

The background of the cover is a light, textured, off-white or beige color. Overlaid on this are several vertical, irregular, elongated shapes. These shapes are colored in three distinct colors: a vibrant red, a solid black, and a muted grey. Each shape has a small, white, rectangular cutout or notch near its center. The shapes are arranged in a somewhat scattered but rhythmic pattern across the upper and middle portions of the cover. The overall aesthetic is minimalist and graphic.

**JOSEPH SATIN**

**Ideas  
in Context**



# IDEAS in CONTEXT



JOSEPH SATIN

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## To the Student

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This book is designed to give you ideas to think about, talk about, and write about. Every one of the fifty-three essays and stories in it presents an idea — a formulated judgment or conclusion — on a subject about which it is important for you to have thought. For you have contracted as an educated person to take a mature part in the world, where it is important to have sound values and clear ideas of your own, and a mind open and able to grasp the ideas of others. These essays and stories range through sociology, history, economics, science and nature study, psychology, morality, and ethics. They are not “difficult” reading; if anything they shade toward the opposite. But they are all “serious” in the sense that they all deal in one way or another with problems that are central to your growth and success as an individual, and through you, central to the world of affairs of which you will become a part.

Broadly, these problems are in four areas. Part One treats of man in society, of how man has created the society in which he lives, and how he in turn is affected by that society. Part Two investigates that attribute of man which chiefly makes him human — his mind — and touches on the related problems of what we know and how we know it. These two parts of the book deal chiefly with the nature of man, outside and in. Parts Three and Four treat of the world he lives in, again first from the outside and then from the in. Part Three examines our changing attitudes toward the external world during the last four centuries of the scientific age. And Part Four views various ideas of good and evil which have taken form in the last century and a half. Around each of these four problems, then, are grouped in loose constellation a dozen or so statements of attitude and conviction, and each piece takes on added meaning when read not only in the light of its own group but of other groups as well.

That is the meaning of *Ideas in Context*. Context is the set-

## TO THE STUDENT

ting, the surroundings, of a word or any larger statement. Literally it means weaving together; and as you will see by a glance at the table of contents, the selections in this book have been woven together in such a way that each takes on added meaning from every other. Some, you will find, take opposite sides on the same question. Others meet only in passing, while still others illuminate each other by approaching the same or similar subjects from different points of view. You can, if you and your instructor so choose, start at the beginning and read straight through. You will get an equal enrichment of ideas in context if your reading follows a different order. For just as every experience you have is enriched and made more meaningful by those which went before, so it is with everything you read. Whatever the order you follow, the things you read will build themselves into patterns for your informed thinking, talking, and writing. As you read, talk, and write, you will see that it is your thinking and your writing that weave the selections into your particular context. This context will help to define you to yourself, help to orient you in this modern world of ours. For if, as the poet Alexander Pope said two hundred and fifty years ago, "The proper study of mankind is man," a very large part of man is the society he lives in and his view of the world without and the world within.

So you will be reading extensively for ideas. But since you will also be doing a good deal of writing, now and throughout your college years, you should also learn how to read for hints on how others write who do it well. You will find that the questions and suggested theme topics at the end of each selection will help you in all these ways. There are questions to help you grasp what others mean: on content, interpretation, and intent. There are questions on words: on what they mean and how others (and you) can use them. And there are questions for speculation: to stimulate further thinking of your own beyond what the author has said. Many questions of this kind can surely lead to stimulating topics for your own writing. But in case they don't, there is for each selection a list of specific suggestions. Very likely you will often find that the two weave together a new context out of which an idea of your own takes shape.

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## Acknowledgment

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A teacher is like a hitchhiker on the cycle of civilization, absorbing vitality and knowledge from students and colleagues and funneling those things back as best he can into the classroom. To all my students who showed me how vital and lively freshman English can be, my deepest thanks. Thanks, too, to all those scholars and teachers I have met who have shared their knowledge with me — to Professors Paul E. Memmo, Clarence Glasrud, Neil B. Thompson, Helen Pettigrew, and J. P. Smith, to single out but a conspicuous few. To my wife, Selma, and to my son, Mark, who helped me time and again with the innumerable details of editing a text, my profoundest thanks of all.

