

THE NEW ICONOCLASTS

THE modern attack on reason is probably just as necessary and important as was Gautama Buddha's attack on the casuistry and useless speculations of the Brahmins of his time. It is possible, however, to attack reason for bad reasons as well as good. The project is, or ought to be, to establish the proper role of reason—neither to give it a prestige it does not deserve, nor to condemn it as the chief source of self-deceptions.

In the West, the distrust of reason has grown from a variety of sources. The attitude of fervent humanitarianism is impatient of cold logic-chopping, for example. Those who dream splendid dreams soon tire of painstaking intellectual analysis, especially when the result seems negligible for the hopes of mankind. "The atheist," exclaimed Madame Roland, "is seeking for a syllogism, while I am offering up my thanksgiving." Elsewhere she wrote: "Helvetius hurt me. He destroyed the most ravishing illusions, and showed me everywhere a mean and revolting self-interest."

Believers in religious inspiration tend to a similar distrust—the orthodox believer because he is reluctant to submit his creed to the impersonal scalpel of rationalist criticism, the independent religious person on the broader ground that intellectuality is unable to supply first principles, which must be found intuitively. Reason, in these terms, is condemned as the inadequate tool of egotism, or rejected as being no more than a coarse sieve from which the vital elements of thought always escape.

Then there is the sophisticated positivist indifference to all "speculative" propositions. The positivist will say, sometimes as a simple admission, or sometimes with Olympian disdain, that Science knows nothing of "ultimate reality,"

that it is concerned only with observable behavior. The semanticist is often a close relative of the positivist in this respect, arguing that abstract thought may often be pretentious nonsense. "Symbols," the semanticist declares, "have meanings only in contexts," and if the context of a statement does not contain definable elements, or "referents," he may reject the statement as without intelligible meaning.

Another blow to reason has come from certain psychoanalysts who have been able to show that an intellectual theory of truth, when avowed as a kind of "doctrine," or "line," can produce incredibly disastrous results. The insights afforded by workers in this field are of such importance that an illustration should be of value. We quote from Trigant Burrow's *The Social Basis of Consciousness* (Harcourt, Brace) a passage which reveals the folly of over-intellectualization:

Today, under the impetus of psychoanalysis in its theoretical or vicarious form, we are carrying theory to the point of absurdity. There is now, for example, the psychoanalytical theory of the nursery. Anxious young mothers are running about looking for texts which will serve them as guides in the love of their children. They are diligently searching upon every hand for the latest approved theory of maternal love. And in response to the demand the popular literature is supplying them with full details. But there are no librettos of the nursery. Baedekers to motherhood are not to be had. The motherhood that is true is a subjective relationship, and it is only subjectively that it can be felt and understood.

I shall not forget the experience told me by a patient whose mother, actuated by the theory of motherhood in its highest "scientific" interpretation, undertook to enlighten her on the subject of sex. The incident left the most painful impression upon her. The mother, having gathered courage for the performance of her maternal duty, delivered her errand with a punctiliousness which from the point of view of technique was irreproachable. She spoke out

of the strictest regard for the theory of motherhood. But unfortunately her theory left out of account an item that needs to be reckoned with, namely, the native simplicity of the consciousness of childhood. The woman spoke out of the theory of a truth, but her child listened with the organic susceptibility of truth itself. The mother had not accepted within herself the actual significance of life, and so, in accordance with the formality of a theory, was vicariously imposing its acceptance upon her child. But childish perception pierces the veil of pedagogic finesse. The rigid demeanor of her instructor readily disclosed the discrepancy between the verbal recital and the utter lack of conscious acceptance within herself. For the child, now a middle-aged woman, the moment was an unforgettable one. She had witnessed in her mother an outrage of organic truth, and the shock of that experience caused a psychic disunity between mother and child from which there resulted an introversion of personality that covered half a lifetime. And so, while the theory of the nursery is from the point of view of theory wholly irreproachable, it is from the point of view of the nursery wholly absurd.

A lesson which parents have yet to learn is that the child is closer to the heart of things than the grown-up—that the consciousness of childhood stands in far more truthful relationship to the actuality of life, as it is, than the consciousness of the conventionalized and sophisticated adult. For years it has been my feeling that beneath the conflict of the neurotic personality there is an urge toward the expression of this primal inherency of consciousness. Today, it is more than ever my view that in the neurotic reaction there is expressed an inherent plea for the native simplicity and truth of this organic consciousness. It becomes more and more clear to me that the pain of these personalities is due solely to the organic discrepancy of an unconsciousness and indirection within themselves, and that essentially their urge is to bring themselves again into harmony with the law of their personality by reuniting the needs of their consciousness with the needs of their organic life.

The force of this comment hardly needs amplification, although it may be pointed out that the crucial question, here, concerns the nature of "primal inherency of consciousness." Burrow believes that it arises from the *organism* and names his philosophy "Phylobiology," which is devoted to discovery of "natural biological

motivation," from which human beings depart, through intellectual constructions, to their sorrow.

