

## THE SENSE IN THE UNIVERSE

DEFINITIONS are deadly instruments, yet we cannot do without them. If we knew more about human nature, we could probably say why men habitually turn their knowledge against themselves, until it is no longer knowledge, but a kind of strait-jacket of the mind. The obvious explanation, which will have to do for now, is that there is a side of human beings which wants certainty without the effort that certainty of any kind requires. In our own time, this expectation takes the form of reliance on some sort of "truth-machine." You get the facts, you process them, you add up the result, and then you know.

This point of view is nothing new. In religion it is called orthodoxy. In any cultural framework, it represents the fruits of human investigation, but with the element of original discovery removed. It is formula without the formulator—a work of man which is made acceptable to the mass by being dehumanized.

What sort of standard can we set up to help us distinguish between such spurious "truth" and the truth we need? This question reveals the essential difficulty suffered by men in their effort to gain some certainty in their lives. To set up a standard, you have to make a definition, and the definition is what turns us against ourselves. In any age, the definition you make about important matters is a definition calculated to correct the bad definitions we have been living by. But tomorrow, the situation will have changed, and today's definitions are no longer reliable. We can say that our trouble comes from trying to make final definitions of things which are not final. But then we must add that the final things cannot be defined at all.

So, from dilemma of this sort, men proclaim the absolute authority of Silence. Only by keeping still can you know, they say. And they are right;

or at least we think they are right, until we are overtaken by the feeling that they are only *partly* right; and then, somewhat cautiously, we start in making definitions again.

The definition we propose to work on, now, concerns a standard for recognizing truth—a large order. But we are only going to work on it, not attempt to finish it. The basic distinction that we have lost, without which truth cannot be recognized, is the distinction between an additive process and an evocative process, between a statistical review and an alchemical ordeal.

Human life is essentially a drama. Its stuff is an eternal dialogue. It is affirmation and response concerning what we are, where we are, and where we are going. The speech of human life can use no borrowed rhetoric. The man who has some truth never threatens you with Big Battalions. He has experienced the only sort of certainty a man can rely upon; his discourse is the voice of civilization, the appeal of reason, and of something more than reason.

It is perhaps too soon to offer a quotation to illustrate this contention. But every illustration of human wisdom comes "too soon." That is, it can never be anything more than a fragment of wisdom, capable of being turned into a formula, of being turned against itself. The case for wisdom is never really stated, but only intimated. For example, there is this passage from Albert Guerard's *Bottle in the Sea* (Harvard University Press, 1954), a volume of reflections about the human condition:

Like Descartes' *good sense*, like the æsthetic response, *mysticism is universal*. Every man, at some moment of his existence, be it ever so humble, or, far worse, be it ever so hectic, has felt its irresistible power. But we feel it in utter darkness. The ineffable imposes silence. It cannot be comprehended, it cannot be remembered, it leaves no intelligible trace.

There remains with us only an undefinable longing for a truth, for a peace, for a love passing all understanding. Metaphysics, theology, by rational means; ritual, by material ones, are attempts to end the quest. What they offer is but a painted screen, a *trompe-l'œil* claiming to be the ultimate reality. Art is the quest for the lost glimpse of a more real world: but we know that it never is quite true.

A common man may never have known ecstasy, and yet have his share of the mystic scene. Ecstasy is but a paroxysm: the mystic sense pervading the whole of existence is what I call faith: congruency with the unutterable, oneness with the sense of life. There is more faith diffused through the whole of mankind than in the rare and magnificent flashes of the professed mystics. Seers, poets, and conquerors are portents: we are awed by their unique power. But spiritual life is not made up of portents: it is an obscure and constant endeavor.

"And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."

Before the voice—so still, so small in the tumult of the world—can reach our ears, there must be a desire to listen. That desire is confusedly blended with historical and social elements: these must be hushed, or they will deafen us to the voice. Our first duty then is to purify our sense of duty. This is what I mean—the formula will be found many times in my writings—by *good will and the critical spirit*. Goodness is futile without *will*; good will itself, *i.e.*, will at the service of the good, may be blind and harmful if not checked by clear thinking and dispassionate inquiry. But nothing is so barren as mere analysis. The critical spirit, in absolute purity, *stets verneint*, ever denies. Fact-finding will not point the way, unless you know first where you want to go.

"Where I want to go" is what I call the good. It is not identical with the true. For whatever is, is true: diseases are facts, and so are sins. The quest for the good implies a selection. Again, we must "take things as they are": that is pure science. We must not leave them as they are: government poetry, religion, are efforts to order the facts so as to achieve our desire. Science is an inventory; religion is a campaign.