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## PART ONE

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# MAN IN SOCIETY

☛ "No man is an island," wrote the poet Donne three centuries and more ago. No one lives by himself alone. Man lives among his fellows, in an organized structure called society, which is his creature yet in a profound sense his creator as well. Man in society is largely a product of the people and the forces around him: they shape his attitudes, opinions, customs, even his appearance. They decree his way of life, and all too often he is judged by a single standard: conformity.

But conformity to what? In the year 1300 European society was based on a rigid caste system in which the principal factor which determined status was birth. In conformity to their humble birth the medieval majority, the peasantry, lived lives of unquestioning servitude. Today the Dobu Islanders, who live near eastern New Guinea, respect viciousness and treachery above all else. The more treacherous an individual member of that society can be, the more successfully he conforms to the pattern, and the more he wins approval from his fellows. Whether the badge of approval is scalps or servitude, there is a deep need in every man to belong, and to conform.

And what of western man in the twentieth century? The caste society of the Middle Ages, and the ethics of the Dobu Islander, may seem alien and irrational to us, but in fact they are less novel than certain critical forces in our own society. Caste and an ethic of ruthlessness have ample precedent in history. But our culture exhibits something new under the sun: for in our day the spirit of the time belongs to the educated many, not to an élite of wealth and power whose interests, tastes, and attitudes almost alone give color to the culture as a whole. A society like ours, with the appear-

ance of almost unlimited free choice, and a fluidity which amounts nearly to formlessness, has never existed before.

This society began to take shape several hundred years ago, from a wide variety of causes, of which the chief ones are sketched in the readings which follow. Out of these causes has come a society in large part dedicated to a standardization in many ways more sweeping than any that ever existed before. In America, at least, the toaster, the television set, and the gray flannel suit are everywhere, and everywhere the same; and these mass-produced artifacts are the external symptom of pressures toward uniformity which are insidiously hard to resist.

And yet we do resist, even if sometimes only in a dim and groping way. Deep within, most of us nourish the conviction that we are more than commodities turned out on an assembly-line. Inside us is something unique and irreplaceable which has to be recognized and nurtured if it is not to be overwhelmed and obliterated by the pressures to conform. As the novelist Elizabeth Bowen once unforgettably said, "There's a me in here!" And the "me" struggles to assert itself, having the deep instinctive urge of all creatures to live and grow.

So here we are, in a curious society without deep-rooted traditions or any single pattern held up as a goal for all to follow, yet perpetually bombarded by pressures to accept mass notions of a good life which have come to prevail through sheer force of numbers. And at the same time we are pressed by the need to be ourselves, often at the price of being different. In ever-changing ways and degrees, we are the product, then, of two opposing forces: conformity and individuality. What these forces are like, where they come from, and most important, what the mixture is like in you, are major concerns of Part One of this book. If you have never thought of yourself as a bundle of tensions produced by opposing forces, it will interest you to see how typical of your time you are, and how well you have managed to harmonize these forces in yourself. The selections which follow are not only a picture of society; they are in some degree a history of you. They will help to explain where some of your ideas and opinions come from, your tastes, your judgments, even your friendships.

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## The Coming of the Common Man

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☛ One simple fact has elevated the common man from the subservient place he occupied in the thirteenth century to the dominance he exerts today: number. In "The New Mass Man," José Ortega y Gasset tells us that just in the years from 1800 to 1914, the population of Europe rose from 180 millions to 460 millions, a gain of 280 millions in a little over a hundred years. Not only in Europe but throughout the world, population has continued its upward surge. With numbers came authority, until today by the sheer fact that he is everywhere, it seems almost that the common man can do no wrong. Even the qualities called faults in other groups at other times have come to be thought of as virtues. Can you imagine today's man in the street feeling apologetic for keeping up with the Joneses or for preferring baseball to opera?