Another line of attack on reason is now appearing as a result of the new interest in the West in Zen Buddhism. We have a letter from a reader which reflects this influence, along with an Existentialist current:

Zen Buddhism has led me to conclude that words are abstractions which pertain only vaguely to "reality." I suspect that a competent philosophy is only coordinated word symbols—in some respects like a competent geometry; I suspect that abandoning words (except for play or utility—again, like geometry) will not make me free, but will mean that "free" does not apply—as in a literal sense an air molecule is neither bridled nor unbridled.

Although Kierkegaard (in my limited understanding) does not substantiate this Word-heresy, his "knight" in *Fear and Trembling* exhibits the characteristics of a man whom I would visualize as being free from the power of the Word.

Zen says, "Ignorance and Wisdom are alike; there is no difference." But, at least superficially, a difference lies in the quality and quantity of symbol orientation. If this difference is nil, then symbol orientation (words, mathematics, chemical formulae, ethics, laws, etc.) is nil.

Does not MANAS obtain its very life from the belief in the power of the Word? I hope you will write an article stating your views.

If we ignore the reference to Kierkegaard's work, which we have not read, the important thing, here, seems to be, first of all, to distinguish between the Eastern and Western attacks on reason, letting Trigant Burrow's views stand for the West, and Zen Buddhism stand for the East. While, critically, both these views seem very much alike, they are very different in their "affirmative" aspect. Burrow sees "real perception" in the response of the "organism." This is not the Zen view, which establishes a quite different polarity. For authoritative definitions, we turn to Suzuki's *Studies in Zen*, published last year by the Philosophical Library.

Zen came into being in a matrix of Buddhist thought, and was brought to maturity by Chinese

and Japanese Buddhists. A classical account states that Zen is—

A special transmission outside the Scriptures,
Not depending upon the letter,
But pointing directly to the Mind,
And leading us to see into Nature itself,
thereby making us attain Buddhahood.

Suzuki's comment and explanation is this:

When Zen claims to be "a special transmission outside the Scriptures," we may take this to imply the existence of an esoteric teaching in Buddhism which came to be known as Zen. But the phrase simply means that Zen is not dependent on the letter of the Scriptures, which here stand for conceptualism, and all that the term implies. Zen abhors words and concepts, and reasoning based on them. We have been misled from the first rising of consciousness to resort too much to ratiocination for the prehension of Reality. We tend to regard ideas and words as facts in themselves, and this way of thinking has entered deeply into our consciousness. We now imagine that when we have ideas and words we have all that can be said of our experience of Reality. This means that we take words for Reality itself and neglect experience to reach what really constitutes our inmost experience.

Zen upholds, as every true religion must, the direct experience of Reality. It aspires to drink from the fountain of life itself instead of merely listening to remarks about it. A Zen follower is not satisfied until he scoops with his own hands the living waters of Reality, which alone, he knows, will quench his thirst.

In Zen, the opposition is not between reason and the organic wisdom of the body, but between reason and the intuition, or what may perhaps be termed *spiritual* intuition, to distinguish it from ordinary forms of intuitive perception, such as immediate recognition that a flower is a flower. To establish this polarity, Suzuki uses the terms *prajna* and *vijnana*, *prajna* meaning intuition and *vijnana* meaning intellect. Suzuki writes:

Vijnana is the principle of bifurcation and conceptualization, and for this reason it is the most efficient weapon in handling affairs of our daily life. We have thus come to regard it as the most essential means of dealing with the world of relativities, forgetting that this world is the creation of something

that lies far deeper than the intellect—indeed, the intellect itself owes its existence and all-round utility to this mysterious something. While this way of *vijnana* appraisal is a tragedy because it causes to our hearts and to our spirits unspeakable anguish and makes this life a burden full of miseries, we must remember that it is because of this tragedy that we are awakened to the truth of *prajna* existence. . . .

That *prajna* underlies *vijnana*, in the sense that it enables *vijnana* to function as the principle of differentiation, is not difficult to realize when we see that differentiation is impossible without something that works for integration or unification. The dichotomy of subject and object cannot obtain unless there is something that lies behind them, something that is neither subject nor object; this is a kind of field where they can operate, where subject can be separated from object, object from subject. If the two are not related in any way, we cannot even speak of their separation or antithesis. There must be something of subject in object, and something of object in subject, which makes their separation as well as their relationship possible. And, as this something cannot be made the theme of intellectualization, there must be another method of reaching this most fundamental principle. The fact that it is so utterly fundamental excludes the application of the bifurcating instrument. We must appeal to *prajna*-intuition.