Well, what does this imply for contemporary education, politics, and talk about a "way of life"?

Plainly, we have been misleading the young, misleading ourselves, if the foregoing has any truth in it. We have not said anything to the young about the need for private discovery. We have let them suppose that all they need to do is "catch up" on the information possessed by their elders, and then make some sort of "personal adjustment" to the times. We have made no important distinction between what they can learn from others and what they must find out for themselves. We have hidden as though it were a wicked secret the fact that we have made a mess of our lives and of the beginning of theirs. We have let them suppose that there are no important secrets to be found out, any more. For nourishment, we offer them only the funeral-baked meats of our civilization.

We betray the young and ourselves. How do we betray them? We betray them by our pretense to knowledge. For example, Mr. Guérard, in the quotation offered above, gives a passage from the Bible. So, we are likely to say to the young: "You see, this wise man is a Christian. If you like what he says, follow his example." What we do not tell the young is that Mr. Guérard is a man who cannot be labelled—that no *man who has understanding* can ever be labelled. It is a crime to burn books, but it is necessary to the emancipation of mankind that we burn all labels. The reason for this is that the discovery of truth is a private ordeal. No man can have truth at the hands of another. No man's path to truth is the same as any other man's path. The chrysalis within which a man's awakening to the truth takes place is an inner structure, made of strands of private thought and private feeling. The lie that the labels tell us is that we live in a common chrysalis, like a religious congregation or a political party, or a scientific culture based upon accurate measurements.

But alas, we cannot even burn other people's labels. We can burn only our own. All we can

do, in common, is to watch the fires set by other men. Here is one of Mr. Guérard's fires:

I am writing this testament without defiance and without fear; at this hour, why should I pretend, to man or God? I have no desire to placate and no desire to offend. I hate violent disruption, material or spiritual. I should like to call myself a Christian. I am bound to explain why I do not feel at liberty to do so. . . .

Atheism, a vacuum, is not the core of my thought. I am not interested in it: I have no need for that purely negative hypothesis. But I have the right to reject, as unnecessary, illogical, and idolatrous, the anthropomorphic doctrine. I know that in all denominations there are many who are not conformists, and who have what I consider as the essential religious experience: the sense of mystery and the desire to do good. They pour life into their symbols: they do not receive life from these symbols. But they refuse to consider their creeds as symbolic. They insist upon subordinating the life-giving experience to formal assertions which to me are superstitious or irrelevant.

This is my deepest objection to all the creeds: *their inveterate, their irremediable materialism*. The Sacred Books contain far more than ethical commands and visions of the spiritual world: they are also records, in the fields of astronomy, geology, geography, and history, and those records purport to be the inspired will of God. Literalism cannot be expunged without destroying the supernatural claims of the churches. I know that the Pope has receded from the position that Genesis was sound "natural science," without jeopardizing his own infallibility; but humble mortals do not possess this miraculous gift of facing both ways. The Bible must be different from folklore, epic poetry, myth. The Gospels, in particular, leave no room for equivocation. It was not purely the spirit of Christ that, after his death, filled the hearts of his disciples: it was his body of flesh and blood that appeared before his eyes, and the fingers of St. Thomas probed his wounds. It was that earthly body, not a dissolving vision that ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. It is our own bones and tissues that will be reconstituted (with all the infirmities and ailments that burdened us?) and live for ever at the foot of the great white throne. I can only repeat that these "realistic" stories only desecrate the hereafter, rob the mystery of its awe and splendor. The fight of religious free thought against orthodoxy is the fight of spiritual truth against material pseudo-scientific knowledge.

What will you do with such a man? You can hunt him, of course. You can say he unsettles the mind. He is a heretic—that is, by etymological precision, one who chooses for himself. But if you should like his thought, if you should admire it and want it for yourself, *you can't have it*. This is the great difficulty with all civilized minds: they cannot be followed—not literally. They can be followed only symbolically, which is the process of becoming civilized for oneself.

Why should we pursue some sort of apotheosis of Mr. Guérard? But we do not. Given some opportunity, we should probably argue with him about many things. But this is unimportant. We are praising a temper of the human spirit, which he illustrates; we are identifying both the strength and the humility of an independent mind, which he happens to possess, and to use. A civilized man cannot be followed or imitated; yet, somehow, he reaches certain conclusions which, usually, all other civilized men reach; and these are the important conclusions, since they deal with the *method* of reaching any and all conclusions. And out of that intensive study of the processes of thinking freely and impartially and devotedly come certain by-products which are substantial conclusions about the nature of things—philosophic assumptions, even if only implicit in content. They are the conclusions which are possible without a misuse or abandonment of the powers of the mind. It is in this sense, and this sense only, that all civilized men are in general agreement about what is true. And this is the only sort of agreement it is possible to advertise without any risk of making a sectarian doctrine out of the idea of civilization.

