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## The New Equality

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LECTURE FIVE--Sunday Morning  
THE NEW EQUALITY

One of the propositions we have been pursuing in this series of lectures and seminars sets forth that *techne* from its inception works toward the equalization of abilities for all workers. First there is the improvisation and then the fashioning of tools and weapons--clubs, bow-and-arrows, levers, pulleys-- equalizing advantages of strength. Machinery in effect eliminates strength as a consideration.

Education becomes the equalizer when skills and crafts must be learned; a person may be slow to learn a procedure but once it is learned, little difference exists in production. Prometheus, remember, taught mankind not only how to build ships but also how to navigate, using the stars for guidance. Consequently an intellectual component entered into education quite early, again upsetting equality. It has been a battle ever since between the elite who preserve the precious high standards of learning and those who, out of humanitarian motives, would have +all+ participate in the feast.

But we are entering an age that is *not a mere turnaround*, not a mere reversing of the pendulum (this is how many would explain it in our time)--but a genuine step forward in technological progress. Hence in the coming epoch +all+ human beings will be able to make use of these devices that, first of all, equalize physical strength; and that, second, equalize mental agility--which for some centuries now has passed for intelligence. (Expand on this a bit. What +is+ intelligence, then?)

How has this new era manifested itself? What are its signs?

Just fifty years ago the discovery of semi-conductors led to the invention of transistors, permitting the first step in the miniaturization of computers, then the growing of crystal chips with entire circuits, integrating these circuits into devices such that the computer that I now carry around in my laptop is far more powerful than the huge roomful of electronic tubes, capacitors, inductances, magnetic tapes and cooling compressors that we had in 1965 at the University of Dallas.

At about the same time that the transistor was invented (1948), so too were the DNA and the double helix conceived. Biology took the step into modern science with a rapidly developing technology. Medical practice, which is in a sense the engineering arm of biology, added new technical apparatus which served as an automation of practice, not changing the basic approach to corrective medicine but making it more precise, more efficient, with less manpower, in the characteristic manner of automation.

But the new biology with new technology approaches the health problem quite differently; with the human genome totally mapped,

the various genes identified, and the proper molecular chemistry prepared to snip and correct the genes, corrective measures can be taken before any damage ensues to the organism.

Surely there will shortly be some device that can supply us each a copy of our genome to carry around with us, so that naughty kids, in the age-old ceremonies of adolescence, can say "I'll show you my genome if you'll show me yours." With the new biology, we'll never know what illnesses we escaped, what calamities we avoided. Will we be better? well, let's say *statistically* yes. With altered genes, fewer people will be dying of specific diseases. But they will die. Technology is not likely to change that grim statistic. We shall still need our "blind hopes" if we are to accomplish anything.

Throughout our culture there is a growing confidence that *whatever we can conceive of that will benefit mankind we can invent the technology that can bring it about.* And that conviction, I propose, is the identifying mark of what we now call technology.

But is this era of technological progress an intermediary stage? When I speak of the post-technological age, I do not mean we are likely to pass beyond the uses of technology but rather that we may reach a stage in which technology is fully exploited so that the technological way of thinking becomes the norm. (That will imply non-competitiveness, communality, the end of "jobs" as we know them, a more relaxed, intuitive way of life--all of which I hope we can investigate a bit more in our sessions this morning. My prediction is that it will take some twenty to thirty years more to reach that stage--just about the time that present students will be taking charge.

With technology a kind of education is needed that is different from that of the utilitarian education which serviced crafts first and then automation--and serviced, too, the economy that supported that way of life. That economy was product-oriented with identifiable units of goods and services. Even medicine had appendices to remove, hernias to repair, esophageal ulcers to cure, with markets or some equivalent fee arrangement. A new sort of economy will have to grow up to support and encourage the development made possible by technology, one that has aspects of a gift society and a noncompetitive market. (Poets, artists, philosophers, teachers, priests and ministers already live in a gift society: they are not paid for their work but are instead provided a living. They "give" their work to others.)

Devices such as licensing, patents, and copyrights are likely to prove unmanageable or too restrictive for American ideals. Can someone "own" an idea? Is socialized medicine exploring the way the economy will have to move when the product is generalized health, not specialized cures? We really do not want to forget everything Adam Smith taught us, the automatic adjustment toward the greatest good that the free market accomplished. Some profound thought will

be needed, a sort of refounding of America on expanded ideals made practical by technology.

What about the following? Did you intend to keep it? Then you'd better edit it . . . You need something like it for length.

We have been talking about the post-technological age that will begin thirty to forty years from now, when technology has accomplished its major expansion into most of the worlds activities. The infrastructure of the global village will be fairly well underway by then and nationalism will continue to fade more or less imperceptibly into global combines. The political structure will still be in the process of adjusting itself to a global economy. How smoothly and justly these adjustments will come about depends on the character and conscience of the present crop of college students. The technical developments needed will be handled by a diminishing corps of specialists. An even smaller set of visionaries will point the way for world society to move. The questionable component of the whole matrix is the large body of ordinary people. How this generation is educated will determine whether the grand experiment in democracy rises to its hoped for triumph or shatters into failure.

Do you want any of the following? You need some sort of positive conclusion.

For a long time we have been chiefly concerned with the education of what we have called "the best and brightest." This exclusive concern will change, is already changing. There is a turn toward community, toward compassion, toward concern. The human person is beginning to be conceived of as more important than abstract standards. We can hardly imagine a world without competition; we can hardly imagine a world in which people are not measured and evaluated. And yet, we are seeing such a new development under our very noses. Computers now are operated by all sorts of people, all manner of men and women, some bright, some slow. But all can master word processing. All can use E-mail.

Just as "intelligence" is not important in a family gathering, where cooking and folk arts are the focus of attention; just as it is not even thought about at a football game; so in the coming age, all human beings will be thought to qualify; and in the larger purposes being served, where none can conquer, all will be included in the feast.