While Zen may wish to abandon "conceptualization," it can hardly be denied that the great philosophical questions for which the Zen followers seek answers from *prajna intuition* are almost of necessity formulated in conceptual terms. Moreover, they are formulated in the particular conceptual terms of Buddhist philosophy. The questions asked by Zen disciples of their Zen masters are fundamentally philosophical questions having to do with the nature of the universe, the nature of a Buddha, and the general problems of philosophy as conceived in Buddhist thought. Without this majestic background of Indian philosophy, Zen, we suspect, would soon become a very trivial affair. Suzuki writes:

In the beginning there is "the word," but in the beginning-less beginning there is the Godhead who is nameless and no-word.

Zen calls this "mind of no-mind," "the unconscious conscious," "original enlightenment," "the originally pure," and very frequently just "this." But as soon as a name is given the Godhead ceases to be Godhead, Man and Nature spring up and we are caught in the maze of an abstract, conceptual vocabulary. Zen avoids all this, as we have seen. Some may say that Zen is rich in suggestions but that philosophy needs more, that we must go further into the field of analysis and speculation and verbalization. But the truth is that Zen never suggests; it directly points at "this," or produces "this" before you in order that you may see it for yourself. It is then for you to build up your philosophical system to your intellectual satisfaction, for Zen does not despise intellection merely as such.

Dr. Suzuki is of the impression that Zen is a unique approach to the problem of life, but, so far as we can see, it is simply one, although a dramatically brilliant one, of a number of ways in which the human mind has sought to protect itself from delusion. Lao-tze comprehended the essential point of Zen when he said, "The Tao which can be expressed in words is not the eternal Tao; the name which can be uttered is not its eternal name." A similar wisdom is found in the *Katha Upanishad*:

The Self-Being pierced the opening outwards; hence one looks outward, not within himself. A wise man looks towards the Self with reverted sight, seeking deathlessness.

Children seek after outward desires; they come to the net of widespread death. But the wise, beholding deathlessness, seek not for the enduring among unending things.

Plato, in his seventh epistle, explains that he will not write of ultimate mysteries; that only fools or charlatans endeavor to give expression to the inexpressible. Every philosopher who has employed the device of paradox has in that moment warned his hearers of the delusion of apparent knowledge. Finally, W. T. Stace, to name a contemporary, has given clear formulation to the difference between the definable, which is the relative, and the indefinable, which is the real.

The distinction, perhaps, of the Zen masters lies in the dramatic or revolutionary way in which

they have compelled recognition of the illusions common to intellectuality. Yet it may be asked if they transcended intellectuality, or merely abandoned it. The Buddha, before he was enlightened, was master of all the systems of philosophy his motherland of India could teach him. Shall we say, because Buddha, the Emancipated One, outgrew philosophy, that we have no need of it?

Our correspondent suggests that a competent philosophy is no more than a system of coordinated word symbols, yet is this so slight and unnecessary an affair? To know a country, one must travel it, but shall we therefore turn contemptuous of maps? Some countries may be better to visit than others: without maps, how shall we plan the direction of our journey?

The world owes much to the makers of maps, and much, also, to the makers of philosophies. It is not the philosophers, but their lazy followers who corrupt words into things and mistake ideas for truths. Thus are born the delusions of *Nama Rupa*, of names and forms. Priests with their revelations give verbal substitutes for the secret processes of self-realization, and so accomplish the weakening of minds and the stultification of the powers of the imagination. And then, in the course of time, come the iconoclasts who attack reason itself, and the forms of ideas, hoping with their wild bludgeoning to prevent a repetition of the evil.

There is a quality, moreover, in the original teachings of Buddha, as found, for example, in Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, that seems to be missing in the works of others who came after, and which is by no means plain in the writings of the Zen enthusiasts. Buddha was a man of universal sympathies and warm compassion. He was as much of a "savior" as any man—or God—could be. A great and overflowing love of his fellows was the chief characteristic of Gautama. He practiced no "shock" technique upon his disciples, nor upon the distraught girl who came to him with a dead babe in her arms. Buddha was

a teacher of the people, but the Zen masters—from what little we have read—set themselves apart from the world, teaching only the monks who came to be their disciples.

It is indeed a great and notable truth that words and ideas are not the same as facts and knowledge. A world wrestling with the shadows of yesterday's rationalist and scientific optimisms may well learn from that truth and be profoundly grateful to the gnostic existentialists of the East, just as it may be grateful to the agnostic existentialists of the West. But let us recognize, also, while honoring these teachers, that skepticism is always *second* in the order of discovery. First we see and we learn, and then we come upon the bitter lessons of self-deception. But the very order of what we first learned gives form and substance to the criticisms we afterward embrace, when we have become aware of the almost infinite possibilities of delusion. The mind, it is said, is like a mirror, which gathers dust as it reflects. Shall we then take offense and break the mirror? Or because the reflected image in a burnished glass has such similitude of reality, shall we argue that this capacity of the mind is a wicked thing, because, from laziness, we are tempted to take the image for the real?

