences to absorb. From now on, as Maurice Samuel has pointed out, humanity will be living in the shadow of its own demonic omnipotence, and this is a calamity so great that almost nobody is able to face it. The chance that the world will not use atomic bombs if

it goes on making them is infinitesimal.

How this tide is flowing even into the small interstices of our lives may be shown by a small incident. A few years ago there stood on the edge of the campus of the University of Chicago a small café. It was a poor affair, without style or pretensions; but here in the afternoons members of the liberal-arts faculties were wont to go for a cup of coffee, to get out of their professional grooves for an hour, to broach ideas and opinions, to be practicing humanists, you might say. Today a monstrous gray structure given to atomic research covers the site; the little café is no more; and the amiable *Kaffeeklatsche* no longer take place.

The chief result of what I now think of as my re-education has been a complete disenchantment with the liberalism that was the first stage of my reflective life. Liberalism is the refuge favored by intellectual cowardice, because the essence of the liberal's position is that he has no position. It may be true, with due qualifications, that in certain transitional phases, where the outline of issues is none too clear, the liberal or uncommitted attitude has its expediency. But as something to construct with, never! It is that state of mind before we have made up our mind. The explanation of why liberalism has been erected into a kind of philosophy in our time is perhaps to be sought in the fact that our world is disintegrating rapidly. It is thereby creating the impression that nothing is permanent but change, and that the very concept of truth is a stumbling block to adaptation as the disintegration goes on.

But even after this concession to the state of affairs, it is easy to see how the liberal's lack of position involves him in contradictions that destroy confidence. He is a defender of individualism and local rights, but let some strong man appear, who promises salvation through "leadership," and the liberal becomes indistinguishable from the totalitarian. Hence the totalitarian liberal of our times, a con-

tradiction in terms, but an embodiment in the flesh, and a dire menace to government based upon rights. In times of peace, the liberal is often a shouter for pacifism, but let something he dislikes appear upon the horizon and he is the first to invoke the use of armed force. In education, he believes in the natural goodness of the child and abhors the idea of corporal discipline, but he believes in spanking nations with atomic bombs until their will is broken.

It is frequently said that while our knowledge of the natural world is increasing rapidly, our knowledge of the nature and spirit of man shows no gain, and that most of our troubles arise out of this disproportion. I think that our situation is considerably worse than this figure represents it, for I am of the opinion that our knowledge of the nature and spirit of man is decreasing, and this not relatively but absolutely. No one can study Greek philosophy or mediaeval Christianity or the other great religions of the world without realizing that these saw man as a creature fearfully and wonderfully made, and that each tried to lead him with appropriate imagination and subtlety. Today, living under the shadow of this demonic technological omnipotence, we are trying to get along by supposing such crudities as economic man, "naturally good" man, and so on. Of course they do not work, and the more they are tried in our context, the nearer we are to catastrophe.

Somehow our education will have to recover the lost vision of the person as a creature of both intellect and will. It will have to bring together into one through its training the thinker and the doer, the dialectician and the rhetorician. Cognition, including the scientific, alone is powerless, and will without cognition is blind and destructive. The work of the future, then, is to overcome the shallow rationalisms and scientificisms of the past two centuries and to work toward the reunion of man into a being who will both know and desire what he knows.