

## **CONTEMPORARY VIEWS**

In the end, when the ancient and medieval classics have been studied and enjoyed, when the Asiatic texts have been pored over and venerated, we find ourselves back in the world as it is now and here. Our readings are not complete. [We need to hear a contemporary voice which knows and speaks out of our own conditions also, not out of incredibly different ones.](#) 15.1.130

Aldous Huxley has outgrown his merely rationalistic stage and begun to express mystical ideas. This is a most gratifying advance. But he has fallen into the common error which makes the quietist ideal the supreme ideal. He may try to refute this activist outlook as being mystical heresy. He may even write a whole book, such as *Grey Eminence*, to show the misfortunes brought on his country by a French mystic leaving his monastic retreat to meddle in State affairs. But Huxley's effort has been a vain one. It is just as easy to write another book showing the good fortune brought to her country by Joan of Arc, also a French mystic, through meddling in State affairs. In this matter, I would rather accept Plato's teaching, that true knowledge compels to action. And Plato's philosophy was surely a mystical one. But there are two facts which refute Huxley. First, there is no such thing as inaction. No one in his senses will spend every day every year in contemplation alone. He has to get up and do something, even if it be only eating his dinner. A life of continuous meditation, without any interruption, would be impossible and undesirable, impracticable and unbalanced. Everywhere in Nature we see striving and activity. For a person to attempt to refrain from both (as if he really could!) in the name of an exaggerated unbalanced and perverted surrender to God is to misunderstand God's--that is, Nature's--working. Second, the refusal to act is itself a kind of action; the real available choice is only between one kind and another, between good action and bad action. Walking about in the monastic cell is as active a deed as walking about in the statesman's chamber. But whether we take a short or a long view of the matter it is a mistake to regard the worldly life as necessarily materialistic and sordid. People may make it so or they may ennoble it. The evil or the good is in their thought of it, that is, in themselves. The notion that the quest of the Divine must necessarily lead to denying the social and despising the historical belongs only to an unripened and imperfect mysticism. The fact is that no mystical experience and no metaphysical idea can complete our duty towards life. They are no substitute for right conduct. 14.4.48

The fourth part of this fourfold quest, which concerns moral and social tasks, ought not to be disregarded. It is only an unintelligent mysticism that promotes smug self-centered idleness whereas a philosophical mysticism inspires both useful and altruistic activity. The condition of stolid indifference to humanity is not compatible with the condition of loving harmony with the divine soul of humanity. In Burke's eloquent phrase, it is "the offspring of cold hearts and muddy understandings." It indicates the attainment of an inferior stage of spirituality. How much nobler is the attainment of a true sage! He does not look haughtily down upon others from the cold pinnacle of his unworldly interests or disdainfully at their moral weaknesses. He does not stop with the self-engrossed type of mystic to wallow in smug peace. Jesus, for instance, did not disdain to descend from the Mount of Transfiguration to help the epileptic boy; that is, he did not disdain to interrupt contemplation for action. The philosophical type of mystic does not content himself with the non-cooperative ideal of personal salvation pursued by those interested in themselves alone and indifferent to mankind's darkness and misery. On the contrary, he takes on the supreme sacrifice of a continual reincarnation which shall be dedicated to human

enlightenment. Only when he has done all he could for the service of suffering mankind, only when he has reached this stage, can he know true abiding peace. Then he truly can say, with Chuang Tzu: "Within my breast no sorrows can abide, I feel the Great World-Mind through me breathe." There is every reason why a man who accepts the gospel of inspired action should become a beneficent force in the world. Whatever role falls to him in the game of life, he will play it in a vital and significant way. More than ever before in its history, the world's need is for such active philosophers. It has little use for volitionally impotent visionaries. Their muddled ethos must share part of the responsibility for mysticism's failure to make more effective contributions towards helping mankind during their greatest crisis and most tragical times. When the world is in such a tremendous need of guidance hope comfort strength and truth during its hour of grave danger and terrible crisis, surely it is the course of a generous wisdom for the contemporary mystic not to seek his personal peace alone but to realize the importance of helping others to find theirs too? He should not seek to be detached monastically from the troubles of his country. On the contrary, he should seek to mitigate them, so far as it is within his power, by rendering wise helpful service.

