

As a Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought, *TRADITION* usually features only articles reflecting a Jewish perspective. But the issues raised in this essay by Professor Grande, though obviously written from a non-Jewish point of view, are of such importance to the readers of our journal that the Editors take special pleasure in being able to bring it to the attention of the Jewish community.

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The modern flight from the historical consciousness and the ravenous desire for change were anticipated in *The House of Seven Gables*. Though obsessed with the Puritan age and its ancestral houses, Hawthorne had young Holgrave wanting to bury the "rotten past" and begin anew. Holgrave's disposition has become, in a technological society, the fundamental outlook on life, change as the essence of reality. No longer is human life interwoven with settled patterns of living, imperceptively connecting past to present. Home is scarcely more than a stop-over driven by the dictates of career and the promise of something better. Friendship evokes a sense of nostalgia as an act of recollection, *à la recherche du temps perdu*, exploited by an endless production of books on human relationships. Great traditions serve not to inspire, but to accentuate the modern world's distance from the past.

"Love is becoming," said J. W. Krutch in *The Modern Temper* (1929), "gradually so accessible, so unmysterious, and so free that its value is trivial." The transcendental value of love, whether Dantesque or Victorian, has been transmuted into material for popular music and slogans for liberation-movements. Human life, reminded Krutch, is not so rich in

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values that love or any other value should slip away. If, in love, life's meaning was inevitably sought, now it is sex that is cultivated by a "rapidly changing" commercial technocracy. Sex is a topic for panel discussions, public opinion polls and university experiments, part of the extraversion of modern life. The most personal matters are readily accessible to any bank teller or department store employee. They are moments of casual conversation.

Increasingly, the individual human being finds the inner contents of his life open to public view. A transformation, observed Erich Kahler in *The Tower and the Abyss*, "toward some formation beyond the individual" is threatening the human form itself. Defining individuality as wholeness, indivisibility, self-realization and uniqueness, Kahler maintained that to divide man is to destroy him. Etymologically, *individuum* was Cicero's translation of the Greek *atomon*. Individual and atom were the same word, literally meaning "indivisible." The individual, like the atom, is no longer unsplitable, both having undergone fission in our time.

The modern individual, in the absence of community and tradition, exists within a number of impersonal collectives, supra-individual or post-individual groups, e.g., political parties, corporations, technical combines (Kahler). Collectives are established for common ends, but lack common origins, the "basic, unconscious layers of the possibilities of individuals." They flourish in an environment of scientific mechanization, specialization in the sciences, mass production and standardization. Collectivization has been abetted by the mass media, acting upon the individual from without. Ubiquitous, they intrude upon the individual as an alien external force, causing him to split. The mass media are immediate and mechanically compelling, invalidating and disrupting the individual's sense of wholeness. Afraid of his own faculties, he no longer trusts himself. He suppresses his personal impulses before vast impersonal collectivities, including the collective authority of science. His human wisdom, concluded Kahler, is on the wane.

Kahler recognized that the individual is no "end in himself" or even of "indisputable value." Kahler should not be dismissed

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as a romantic critic of modern technological society, for Western culture has linked the individual with man's destiny. The modern transformation of the individual is a disintegration of the human form itself, of the essentially human qualities in man—self-determination and self-transcendence. This disintegration is expressed in the profound sense of aimlessness, dislocation and fragmentation of much modern art and literature. Lacking common origins and human community, modern artists strive to create a sense of value and wholeness out of their own lives. Oftentimes, however, they possess a rich modern peculiarity, reflecting the absence of community and tradition.

Alberto Giacometti's filiform sculptures are gaunt figures inhabited by elongated silent spaces. Theirs is the muted eloquence of self-consciousness in a broken world. Similarly, Camus' stranger, Mersault, seems a starved outline of a man. Existing almost as an abstraction, Mersault moves about the world without human attachments. His mother dies perfunctorily, like a run-down machine, and he does not know whether or not he loves his girl friend, Marie. His sole virtue is honesty, a refusal to abide conventional certainties. The priest's certainties are not worth a single strand of a woman's hair. Mersault epitomizes the alienated condition of modern man, the separation from several millennia of Western metaphysical and theological belief, the loss of absolutes.

It is a paradox of the modern world that change defines the character of reality. For Plato, the real world consisted of pure forms, timelessly incorruptible. And for the Greeks in general change was a kind of evil bound up with the instability of matter. Permanence as the principle of reality was the resolution of evil:

From Thales to Plotinus the assumption of permanence (of various sorts) runs steadily: it informs not only Greek metaphysics and cosmology, but also ethics; and it is the most powerful single factor in determining the Greek view of man.

(Herschel Baker, *The Image of Man*)

The modern world, especially in America, has given change the semblance of permanence. A "rapidly changing" world

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makes of change a procession of events usually accompanied by a notion of progress. Coupled with the modern faith in science and technology, the notion of progress has elevated the status of change. Alvin Toffler's bestseller, *Future Shock*, is replete with phrases like "accelerative thrust," the "death of permanence" and the "flow of situations." The overwhelming success of such a book confirms the impact of change on our lives. High speed change means "temporariness" in every aspect of life, making everyone a citizen of the "Age of Transience." Human relationships are becoming increasingly fragile and impermanent. The individual "must search for totally new ways to anchor himself, for all the old roots—religion, nation, community, family, or profession—are now shaking under the hurricane impact of the accelerative thrust." Transience must be understood.

Transience and novelty are in league against love and marriage, friendship and family. "As human relationships grow more transient and modular, the pursuit of love becomes, if anything, more frenzied." Toffler expects society to accept "temporary marriage," rather than wedding "until death us do part." When the paths of husbands and wives diverge, they will separate, only to marry again and again (serial marriage). Serial marriage is considered the natural result of an Age of Transience. Even the individual self loses its sense of continuous durable internal structure. In a super-industrial society, the individual becomes a serial self or, precisely, serial selves, discarding many of the past self's underlying attitudes and external styles.