Mr. Guérard's final statement of "faith"—in his own words, to which he adds St. Paul's thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians—is as follows:

I believe—against what accumulation of realistic evidence!—that there is a *sense* in this universe. When I am conscious of straining against that sense, I am assailed by remorse and despair. Moments of plenitude, peace, and joy were rare in my

life, and may have been delusive; still they sufficed to steady my faith.

Why do I insist upon using the vague metaphor: "there is a *sense* in this universe," when the time-honored terms *God* and *Love* are ready to hand? I am conscious of the wealth of sacred associations that they possess; conscious also that by rejecting them, I am giving offense to many who are active in the good fight. But I am even more conscious of the confusions that these words create; and I cannot shirk the duty of denouncing these confusions.

The word *God* evokes both the Metaphysical Absolute, a pretentious vestment for the inconceivable, and the Fighting God, a splendid metaphor, but frankly anthropomorphic, fraught with contradictions, and linked with tribal legends. My guide must be more of a living force than the God of the Philosophers; more of a mystery than the God of Abraham.

I am reluctant to call my ultimate principle *love*: "one word is too often profaned for me to profane it." It is difficult to soar beyond the commonplace: "it is love, it is love, that makes the world go round." A dispassionate analysis destroys the immediacy of experience: the result is pedantry or cynicism. I admire La Rochefoucauld, Stendahl, and Proust, yet I feel that they lead away from the core of the problem. Sentimental effusions are far worse: they are particularly repellent to me, even in Michelet, who was a great soul.

Here is a man who tells you not only what he thinks, but why, and in each case the authority is what might be termed an intuition of value. But what of all those who will still wish to use these terms? Mr. Guerard would be the first to say, "Let them." He is composing no system for the masses to embrace, but thinking for himself. Why, then, listen to him? Mr. Guérard should be listened to because his thinking represents a civilized mind at work—thinking, that is, according to the best impersonal canons of the age. We need instruction in purity of thought, in the subtle considerations which are important to a man who ranges across the wide country of the Western cultural tradition, attempting to formulate universal judgments from the materials there supplied. Examination of the work of such a mind is an educational experience. He continues:

My essential objection to the word *love* is that we inevitably link it with *sex* and with *jealousy*, two turbid forces alien to the Power I am seeking. I resent the identification of love with sex. The erotic imagery of certain mystics has no appeal to me. The glowing sensuality of the Song of Songs has the purity of fire: but to turn it into a theological symbol seems to me arrant blasphemy. Lust exists in the brutes, and in the human brute too, in the form of whoring, without a particle of what I would recognize as love. And love can be completely divorced from sex. A dog and I loved each other for sixteen years; I feel we are mingled still, "he still half alive, and I half dead." I do not want to minimize the power and beauty of sheer physical attraction: a blind instinct which we may dignify by the name of vital urge. I admit it is possible for sex, companionship, and love to unite: blending, they create a force which has no equal in our existence, just as charcoal, sulphur, and saltpeter combined have a power not found in the separate elements.

In the higher animals, and in man, we find possessiveness or jealousy. It is assumed that love justifies jealousy, is inseparable from jealousy. Yet we know that possessiveness is not good. It is the most outrageous expansion of the ego, seeking to impose its will upon another creature. The person owned becomes an object, a piece of property, and ceases to be a free agent. The selfishness, the cruelty, are not redeemed because they are mutual. The jail remains a jail, even when both prisoners are also jailers.

Sectarian religion and patriotism have made jealousy a virtue: a nation is a jealous god. Is it possible to purify the idea of love from the curse of possessiveness? In many fields, this is not inconceivable. Our ultimate loyalty is only to the highest: I cannot give unconditional allegiance to sect, party, country, "right or wrong." Love for a faith, a land, a cause, can be ardent and holy without being exclusive. I love all countries I have known at first hand, France, England, Germany, America, Morocco, Mexico. I can feel love for the spirit of all religions, and even rejoice in the quaintness of their historical garments. I can love all great causes, particularly liberty *and* social justice. And this means that I do not and that I cannot, *belong* to any one of them.