The readings in this group give some picture of how the common man has come to engulf modern society. The picture moves, tracing him from his emergence early in the nineteenth century to his dominance today. The picture also changes, for as the common man gained in numbers, he changed in status and self-esteem. Dickens's "Coketown" describes the wretchedness of his condition at a time when he had begun to grow in numbers but not yet in power or well-being. Jacquetta Hawkes's "The Industrial Revolution and the Common Man" traces the way in which a changing economy helped to change his way of life. Ortega's "The New Mass Man" is a sometimes frightening account of the mass man's new authority. Perhaps no one has chronicled its implications so perceptively as he, or dissected them with such painful accuracy. Finally, Joseph Wood Krutch's "Eternity or the Franklin Stove" contrasts the tastes and values of the common man, which he finds dominant today, with those of other times, and finds the present sadly lacking. If Ortega's and Krutch's views annoy you, remember at whom they are directed.



## COKETOWN

Charles Dickens

☛ COKETOWN, TO WHICH MESSRS. BOUNDERBY AND GRADGRIND NOW walked, was a triumph of fact; it had no greater taint of fancy in it than Mrs. Gradgrind herself. Let us strike the key-note, Coketown, before pursuing our tune.

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage.

It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled.

It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.

These attributes of Coketown were in the main inseparable from the work by which it was sustained; against them were to be set off, comforts of life which found their way all over the world, and elegancies of life which made, we will not ask how much of the fine lady, who could scarcely bear to hear the place mentioned. The rest of its features were voluntary, and they were these.

You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there — as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done — they made it a pious warehouse of red brick, with sometimes (but this is only in highly ornamented examples) a bell in a birdcage on the top of it. The solitary exception was the New Church; a stuccoed

From *Hard Times*, 1854.

edifice with a square steeple over the door, terminating in four short pinnacles like florid wooden legs. All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchasable in the cheapest market and salable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

A town so sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well? Why no, not quite well. No? Dear me!

No. Coketown did not come out of its own furnaces, in all respects like gold that had stood the fire. First, the perplexing mystery of the place was, Who belonged to the eighteen denominations? Because, whoever did, the labouring people did not. It was very strange to walk through the streets on a Sunday morning, and note how few of *them* the barbarous jangling of bells that was driving the sick and nervous mad, called away from their own quarter, from their own close rooms, from the corners of their own streets, where they lounged listlessly, gazing at all the church and chapel going, as at a thing with which they had no manner of concern. Nor was it merely the stranger who noticed this, because there was a native organisation in Coketown itself, whose members were to be heard of in the House of Commons every session, indignantly petitioning for acts of parliament that should make these people religious by main force. Then came the Teetotal Society, who complained that these same people *would* get drunk, and showed in tabular statements that they *did* get drunk, and proved at tea parties that no inducement, human or Divine (except a medal), would induce them to forego their custom of getting drunk. Then came the chemist and druggist, with other tabular statements, showing that when they didn't get drunk, they took opium. Then came the experienced chaplain of the jail, with more tabular statements, outdoing all the previous tabular statements, and showing that the same people *would* resort to low haunts, hid-

den from the public eye, where they heard low singing and saw low dancing, and mayhap joined in it; and where A. B., aged twenty-four next birthday, and committed for eighteen months' solitary, had himself said (not that he had ever shown himself particularly worthy of belief) his ruin began, as he was perfectly sure and confident that otherwise he would have been a tip-top moral specimen.

## *Questions and Exercises*

### FORM AND TECHNIQUE

1. Discuss Dickens' use of imagery in this narrative. Make a list of those images you consider especially eloquent.
2. What images does Dickens use in paragraphs 2 and 3 to express his dislike of industrialism?
3. Observe how the key word "fact" is repeated throughout the narrative. Judging from how it appears in context, what does Dickens mean by it in this selection?
4. The next to the last paragraph is an invocation or apostrophe to the reader. How does this device of apostrophe add to the emotional impact of the narrative?
5. Dickens mentions three persons by name, in obvious contrast to the faceless masses of Coketown. They are: Bounderby, Gradgrind, and M'Choakumchild, the schoolteacher. From the names alone, what would you guess was Dickens' opinion of these three?
6. Define and use each of the following words from Dickens' narrative: *counterpart*, *inseparable*, *edifice*, *listlessly*, *inducement*.