The future will be confounded by what Toffler calls "over-choice." "Never before have masses of men faced a more complex set of choices." Technological society will continue to extend the range of choice, offering greater opportunities for self-realization than any other previous time in history. Most people, unfortunately, will remain imprisoned in life-niches they have neither made nor hope to escape. A few, though, will have unprecedented opportunities for creating their own niches.

Toffler embraces science and the technologies of the future, finding in scientific knowledge applied expertly to social control

the answer to future shock. It is noteworthy that two other bestsellers, *Walden Two* and *Beyond Freedom And Dignity*, written by America's most distinguished experimental psychologist, B. F. Skinner, share *Future Shock's* preoccupation with the future and faith in science and technology. Skinner sees science and technology as representing a position of strength. "We try to stave off world famine with new foods and better ways of growing them" (*Beyond Dignity And Freedom*). Improved sanitation and medicine will control disease. Skinner calls for vast changes in human behavior, a technology of human behavior comparable in power and precision to the physical and biological sciences.

Skinner denies the philosophy of personal freedom based upon an inner self, autonomous man:

In the traditional view, a person is free. He is autonomous in the sense that his behavior is uncaused. He can therefore be held responsible for what he does and justly punished if he offends (*Beyond Freedom And Dignity*).

The traditional view of autonomous man, according to Skinner, fails to take account of unsuspected controlling relations between behavior and environment. Personal exemption from complete determinism is being revoked as scientific analysis progresses. Skinner contends that the traditional view of human dignity is being threatened by the scientific analysis of human behavior, human predictability as inherently undignified. Predictability violates the traditional admiration for autonomous man as freely choosing, especially in the face of adverse conditions: "We commend loyalty in proportion to the intensity of the persecution, generosity in proportion to the sacrifices entailed, and celibacy in proportion to a person's inclination to engage in sexual behavior" (*Beyond Freedom And Dignity*).

There need not be an incompatibility between human dignity and predictability. Skinner's assumption that there is such an incompatibility is highly questionable. Predictability, one of modern science's chief characteristics, is not necessarily contradictory to the traditional sense of human dignity. Every human being (event) is unique. Only some features of human behavior

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are predictable. Cause-effect relations never involve all features of a set of events. Great individual differences remain among human beings. Every human being is a unique complex of characteristics.

For Toffler, only a few will be able to choose their own destinies in a future super-industrial society of overchoice. It is difficult to understand how these few serial selves will maintain a sense of personality, on the one hand, and make significant (short-lived) choices amid a welter of possibilities, on the other hand. Both Toffler and Skinner, despite obvious differences, find in the future the source of human direction and value. It is worth pondering whether or not Toffler's concept of the serial self (selves) really differs fundamentally from Skinner's denial of autonomous man. It is doubtful that any real (at least traditional) sense of personality in a super-industrial society of temporariness could survive a succession of selves in a blizzard of choices and accelerated change.

To say that Toffler and Skinner reject or ignore the past would be inaccurate and naive. Their assessment of the human condition and man's destiny, nonetheless, are future-oriented and scientific. Physics and biology, Skinner declares, have come a long way, but there has been no comparable development of anything like a science of human behavior. Greek physics and biology are now of only historical interest, but the dialogues of Plato are still assigned to students as if they shed light on human behavior. Socrates would have little difficulty following most current discussions of human affairs, whereas Aristotle would be bewildered by modern science and technology. The Greeks, in Skinner's estimation, knew little of the sources of human behavior and their theories led nowhere. If their theories are with us today, it is not because they contained eternal truths, but because they did not include the seeds of anything better.

Plato (to mention one ancient Greek), perhaps as Sir Richard Livingstone indicated in his classic lecture, "Plato and Modern Education," possessed deep insights into human thought and life through unfettered activity of the human mind. Contrary to Athenian practice, he advocated public education and parallel education for boys and girls, not to mention his reservations

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about family life and private property. Plato also appreciated the importance of pre-natal influences on the unborn child and the significance of early childhood education and play. He was the parent of adult education: his ruling class reaches the climax of education at age fifty. Ultimately, Plato's works may prove more valuable than the combined efforts of contemporary twentieth century educational psychologists:

B. F. Skinner in his way has added some sophistication to the repute of the pigeon. Of rats, too, they [behaviorists] know a good deal of what is to be known, though not more perhaps than sailors or housewives could have told them.

(Ryland W. Crary, *Humanizing The School*)

There is, in a consumer society, endless talk of choices and options. Rarely, however, are choices treated as if wise ones have been made. In a complex age, it is to be expected that mistakes multiply. But contemporary accounts of human behavior seem a relentless reminder of man's fallibility. There are guidebooks and manuals for every conceivable human activity, based upon the assumption of ineptitude. Perhaps the standard of making wise choices should be repetition. That is, a wise choice in choosing a mate, for instance, might be one that, say, a husband or wife would make again and again. Though such repetition in contemporary society might be deemed heretical, it would provide a standard of making real or permanent choices. Choices, of course, are not infallible, and here there is no dearth of pertinent evidence. A mistake in choosing a mate does not negate the desire for abiding love.

The real or permanent self must possess a temporal awareness, a sense of continuity in time. The whole man is possessed of permanent self, even as he undergoes self-revelation and growth with others. Too much is made of most choices, as if everyone were to await the latest research before choosing. Nothing is more pathetic than to listen to a stream of experts present conflicting data on love, marriage, divorce and a hundred other human subjects. The contemporary individual, like Aristotle's great-souled man, must realize that only a few things are really important, and he must decide.