It is perhaps a good thing that the modern attack on reason is drawing Zen into the argument as a supporting force, for Zen is an evolution of Mahayana Buddhism and exists as a bright jewel within the web of a great psycho-philosophical system bequeathed to the East by the Buddha and his great Arhats. Skepticism in Buddhism is not the same as skepticism in the Western tradition. As Suzuki says:

Zen . . . does not rely on the sutras or abhidharmas, however exalted and enlightened be the authors of these sacred books. For the ultimate authority of Zen faith is within one's self and not without. A finger may be needed to point at the moon, but ignorant must they be who take the pointer for the real object and altogether forget the aim of the religious life. The sacred books are useful as far as they indicate the direction where our spiritual efforts are to be applied, and their utility goes no further.

Zen, therefore, proposes to deal with concrete living facts, and not with dead letters and theories.

This any man can do, whether he calls his pursuit "Zen," or something else, or nothing at all. In fact, there is ground in Zen texts for saying, on this basis, that the less he knows, or thinks he knows, about Zen, the better for him!

REVIEW

AN ODD FLAVOR FOR WESTERNS

IT'S the damnedest thing, pardner, but some of these hell-for-salty-leather Western writers seem to be exploring *ahimsa*. At least, four of the last five we confess to reading have depicted heroes seriously concerned with the tyranny of violence. Whether the attraction is genuine or simply originates in an author's search for new and unlikely twists, the frequent appearance of pacifist overtones does seem worth a quizzical glance. Take for instance John Reese's *The High Passes*. Though the intrepid leading character seems without trying to get himself into as many violent situations as any ten ordinary mortals could by design, he talks quite a brand of *ahimsa*. Returning after years of absence to the "home ranch menaced on every hand," he delivers himself of this Gandhian logic on the trail:

"Where's your gun?" Dutch asked.

"What gun?"

"Don't you pack a gun?" cried the amazed Dutch. "Hey is it true what Floyd said—that you don't believe in fightin'?"

"I don't know what I believe," Wayne said. "In a way, I guess it is. It's not a crusade, Dutch. I don't care what other people do. It's only—"

Behind him Jud cut in, "Let's go. We're tired. We can't stand here and palaver all day."

Men who rode for a living took pride in their outfit. They did not like working for a man who admitted that he did not like to fight.

"In a minute, Jud," Wayne said, impatiently. He turned back to Dutch. "There'll be talk about me so let's see that it's straight talk. I can fight if I have to. I just don't think it gets a man anywhere—any kind of fighting. Study the battles of the Civil War, Dutch. Study our most successful Indian campaigns. To me it's absurd, grown men wallowing in the mud and sneaking through the grass to shoot at each other, while their families go hungry and their farms are lost in bankruptcy. It's just as absurd for two men to stand up and pound each other with their fists. I suppose I'm not making myself clear—"

Notes on "Wayne's" life at military school are apropos of the same theme:

At Turnpike, Wayne led the class in tactics and strategy. Problem N—To move your force across its own front without relinquishing your artillery emplacements of relieving pressure on the enemy. . . . Wayne had developed a method of rolling detached battalions across his front that won him a citation from the colonel, as well as the theoretical engagement.

"This would utterly destroy your enemy's whole right wing, Cadet Staples," said the colonel. "Why?"

"I just wondered. Then I would re-form and prepare to kill more men, wouldn't I? And after winning or losing—that battle, I would then prepare to kill still more men by winning or losing another one, wouldn't I? And when this war is over—"

"Are you a *pacifist*, sir?" the shocked colonel shouted.

Wayne still didn't know what he was.

Walter Cantrell's *Brand of Cain* fails to verbalize clear pacifist sentiments, but is nonetheless a tale of the *karma* or nemesis of violence. A man becomes a gunman-killer through family circumstance, but detests his role, making every effort to become a peaceful citizen. Other men with mayhem in their natures force his plays, but he is ready to take insult to pride rather than resort to his gun—or even to fists. This is a somber tale, a kind of classic tragedy; the hero does not reach any sort of promised land at the end, though he breaks through to a partial freedom from the dreary chain of killings. *Brand of Cain* is thus a bit of a dirty trick on those who read Westerns because they like their violence raised to glory, just as Walt Sheldon's *Troubling of a Star* and David Davidson's *The Steeper Cliff* failed to pull out the tried and untrue stops on war.

Another pocket book, Robert McCaig's *Danger West!* protests both war's killing and "Western" killing by way of a story set in the present, following the war in Korea. The leading man in this tale is forced to learn that even a callous or unkind word—mere "psychological"

violence—can lead to death. His keen sense of responsibility for one death, only deviously attributable to him, nearly ruins his life. Not even as deputy sheriff in an effort to serve his home community does he relish tasks which lead to the injury of any other human: "The circle stayed closed; he had taken a life not his to take." Elsewhere McCaig has his protagonist remark: "I've seen too much killing in my day and it never solves anything."