### FOR ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. According to Dickens, does the sameness of Coketown's streets, buildings, and so forth, make for a sameness among its inhabitants?
2. Explain what Dickens means by "the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness?"
3. What is Dickens' opinion of the architecture of Coketown?
4. What does Dickens think about the sameness that pervades Coketown? How would you feel if all of our cities were uniform and had, say, a five and ten cent store and the same chain drug store on every Main Street?
5. By saying the masses do not attend church Dickens is not saying they are irreligious. What is he really saying?

6. Comment on Dickens' bitterly humorous attack on alcohol. Is the attack more effective by being concealed beneath a mask of humor?

#### FOR SPECULATION

1. In this passage Dickens' major comments are made indirectly, by allusion and even in some cases by omission. What particular comments do you find which are made in this way?

2. Dickens seems to be full of sympathy for the masses of Coketown. Yet his basic assumptions about them are not at all complimentary. Why should this be?

#### SUGGESTED THEME TOPICS

Conformity on the Campus

Conformity in Small Towns

The Recreations of Today's Average Man: a critical analysis

Facts — Their Value and Their Worthlessness

The Big City: a story



## THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE COMMON MAN

*Jacquetta Hawkes*

THE PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT WAS NO LONGER TO BE DECIDED BY the character of the soil, the surface features of the land and the climate, but by the distribution of the deposits which time had left far below the surface. Huge numbers left farms and villages and swarmed to the places where coal and metal ores lay hidden; once there they showed an extraordinary fecundity. The population doubled and doubled again. By the middle of the nineteenth century half the people of Britain were living in towns, a situation new in the history of great nations.

Those town dwellers, cut off from the soil and from food production, soon lost all those arts and skills which had always been the possession if not of every man, then of every small community.

From *A Land* by Jacquetta Hawkes. Copyright 1951, 1952 by Jacquetta Hawkes. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc., and The Cresset Press Limited, London.



The sons and daughters of the first generation of town dwellers were not taught how to use eye and hand in the traditional skills, and, a loss of absolute finality, they could not inherit all the traditional forms, the shape for an axe handle, a yoke, for a pair of tongs; the proportions of cottage doors and windows, the designs for smocking, lace making, embroidery. Some of these forms, because they had achieved fitness for their purpose as complete as the unchanging bodies of the insects, had remained constant for centuries or millennia; others were always evolving yet maintained their continuity. Now all of them, or almost all, were to fade from the common imagination, to become extinct. I know of only one traditional form for an everyday tool which has been adapted without loss to machine production; this is the exquisitely curved and modulated handle of the woodcutter's axe.

With the extinction of ancient arts and skills there went also countless local rites, customs, legends and histories. All these, whether or no they had been adapted to Christianity, were survivals of a paganism that helped to unite country people with nature and their own ancestors. Stories and names for fields and lanes recalled men and women who had worked the land before them; legends still commemorated local deities who had lived in wood, water, and stone; many customs recognized and assisted in the main crises of individual lives; rites helped to harmonize these individual rhythms with the greater rhythms of nature — they celebrated the return of the sun, the resurrection of the corn, harvest, and the return of death.

Without these immemorial ties, personal and universal, relating men to their surroundings in time and space, the isolation of human consciousness by urban life was a most violent challenge. It gave opportunity for the heightening of consciousness and the sharpening of intellect, but human weakness and material circumstances made it impossible for any but the few gifted or fortunate to respond. The urban masses having lost all the traditions I have just named which together make up the inheritance which may be called culture, tended to become, as individuals, cultureless. The women were in better case, for all except the most downtrodden could rear children, clean, launder, sew, and cook after a fashion, though all their work was dulled and robbed of distinction by the standardization and poor quality of their materials. (It is one of the more bizarre results of industrialism that the rich will now pay