



Part 2 of 3

A CATECHISM FOR REVOLUTIONARIES

by Mortimer J. Adler & John N. Deely

This leads to the third of our seven questions: *In what ways does the culture of a society, especially the value-system that underlies its mores, encourage or discourage the individual in his efforts to secure an integrally good human life?*

In response to this question, I would like to make my own the observation of Plato that what is honored in a society is likely to be cultivated there. Few individuals can be expected to have the vision, let alone the heroic virtue, needed to be such complete non-conformists that they will seek what they ought to seek in their own lives if the quest carries them against the over-bearing pressure of social disapproval or even the disinterest of their contemporaries. It is extremely difficult for the individual to seek for himself things that are not honored or valued in a society, or completely to turn his back on the things that are honored there, however wrongly.

As to the values that a society should honor and inculcate, I think that they were correctly indicated in a passage of Pericles' *Funeral Oration*, in which he praised the 'culture of Athens as one that honors the things that should be cultivated in a society whose scale of values accords with the order of real goods. Let us ignore for the present his rhetorical intention to bolster the morale of the Athenians at a dark moment of the Peloponnesian war, when they

had suffered from defeats in the field and the plague at home. What he tells his fellow-citizens may not have even been true of Athenian society in his day; it nonetheless depicts what should be true of a society if its culture is to promote the pursuit of human happiness.

Pericles said first:

Our constitution... favors the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences... class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way. ... The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends to our ordinary life... But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens.

He then went on to make the following observations about Athenian culture:

We provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games... all the year around, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a source of daily pleasure...

We cultivate refinement without extravagance and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth we employ more for use than for show, and place the real disgrace of poverty not in owning to the fact, but in declining to struggle against it...

In short, I stay that as a city we are the school of Hellas.

I am prepared to elaborate and defend the third guideline for the Final Revolution, that concerning the values society ought to honor, in the form of a partial paraphrase, and extension of the cited words of Pericles. One culture is better than another in proportion as: (1) it regards wealth always as a means and never as an end, and so does not look upon the continual expansion of the economy, beyond the production of useful wealth, as an end in itself, to which everything else should be sacrificed or subordinated; (2) it subordinates business to the pursuits of leisure, the production and consumption of wealth to the goods of the mind; (3) it provides ample means for the mind to refresh itself from business, through the pleasures of play, through the enjoyment of the arts, through the advancement of the sciences, and through all forms of learning and of creative work; (4) it subordinates the goods of the body to the goods of the mind, and places its disapproval upon un-

limited indulgence in sensual pleasures or even upon excessive pre-occupation with amusements and recreations that do not contribute to the growth of the mind or the improvement of the individual as a person; (5) it cultivates the refinements of life and even a modest degree of elegance, but at the same time censures extravagance and the lust for luxuries, or even for creature comforts and conveniences beyond all reasonable need; (6) it honors the man of private and civil virtue above the man who succeeds, by foul means or fair, in the rat-race for power, fame, or wealth; (7) it esteems intrinsic human excellence above any and every form of merely external or economic success.

These seven points taken together indicate how far removed is contemporary American culture from the rational human ideal or norm which must guide the twentieth century revolution if it is to also be socially final. Practically every single automobile produced in America today is an unmistakable symbol of the inverted scale of our cultural values. There are those who, recognizing this fact, turn away from our culture to embrace Eastern mysticism in its various exotic forms. Yet perverse as is our present distribution of accolades, the new mysticisms with their abdication of social responsibility, emphasis on the sensual immediate, and wholesale flight from reason, advocate solutions that can only result in a bad situation's becoming immeasurably—perhaps irretrievably—worse.

There is a shortcut to the heart of this issue of what things ought a society to honor, however, adequate for our purposes, which bypasses the need for a detailed critique of economic patterns. If we ask ourselves not only *what* things a society should honor, but also *how* should it honor the things that should be cultivated if its members are to be aided and abetted in their pursuit of happiness, it is rather clear that only part of the answer lies in the patterns of subsistence labor society establishes and in the cultural institutions it creates, maintains and develops at the public expense --libraries, museums of art and science, theatres, parks, and so on. The heart of the answer lies in that key cultural establishment which most directly and extensively affects the citizenry—its educational system: not only its schools, colleges, and universities, but also the educational facilities it provides for continued learning and creative formation in adult life.