Milton Lott's *The Last Hunt*, hailed as the best frontier novel of the past two years, abhors callous killing in all its dimensions. The weak man here is the man who loves guns and violence the most, the hero a friend who will let himself be shot before he will trigger his own gun. And Mr. Lott becomes a pantheist, a man of reverence for nature's life too, in his sickeningly vivid portrayal of the remorseless buffalo hunts which destroyed the last of the great herds—and the livelihood of the Indians who depended upon them. Even the motion picture version of *The Last Hunt* manages to expose the horror of animal slaughter, and to make the hero's trend toward *ahimsa* a mark of true manhood. The following describes Sandy's final turning away from hunting to expiation for his animal murders of the plains—an ignominious atonement:

Sandy saw that he was standing by the rib rack of a big carcass. He glanced around the flat at the scattered bones, the anger draining out of him. It was no use. He could not bring back the buffalo or fight for the Indians the battles that were already lost. Parson was right, the way he felt was something he had to settle with himself, not with the Indians.

He kept seeing Hollis, his face a mask of contempt, saying, "Bonepicker," and was puzzled by his own lack of rancor. The word and the picture seemed to float just at the surface of his mind, insistent, inexplicable.

He stood a long time in tension, a need sharp and driving as the need for a woman rising out of the turmoil of his feelings. He had to do something.

He was walking now across the flat, tensely, almost running. And suddenly he stopped and picked up a bone and threw it with a vehemence that was yet

not anger. Then—as if it came to him through his hands—he knew what it was he had to do.

He began gathering the bones and throwing them together in a heap at the center of the flat. . . .

He worked at it every day after that, early and late, finding a satisfaction, a release, that he did not question or try to understand. It would be a good way to get another start, he thought.

Well, there it is, pardner. Four out of the last five Westerns picked up at random is quite a percentage—for pure chance. One wonders if these are not some of the far-flung results of the life and death of Mohandas Gandhi, the little man who was so big in spirit that he added a new look to even the common man's "hero."

COMMENTARY

THE PAIN OF JUDGMENT

THERE is still another passage in Lawrence Holmes' column in *Poetry Public* (see *Frontiers*) which excites our admiration. This one has to do with the difficult task of relying on one's own judgment, without giving way to petty conceit. Mr. Holmes is talking about the appreciation and criticism of poetry, but nearly everything he says in relation to aesthetic judgment is even truer of what we call moral judgment. Matters of both taste and morals are different from the problem of being accurate. When a man goes on record in respect to what is good or fine, in the field of the arts, or when he speaks of what is right, he exposes something more of himself than a measure of his technical skill. He reveals his heart.

To be found wrong in some technical way, while not especially pleasant, is at least bearable. Hard work will correct such mistakes. But what if our hearts betray us into error? This, we feel, is a kind of sin—a judgment, not of our abilities, but of *ourselves!*

Mr. Holmes discusses this situation with great understanding. After observing that a critic must preserve his humility—"There is probably no critic more suspect than one who makes loud and recondite claims to some special pipe-line to the Absolute Mind"—he adds:

Yet after saying this, it is most necessary to remind oneself that humility and self-doubt must *not* be carried to the point of falsifying one's own genuine responses to a poem, or of failing to recognize in them a kind of *provisional* validity which cannot be found anywhere else. *The place to start* is with one's own immediate response to the poem. If we start off by denying or being ashamed of this response, we have betrayed our own child from the very beginning and have gotten off the path of integrity at the very first step. For we have nothing to begin with *but* our very Self, undeveloped as it may be. We must just be careful not to insulate this Self against further and different responses, in the interests of sloth or pride or in homage to some foolish prejudice against ever changing one's mind."

If our initial response be *genuine*—no matter how inadequate in the light of subsequent experience it may turn out to be—and if we move unflinchingly from one genuine response to another, I do not see how we can fall into what R. G. Collingwood calls the "corruption of consciousness." But as soon as we start just "taking someone else's word for it" as to what is good and what is bad, in violation of our own true feelings, we have strayed from the path, and may have to pass through Inferno before we can get back upon it again. And yet the opposite extreme is worse, if anything. The tenuous rivulet that intricately weaves through the shadowy frontier-country of free choice, between the region of self-trust and the at first almost indistinguishable region of willful self-assertion, self-sufficiency, and ultimate solipsism, is the most slender and innocent-appearing boundary line we shall ever be tempted to cross, and possibly the most decisive one.

Seldom have we seen the delicate nuances of this problem so thoughtfully explored. This, we think, is adult education at its best, and the fact that Mr. Holmes' subject happens to be poetry is the merest accident.

We have little to add, except some wondering on why the fear of being wrong in matters of taste or morals should seem so formidable a threat for most men. After all, since there is so much bad taste and so much corruption of motive in the world, nearly everyone must err, more or less, in these ways, so why be so disturbed about it? The point, of course, is that we do not fear making the mistakes half so much as we fear being *found out*.