Perhaps we cannot say that we have put together an answer to our original inquiry—the inquiry concerning a standard that will enable us

to distinguish the kind of truth we need; perhaps this sort of standard must be secreted rather than stated. One thing, however, is certain: We need to learn a basic honesty in what we tell our children. We need to make it plain to them that all that they can inherit from their parents is the raw material of life. A life has to be made; the characteristic of a high civilization is awareness of this fact, and not a wealth of things which are prepared and bequeathed to oncoming generations.

We need to tell them that the public truths are never the important truths, and that the well-worn paths are never the paths to freedom. How astonishing it is that such things should have to be said. This is the simplest sort of verity, known in practically every age but our own! The American Plains Indians practiced a custom—perhaps it should be called a rite—according to which each young man, upon reaching a certain age, was obliged to go out into the desert, taking neither food nor water, and remain far from home, in isolation, until he dreamed a dream which would give his life meaning, and until he found a secret name that would represent his identity to himself. Perhaps not every Indian youth had the sort of dream he hoped for, but this custom obviously gave dignity and importance to the idea of finding an *individual* sense of life orientation. In medieval times there was the tradition of knight errantry, of the quest for the Holy Grail. This idea of "high calling" is the inward heritage of every human being, and while the abolition of caste and class in our society has made the old symbolisms inoperative in our lives, the heritage must be made to persist—we must learn to do with our minds what our loss of custom now deprives us of.

Ours is an age in which each man must devise his own symbols. This, surely, can be taught to the young. As the basis of such a program, Mr. Guérard offers a statement formulating the purpose of the Dwight Harrington Terry Foundation (devoted to *Lectures on Religion in the Light of Science and Philosophy*), and this

statement, we think, could hardly be improved upon:

. . . the object is . . . the building of the truths of science and philosophy into the structure of a broadened and purified religion. . . . The lectures shall be subject to no philosophical or religious test, and no one who is an earnest seeker after truth shall be excluded because his views seem radical or destructive of existing beliefs. The founder realizes that the liberalism of one generation is often conservatism in the next, and that many an apostle of true liberty has suffered martyrdom at the hands of the orthodox. . . . The cardinal principles of the Foundation . . . are loyalty to the truth, lead where it will, and devotion to human welfare.

Problems remain, of course. What shall we tell the children, during the formative years when their minds are not yet ready to grapple with ultimate questions?

But perhaps we underestimate the children. It seems likely that the children of parents who are absorbed in the quest for knowledge, after the manner of civilized human beings, will not lack for instruction.

Yet it must be admitted that only a few attempts have been made at the creation of institutions to forward the independent spirit, whereas we have dozens, even hundreds, prosperous and thriving, to maintain and strengthen the sectarian spirit. Institutions, of course, have inherent tendencies to sectarianism. An institution to counter the tendencies of institutions may be quite impossible, but human beings are resourceful and they may be able to work out something along these lines. Especially if we can be sure to remember that the practice of independent thinking must always outrun, eternally violate, alter and remodel the forms of even the best of institutions.

## *REVIEW*

### "PRIDE OF STATE"

JOSEPH MORRAY'S volume of this title (Beacon Press) has now been in print for several months, and we should have liked to review it with less delay. The book is very good. Presently a visiting professor of law at the University of California in Berkeley, Mr. Morray is a comparatively young man with a rich background of experience. Following undergraduate work at Annapolis, he was an intelligence officer during World War II and in Korea. Subsequently he passed through Harvard Law School and practiced law in San Francisco, then turned to teaching.

The publisher's claim seems accurate enough—"Pride of State will arouse both resentment and admiration; but no one who reads it will fail to see the warning"—although we would qualify by adding that while no one will have difficulty in understanding *what* Mr. Morray is saying, interpreting his intent is another matter. The Preface says:

This is a book about the pride of a nation, the United States of America. It hardly need be added that it is therefore a book about our national morality. As pupils of Western civilization, of Hebrew prophets, Greek philosophers and the New Testament we are familiar with the insight that the pride of man raises a moral problem and great risks of catastrophe to himself. What is not so familiar is the notion that a state, too may be guilty of inordinate pride and may out of the blindness which pride induces work its own doom. It is the theme of this book that America is now showing signs of an arrogance which has always been the peculiar peril of great men and great states.

"The pride of a state" is a figure of speech. The true seat of the moral problem of national pride is in the citizens who make and support its policies. The morality which we attribute to a state is a resultant of the attitudes taken by individual citizens toward state problems. Therefore we are led to the problem of patriotism, wherein morality and reason struggle against primitive and emotional urges seeking satisfaction in a fellowship of phobias toward the outsider. Out of this dialectic of patriotism, which takes place in the breast of every citizen as well as in

political controversy between parties, national morality emerges.