I am not thinking here as much of equality of educational opportunity—fundamental a need as that is—as of the quality or character of the schooling and other educational opportunities afforded a cross-section of citizenry. If, for example, all children

were given an equal number of years of schooling, from kindergarten through college or university, and if in addition they enjoyed equal educational facilities during these years, *but the schooling they received were directed mainly toward technological and economic advances rather than to the pursuits of leisure and the development of human excellence*, the educational system would operate against rather than for the individual's making a good life for himself.

From this one can infer the justice of the contemporary student rebellion, or the concealed common ground which led students and workers to join forces in the Paris uprising and even diagnose the real nature of the pathology against which they have struck out so violently—and, unfortunately, so blindly. To know, in short, whether the culture of a society, our own or any other, is or is not favorable to the pursuit of happiness in the sense of encouraging an integrally good human life, one need look not only at its systems of production, as Marx so well taught us, but also at the scale of values embodied in its educational system—the objectives it is designed to serve. This was a lesson Marx failed to teach; and of a certainty, it is a lesson contemporary thought has yet to learn.

Only if an educational system subordinates all forms of specialized, technical, professional, or vocational training, to discipline in the arts of learning and communication applied first of all and principally the areas of humanistic concern—only if it places truly liberal education first, and relegates all merely utilitarian programs of education to second place—can it reflect a scale of values that accords with the real order of goods necessary in the successful pursuit of happiness. Then and only then do we have a persuasive sign that the culture of a society is beneficent because it honors the things that should be cultivated there for the sake of a good human life.

But if government has only in a few nations and in the most preliminary and rudimentary fashion begun to realize its real objectives on the historical level, and if even the best educational systems today, throughout the world, cultivate a perverse scheme of values, the fourth of our seven questions imposes itself in the form: *Is this—our century—a good time to be alive?*

My own answer to this question is that, from a revolutionary point of view and for anyone willing to forego safety in a commitment to making this twentieth-century revolution sufficiently enlightened and determined to be also a final one, the question calls for an unqualified Yes. Our century, bad as it is for most, is better

than any earlier period of human life in the perfectly clear sense that it provides the external conditions of a good human life to a greater extent and for more human beings than ever before on earth.

For the first million years of human life on earth, members of the hominid family led bestial, not characteristically human, lives—that is, they lived mainly, if not exclusively, on the bare subsistence level.

Beginning 35,000 years ago, technological progress began to be made which brought man to the verge of civilization: the domestication of animals; the transition from stone to iron implements; the establishment of permanent settlements, etc.

But not until 6,000 years ago, with the emergence of civilized society, with superior agricultural technology, with political or quasi-political institutions, with an increased division of labor, and almost always with human slave labor—not until then were the external conditions of a good human life provided for a fortunate and privileged few.

In short, from the beginning until 6,000 years ago, the external conditions for leading a good human life were available *to no one*. Beginning 6,000 years ago, with the rise of cities and civilized societies (which are one and the same), and from then until now—or rather until the end of the 19th century—we have had all over the world what I am going to call the parochial civilizations of privilege, based on an inequality of conditions for their human members.

In all these historical parochial civilizations of privilege, the external conditions of a good human life were provided only for the few, at the expense of misery for all the rest. And it seems fair to say that, under the circumstances of the time, especially the poor technology of the time, these inequalities of condition could not have been rectified—except, perhaps, by going backward to a state of affairs in which no one could lead a good human life.