This should tell us quite a lot about the human nature we share with our fellow men. To the extent that we fear being found out, we value appearance above reality, and are, alas, to that extent hypocrites! Reason tells us that the debilitating effects of this fear are far worse for human character and integrity than actually being wrong in some important matter, yet to stop *caring* whether our taste is regarded as "good," or our morals beyond reproach, takes a kind of heroism that is extremely rare, these days. One wonders why. What has "conditioned" us to this low estate?

CHILDREN and Ourselves

WE have a letter of the sort most appreciated by the editor who prepares this column. A number of such, in our opinion, are long overdue from readers who are interested in the problems weekly discussed here, but who allow the remoteness of the printed page to discourage communication.

EDITOR, *Children . . . and Ourselves*: Reading your Feb. 15 issue with a pencil (I have gotten into the habit of this, as I like to discuss with you in the margin as I go along) I found myself happily listening all the way through until I came to the last paragraph. There my pencil began scribbling so furiously that it necessitated, or rather inspired, a letter to send you some of the questions that came popping. For I encountered this:

"Somewhere along the line, every human being must choose between learning by a hit-or-miss method of experimentation with life, or by the application of general principles, in which one has considerable faith, to new and confusing situations."

This dichotomy seems fallacious. Life to me is experimentation, trial and error by means of which one forms one's own general principles to apply at the next "trial." Continual testing of principles, continual adapting of them. The individual, and that is the only meaningful unit, has only one adulthood in which to build for himself his own tailor-made philosophy of life. It is admirable to provide youth with an example of "living by principle," but to provide him with a ready-made set of principles would wrong him.

For example, to say "service to society" is the absolute ideal would defeat your purpose: first, because, though it is a great ideal, who can be positive it is the Ultimate? Second, because if indoctrinated directly, it might make the person bitter, superficial, dogmatic; and third, because if he will discover this ideal for himself, it will be more compelling and effective. I have tremendous faith that loving service will naturally follow other conditions which we try to provide for our children. Such conditions as the "integration" of this article give children confidence in themselves and faith in their fellow man, building blocks for the good life which MANAS and its readers are searching for together.

Another thought that bothered me in the paragraph was, "The only conceptions of excellence

worth passing on to young people are those of ethical and mental development." I suppose you meant to include all excellences but material ones; however, "ethical and mental" suggested to me a dry-as-dust, conventional, academic outlook, omitting the person's motivations, passions, imperatives. (I read in the last issue your fine distinction between "ethical" and "moral," a distinction of which I was previously unaware.)

Then, trying to tie up the article in a concise but all-inclusive statement, you suggest that we be philosophical—a term used almost unto meaninglessness. I had always thought it meant love of truth, but found my dictionary says, "sensibly calm under trying circumstances" (surely calmness alone won't get us far) or "versed in the study of truths or principles." Again, I suggest that study is not enough; we have to have Socrates' right opinion right in our (D. H. Lawrence) "Blood-nature."

Portland, Oregon

By happy coincidence, last week's discussion seems to have addressed itself to several of the points raised by this correspondent. Our quotation of the lines of Gibrán's poem should make it evident that there is no disagreement on the issue of forcing young people to "accept" a "ready-made set of principles." However, to state that, somewhere in the process of maturing, one must choose between trying to learn by "hit or miss experimentation with life and general principles in which he has considerable faith" does not necessarily imply that the "principles" must derive from a parent, a religion, or other external authority. We recall a passage from Macneile Dixon's *Human Situation* which seems applicable here, for when he writes that one must "follow his star until he sees a brighter," and advises: "Let each man cast his spear, and leave the issue to the immortal Gods," he is simply saying that we learn most by deliberate fixings of faith and least by drifting. The "faiths" will indeed stand in need of continuous revision, but a man—or a youth—possessed of a sincere belief, at least has something to revise, something to work from. The alternative to seeking and finding material for faith, as we see it, is to have a go at every experience offered—which may include every variety of debauchery.

The point is that a human being is able to decide, on the basis of principles he has fashioned or

adopted, which experiences and motivations are appropriate for the sort of person he wishes to become. He need not kill a man in anger to know that such killing would bring remorse, and constitute a violation of the mysterious bond that unites all human creatures. So the youth need not necessarily experiment with drunkenness, heroin addiction or sexual promiscuity to begin to *place* himself in relation to these possible courses of action.

It is quite true that the finest "moralities" seem to be "of the blood" rather than of the intellect. Sensitivities in some are either innate or develop so early in life that it is quite apparent they have not been "reasoned" into existence. But a sensitivity is the root of a faith. To know one's sensitivities, to seek their meaning and to consider their further implications and applications is precisely the way one builds "faith in a general set of principles."