What Winston Churchill once told the American nation, "The price of greatness is responsibility," is what may be said to the mystic. The Americans tried but could not escape getting embroiled again in European affairs, and the mystic may try but cannot escape his own duties to the rest of mankind. The esoteric explanation of this is the factuality of a deep inter-relation and primal oneness of the human race. [20.4.229](#)

Hitherto, developments naturally tended to centralize industry in huge establishments. This was absolutely necessary to heavy industries such as steel manufacture. It was done to reduce cost, but it was also done irrespective of the human factor involved. It promotes neither mental nor physical health for people to live dreary diurnal lives under a smoky sky and work in factories where giant machines pound at their nerves. The owner-worker--that is, the little capitalist who labours for himself, the workman who prefers independence, and the peasant with a small land-holding--each of these has a right to exist. Under a wiser arrangement he could still do so without having to compete with the owners of factories, for he could collaborate with them.

A nation ought not to abandon itself to the hypnotic glamour of gigantic factories for the mass machine production of huge quantities of goods. On the other hand, it need not abandon such factories for the medieval notion of making everything by hand. It could make in factories whatever is best made there, such as automobiles and pencils, but it ought to encourage hand manufacture wherever that will serve best. A balanced industrial economy is ideal and will require both the big manufacturing, assembling, and distributing units in cities and the decentralized cottage crafts in villages. Small parts such as components and accessories can be made in the village workshops, and larger articles such as heavy goods and mass productions in the former. If the old idea was to take the worker to a machine in the factory, the new idea will be to take the machine to a worker in his or her home. The principle of mass production can still be employed, the most modern machinery may still be used, and yet the worker may have his freedom and retain his individuality by making part or all of an article in surroundings and under conditions where he can still be himself. This has indeed been done for many years in Switzerland, where village workshops carry out many of the processes needed in that country's famous watch and clock making industry. Such a scheme, of course, could be applicable only where the worker lived in a cottage or house of his own and not where he lived in an apartment or tenement situated in a building housing several other apartments or tenements. It would be

ideal for "garden cities," which ought in any case to represent the type preferred in future town planning. Small-scale industries should be regarded as complementary and not contradictory to large-scale ones. The value and practicability of this arrangement have been well demonstrated by wartime experience, when a great diffusion of subcontracting enabled stupendous programs to be completed on time.

Why should not the towns themselves be converted into "garden cities" where every family has its own little house and its own little garden surrounding that house? In the garden city, beauty and use have demonstrated under the test of time a happy and successful marriage. Nobody who has seen Letchworth and Welwyn in England, understood their significance and appreciated their worth, would again be satisfied with disorderly drift. There should be a feeling of space and air, a presence of green grass and leafy trees in the modern town. The garden city idea, which balances industrial, residential, and aesthetic needs, is the best for dealing with the problem of placing manufacturing plants and housing their workers. The Lever Brothers at Port Sunlight and the Cadburys at Bournville have shown how clean, artistic, individuality-preserving, and kindly the factory system can be made when those who administer it have taste and heart as well as minds. Metropolitan towns exist already, however, and have become too indispensable a part of each nation's economy to be eliminated. The solution of the problem they pose is to turn part of them into a group of connected garden-city units, arranged like concentric circles around a common centre.

A metropolis like London or New York needs at least half its population transferred to a dozen different newly built garden cities set in the clean healthy spaciousness of the green countryside. When the size of towns is kept moderate, their streets will be quieter and the health, happiness, and outlook of their inhabitants better.

A proper relation must be found between town and country life, between existence in the large factories and in the little workshops. A healthy modern society will be neither excessively industrial nor exclusively agricultural. A well-balanced society will enable its members to choose their work from a wider set of activities than merely industrial or solely agricultural ones. The worth of a sane equilibrium between such antithetical factors of life as machine toil and hand toil needs remembering. The decentralization of advanced countries is only part of the answer to the evils associated with their present industrial economy. We must think out an economic structure which will still make use of people as human beings, even while they themselves are making use of machines. *13.4.253*