The second great revolution in human affairs began yesterday—with the opening of this century. The 20th century revolution, which began first in the United States and Western Europe, is now sweeping the world. Please note that I said “began”; for the 20th century revolution has only just started even in the countries where it first began. It may take anywhere from 100 to 500 years, maybe even 1000, before this revolution yields its full results on a

worldwide basis, with the emergence, for the first time, of a world civilization that is based on universal conditions of equality for every human being on earth—all men with *no* exceptions, That is why this embryonic revolution *can* also be the final one—if we use wit and courage enough.

It is worth our while then, at this point, to suggest the physiognomy of our revolution in its possible and hopefully successful form. It involves, *first of all*, extraordinary advances in science and technology, resulting in vastly increased power to produce wealth, in the elimination of inhuman forms of subsistence-work at the level of sheer drudgery, the reduction in the amount of time that must be spent in producing wealth, etc. All these changes indicate that it may at last be possible to eliminate slavery, poverty, unequal educational opportunities, unequal conditions of health, etc.

Second, the 20th century revolution involves a commitment, in varying degrees, to the democratic and socialistic principles that all men, being by nature equal, are entitled to an equality of social, economic, and political conditions. It calls for the elimination of all class-divisions, especially the division between the economic *haves* and *have-nots*. It calls for political equality—the equality of citizenship, with political rights, liberties, and privileges for all. It is not only democratic but socialistic in that it accepts the ruling principle of the welfare state, namely, that the state should make every effort to promote the general economic welfare, in which all citizens shall participate up to at least the minimum level of a decent and secure standard of living. Hence this is not only the first century in which men can project the elimination of war by the constitution of a world federal government; it is also the first century in which men can project the advent of a truly classless society, pervaded by a universal equality of conditions. For the first time in history, it seems practicable to eliminate the twin evils of class and war that, as Toynbee points out, have beset civilized life from its beginning.

Though these great advances in the conditions of mankind may take centuries more to bring to their full fruition, even now, in this century, many more men than ever before on earth *can* think about their lives as a whole because external conditions are now such that it has at last become *possible* for them to make good lives for themselves.

This 20th century revolution was first foreshadowed in the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States and in the Declaration of Independence. But the promises made in these documents

could not have been realized under the technological conditions of the 18th century. That is why Lincoln wisely described the Declaration not as a statement of fact, but as a pledge to the future. And it is in these same terms that Tocqueville presented his vision of that future, in which the revolution that had just begun in America would, under God's providence, ultimately sweep the whole world.

That future has now in part been realized. One need only compare the best country in the world in the middle of the 19th century—whichever one you wish to choose with a dozen or more states today, in which the twentieth century revolution has begun to take hold, to see that in the latter the external conditions of a good human life are provided for *more human beings than ever before on earth*. But nothing short of *all* will do. That is the crux of modern frustrations and tensions; and those among us who would settle for the conditions of course of a good human life for less than all,—provided of course that they themselves are not among the less—shall have to bear before history the principal responsibility for the violence and bloodshed which will doubtless beset us time and again until those who would secure themselves without regard for and even at the expense of others' lives learn that the demands of a common nature will not be permanently silenced on any side.

But we are not only witnesses of a global human development, we are participants as well. We must therefore ask ourselves and be prepared to reasonably answer a fifth guideline question: *What place does our own country hold in the ranks of those countries within which the twentieth-century revolution has begun to bring in a classless order?*

To answer this question, one must list and compare the countries so far involved. In making this comparison, I will limit myself, for present purposes, to considering political, economic, and social conditions, since, as I have indicated in my answer to Question 3 and shall consider more fully in answering the seventh guideline question below, even the leading countries today are about equally appallingly backward in setting up proper educational goals for their citizenry.

In varying degrees, all these states are characterized by political democracy, economic welfare programs, the broadening of public education, public health programs, reduction in the hours of human labor, improvement in the types and conditions of subsistence-work, increase in recreational facilities, participation in the enjoyment of the arts, increases in longevity, advances in communication and public information, etc.

Let me designate this type of state as the technologically advanced democratic welfare state, moving toward—approximating but not yet fully achieving—the ideal of the classless society, i.e., of the society with a universal equality of conditions and with ample free time for all.