Background for this discussion is the ages-long conflict between science and religion. The fixed referents of the Middle Ages—and of the doctrinal religious follower in any age—have been challenged by experimental philosophy. The man of scientific temperament does not like to be told that anyone has inside information on the ultimate nature of man, and, consequently, knowledge of what constitutes proper conduct and values. Not only this, but he will not allow *others* to claim as facts the many assertions of religion in regard to man's origin and destiny, because this, in his opinion, leads to pomposity, arbitrariness, and a general closed-mindedness. So youth, tending more toward radicalism than conservatism, has usually concluded that anyone who does not experiment broadly with life in all its aspects is simply a fraidy cat—or, to use the current vernacular, a "square."

Extremes of viewpoint, however, especially when founded on reactions against an earlier and opposite extreme, lead to oversimplification and confusion. The mere fact that orthodox religion claims many things as "knowledge" which rest only upon conventional belief does not signify that faith and belief have no legitimate place in human evolution. The point we should like to stress is that no one learns much without faith in himself, in his native ability to choose principles and fortunate

courses of action. To have faith in oneself means to believe in whatever deep-seated intimations and intuitions one possesses. A youth should not, in the interest of his own fulfillment and happiness, let himself be talked out of these by the blanket skepticism of the crowd—for after all, as Riesman has reminded us, the "crowd" is lonely, *self-alienated*.

Perhaps part of the difficulty in converse with our correspondent resides in the differing meanings attached to the word "principle." To follow a principle does not necessitate following it blindly. But it is more likely that our *conception* of that principle, especially if it be of our own fashioning, stands in more need of constant revision than the essence of the principle itself. Principles have to do with ethical attitudes, and our attitudes *toward* "learning from experience." If one believes that a soft answer is a good antidote to wrath, he may indeed discover that there are times when an additional principle needs to be considered—and when a "hard" or vehement answer best fills the needs of the situation. But soft answers take care of a *lot* of wrath, and the "principle" is valid wherever it works. A principle is not a rule, but a rational basis for declared intent, and it is our declared intentions which increase the capacity to be intelligently selective among widely differing experiences.

So youths, on this view, need to develop greater respect for their own promptings towards selectivity. Experimentation with oneself, if blind, can be just as costly to happiness as blind belief in a borrowed orthodoxy. In neither case does one learn to know himself, for he develops no individual criteria. Whether he suffers from too much unassimilable experience or from an enforced lack of experience, he suffers in much the same way—for good nutriment in experience requires not only sufficient quantity but also appropriate digestive enzymes.

Not "experience," but *assimilation*, is the desideratum, and the best assimilation occurs when thought precedes as well as follows action. The simplest definition we know of a "man of principle" is supplied by saying that he tries to think, evaluatively, *before* he speaks or acts.

FRONTIERS Shop Talk

ANYONE who uses words in his work is likely to be grateful to anyone else who throws light upon the craft, and we have found in a little magazine on poetry, *Poetry Public* (Box 898, Chadron, Nebraska), a discussion which, while doubtless "elementary" for specialists, was for us of great interest and instruction. In a department headed "For Beginners," the director of this periodical, Lawrence Richard Holmes, examines the meaning of "organic poetry." At least two passages should prove of value to all readers for whom a choice of words is important.

The first passage concerns the role of metaphors in organic poetry. Mr. Holmes writes:

It [organic poetry] avoids "mixed metaphors." (Example of a mixed metaphor: "The crowned heads of Europe were trembling in their shoes." Another: "For civilization to burn with a hard gem-like flame it must undoubtedly have its roots in the deep past and its wavering decisions at some vital parting of the ways."—John Cowper Powys.) A mixed metaphor is evidence of a kind of insincerity, for if the poet were really *visualizing* his figures, he would *see* the incongruity and avoid it. The hymnist who wrote, "Crown him with many crowns / The lamb upon the throne," could hardly have been visualizing, or he would have seen the incongruity of the picture of a lamb seated upon a throne with tiers of crowns upon his head. He must have written these lines using "Lamb" as a *dead* metaphor, *i.e.*, in this case as a mere synonym for the Lord, without thinking in terms of animal lamb at all. But organic poetry avoids even a series of different metaphors, apart from actually "mixed" ones, in the sense illustrated above. Shakespeare's "to take *arms* against a sea of troubles" might be considered "defective" . . . for this reason.

Before rising to Shakespeare's defense—a safe enough cause for any amateur—there is need to confess that we had thought of a mixed metaphor as no more than a minor offense against authoritarian grammar—a thing to be avoided only because a badly mixed metaphor can make a sentence quite ridiculous. But that unpleasant word "insincerity" provokes a search of conscience. Mr. Holmes is quite right. The careless wielder of metaphors

cannot be quite sure of what he means to say; he snatches his vehicles of meaning in a hurry, casually estimating their "feeling-tone," then piles them together like a badly built stone wall. (We've practically got one of our own, there!) The point is, it seems to us, that a bad use of metaphor is usually a mechanical use, and often depends upon borrowed instead of generated meanings. The "dead" metaphors referred to by Mr. Holmes seem a good illustration of the "clots" of meaning which a writer will pick up as clichés and use without reflection.