At the present historical stage, we find this type of state realized in varying degrees:

- (1) In the highest degree, by the United States, Sweden, Japan, and a few states of the British Commonwealth,
- (2) In the next rank, by Great Britain, the states of Western Europe (with the exception of Spain and Portugal), and by the Soviet Union and the smaller socialist republics, such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and perhaps Poland and Rumania.
- (3) Far below this are most if not all of the states of Central and South America.
- (4) The 20th century revolution may have begun, but it has not yet taken hold to any appreciable degree in the Middle East, in Africa, in China, and Southeast Asia. The two possible exceptions in Asia are North (not South) Vietnam and South Korea.

All of the states in which the twentieth century revolution is now underway, and especially those in which it has made substantial progress, are vastly superior by all the guidelines so far uncovered to any societies that ever existed on earth before, so far as their political, economic, and social conditions are concerned; vastly superior to the best of ancient societies—to the Athens of Plato (which unfortunately did not live up the eponymiums heaped upon it by Pericles fifty years earlier), to the Rome of Cicero and to the China of Confucius, in all of which the conditions of a good life were accessible only to the very few, and then at the cost of misery to the great mass of men whose lives were either ruined by slavery or consumed by stultifying toil.

Now let me briefly justify my having placed the United States as approximating, alongside Sweden and Japan and a few others, most closely to the ideal of a society with a universal equality of conditions and with ample free time for all, a classless society. In other words, am I really correct in placing the United States at or near the forefront in comparison with other leading states of

the Same type—states that are technologically advanced and that have begun to approximate an equality of conditions political, economic, and social?

The comparison is not a simple one, because it involves multiple dimensions. Thus, for example, the United States is much less class structured than England, has a higher median income than Sweden, has achieved a greater equality of educational opportunity than most European countries, though not more than Australia or Canada, and so on. It also has more political equality and liberty than the U.S.S.R. and its satellites. On the other hand, economic equality maybe more fully achieved in Sweden and in New Zealand; public health may be better cared for in any number of European countries; political democracy may work more responsibly in England; and so on.

With all such dimensions in mind, I still think it is fair to say that, from the point of view of providing the external conditions of a good human life for a larger proportion of its citizens, the United States is, on balance, as good as, if not better than, any other country in the world today, and vastly better than any state that ever existed in the past. It fails most of the tests enumerated in the answer to Question 3. But it fails them no more—and probably less—than any other nation in the world today.

The twentieth century revolution has just begun and it still has a long way to go before it reaches its full fruition—the full realization of the sound principles that have motivated it, the reaping of all the advantages that advanced technology has the power to confer, the overcoming of the serious threats that are the avoidable, not inevitable, consequences of these advances.

The war on poverty has just begun; so has the struggle against racism in all its forms. These efforts must be carried forward, and it will take many years to see them through to complete success.

No country is free from the evils of war or the chicanery of foreign policy, and none can be, as long as the jungle or anarchy of sovereign states exist. Foreign affairs is the domain of power politics, and will remain so until we have advanced to world peace secured in the only way it can be secured—*by world government*. That, by the way, is the only possible final phase of the final revolution: the step forward from our parochial societies, always in a state of war with one another, and with an irremediable inequality of conditions as between the *have* and the *have-not* nations—

forward to a world society, under world government, with an equality of conditions for all men everywhere.

Until that happens, all sovereign states, vis-a-vis one another, i.e., from the standpoint of their *external relations*, are about equally bad; and the United States is no better but also no worse than the rest. And until that happens, the evils of poverty and racism cannot be eradicated on a world wide basis—perhaps, not completely even at home.

With all its past and present imperfections, thus, from the viewpoint of its *internal relations*, the United States has shown itself more susceptible to social improvement than any other country. Its history, as has been well said, has been the history of a continuing revolution prosecuted mainly by legal and peaceful means. More radical institutional changes have been made in a relatively short time in American history and, for the most part, with less violence—current polemics notwithstanding—than in the history of most other countries -with the possible exception of. England. This holds out a great promise for further positive developments by peaceful means.



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