In a larger sense, all writing is haunted by this sort of problem. The writer in a hurry—as we, alas, so often are—frequently succumbs to the temptation to take some convenient "clot" of meaning and make it do duty for better words which would oblige him to dig into experience with his imagination. The more predigested "clots" he uses, the less strength his writing possesses, although it may be ineffably "smooth." Sometimes the use of a "clot" is either completely superficial or plainly dishonest. An evocative reference to "God" may be of this quality. There is an infinite range of associations for the word "God." Accordingly, the question, "Do you believe in God?" is a meaningless question. If asked without qualification, it really means, "Are you the sort of person who is willing to leave the final questions of existence to simple assent to a conventional and unthinking attitude of conformity? Are you 'safe'—a person who can be depended upon not to stir up trouble or ask embarrassing questions?"

As a thoughtful Christian once remarked, the man who asks, "Do you believe in God?" does not need an answer, but an education. More often than not, "God" serves as something like a "dead metaphor" to take the place of an examined content of meaning.

The other passage by Mr. Holmes on the subject of organic poetry concerns its "wholeness":

If a poem is memorized, not by deliberate repetition but involuntarily as a by-product of many impassioned rereadings, all parts will tend to present themselves with something approaching simultaneity. (What goes on in the *unconscious* mind is anybody's guess, but something of importance may very likely be happening; perhaps this is the poem's *fifth*

dimension!) The functional imagery of an organic poem and its unified structure make it possible for the poem to be thought of and felt in its entirety, in an instantaneous flash of time.

Why is this desirable? For singleness of effect. It has been said that from the human perspective, the present only is real, the past being but a memory, the future but an object of speculation. It has even been said that in the immediate present only are we in contact with Eternity. To the Infinite, there is no time—what we call past, present, and future, are all present at once. Yet to *us* the present is of no duration. In less than a second it disappears into the past, water under the bridge. Therefore the only way an art object can be contemplated, in full reality, is for it to be contemplated in its entirety instantaneously. . . . Beginning, middle, and ending thus become virtually as meaningless as these terms would be if applied to positions in the circumference of a circle. (If you look at a rose, which part of it is the beginning, which the middle, which the end?)

To be candid, we had no idea that an appreciation of poetry could be conducted at so philosophical a level. Of course the arts *ought* to be so conceived, if one is willing to define art in classical terms—as, for example, W. Norman Brown spoke of the sculpture of ancient India:

Sculpture was not meant to be a reminder of a human being or of an apotheosis of man, but of something abstract, spiritual in its reality beyond apprehension by the senses, an ocular reference to universal knowledge that might somehow become comprehensible to humanity.

A poem, however, even an "organic" poem, as we read Mr. Holmes, need have no such pretentious objective, and still serve in its way to convey the feeling of immediate being and unity which successfully resists dissecting analysis. We have often wondered at the striking difference between a house and the plan of a house, or between a sketch of city blocks and one's intimate knowledge of his own neighborhood. There is a curious sort of dimensionless infinity in anything of reasonable complexity that is wholly *known*. And a human being—even the bodily presence of a human being—how different this is from the "measurements" or merely physical account of the person! Life suffuses all beings with a kind of wholeness that makes

measurements and weights laughably inadequate. And in the case of a human being are added all the subtleties of mind and nuances of feeling and mood. A human is seen in the curve of a cheek, the light in the eye, the flowing movements of form which reflect whole volumes of delicate intimation. This is the real being with whom we have relations—a being who wholly escapes the calipers and statistical nets of workers in psychological and anthropological research. Is there a "science" which can comprehend this wholeness? It may have been, or it may exist in the future, but we can be certain that there is no such science, today.

A quotation from Lewis Mumford's *In the Name of Sanity* is pertinent here:

In seeking to understand our primal urges, we have lost sight of our peculiarly human traits and our potential human destinations, not given in nature but fabricated and projected by man. How commonplace it is to reduce every higher human development to a lower term, the pages of the Kinsey reports reveal with almost disarming—or should I say alarming—naïveté. Dr. Kinsey and his associates would regard it as a ludicrous form of moralism—as it surely would be!—if we chose to reprove a monkey or a cat for not respecting the conventions and sentiments of human marriage. But these seemingly neutral scientists do not apparently see that it is equally absurd to turn reproof into justification, in the opposite direction. If animal behavior justifies sodomy, why not also the murder of rival males in courtship? If murder, why not cannibalism and incest? Is it not characteristic of this devaluation of the human, that in this whole study of the sexual life of American men and women, seemingly so exhaustive, the word love does not appear in the index of either volume? This is the science of Mickey Spillanes. . . .

So the arts—and poetry, as one of the more self-conscious arts—can be a bastion against such "scientific" horrors, and a reminder that we are, after all, human beings.