I am primarily concerned for the welfare of the United States of America. Therefore the harsh and candid words in this book are directed primarily at her. I leave to the Russians a criticism of the Soviet Union. Since this is the reverse of most of what we read these days, wherein Americans praise and Russians condemn American practices, and vice versa, I am aware that the reader may easily mistake my identity. This risk is made all the greater by my two principal propositions, that abroad we are embarked on an incipient imperialism and that at home the American communists are more sinned against than sinning. Readers whose minds are so closed on these subjects that they are not able even to entertain such possibilities had better go no further, unless it be to exercise their indignation. The more discriminating will recognize in my presumption of liberty to speak freely the highest compliment a citizen can pay his country.

*Pride of State* is in three sections. The first, "Theory of Patriotism," shows how the ethics of patriotism, of itself, fails to reach the concern of the philosopher—which is love of truth for its own sake. The morality of patriotism, in the final analysis, demands "fidelity to institutions," and since all institutions can be turned to unjust purposes, subservience to institutions is by definition detrimental to any conception of One World. In our own time, there is little evidence of the sincerity illustrated in the patriotism of earlier epochs—filled with devotion to the welfare of the nation.

The second section of *Pride of State* contrasts the issues of civil liberties with the interests of militarism. The third section, "Patriotism in One World," establishes the larger dimensions of the questions raised by this survey. Blatant nationalism, as Morray shows, often involves the fomenting of mass hatred, and is barbarous by definition. The kind of patriotism which we can stand in greater quantities, and for lack of which we may lose whatever is worth "loving" about our country, is the world patriotism of a Thomas Paine.

The closing passages of *Pride of State* are concerned with a realm *beyond* patriotism. They deserve to be widely quoted, as the following makes plain:

It is only the "wise and virtuous" who are capable of a world patriotism. That is why it is such a rare achievement. But it is as precious and admirable as it is rare. When it is condemned by national patriots it is clear that these are being pulled by the bases of the two horses in the team of duty and passion which give patriotism its motion. Insofar as patriotism is moved by a sense of duty it must be drawn toward universality. There is no true duty of hatred in patriotism, but an aggression blended with a duty to one's compatriots. Duty in the world patriots has overcome the aggression and xenophobia disappears. This may be a process of repression rather than of conversion, so that discontents will appear in other directions. This is characteristic of the process of civilization. World patriots are a vanguard. Those who cannot appreciate them reveal the primitive stage of their own development. It is a higher thing to love humanity than a nation. Since it is the individual that counts, patriotism is vicious when it puts obstacles in the way of a man's moral progress from concern for fellow citizens to concern for all mankind. Furthermore, the real benefactors of the nation may prove to be those who look beyond its interests. With its vision blurred by its passion, patriotism is apt to fix its attention on short range goals, to the defeat of the true interests of the nation. Hitler might have been saved from his *hybris* had there been more Germans who obeyed a moral law against the claims of the state. It is easy to name states ruined by the counsels of patriots; hard, if not impossible, to find one ruined by the counsels and acts of citizens of the world or lovers of God. The principal risk in paying the respect deserved by these optimists, these "children of light," is that they will teach the nation the blessings of peace.

That patriotism is an imperfect virtue does not mean it is unworthy. It is still a boon to all insofar as it obeys the instinct of Eros. But since it is imperfect, every patriot must beware that he is not carried by his enthusiasm into conflict with humanism and duties of universal scope. The most realistic hope of mankind lies in the civilization of a prevailing patriotism. What this means with respect to the rest of the world is that patriotism shall come to recognize that the national interest is dependent on national self-control. Love of country is the desire for her good. In time man will perhaps come to recognize that the good of

a country does not lie in great power used to dominate others but in national conduct which can serve as a model worthy of imitation by all.

## COMMENTARY

### BARBERSHOP BLUES

NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV'S visit to the United States has already brought a spate of comment in the American press, and discussion of the Russian premier's flying tour of the country will undoubtedly go on for months to come. The official reaction of Americans to the Soviet diplomat's coming included a noticeable ambivalence—the desire to "do the right thing," coupled with a careful avoidance of appearing too friendly, lest there be criticism of a "soft" attitude.

About all we have to contribute to this popular topic is a brief report of conversations overheard in a barbershop—two barbershops, to be exact. Your editors, while having many things in common, patronize different barbershops, and not alone for the opportunity of enjoying different listening-posts giving insight into the state of the nation.

In one of these hair-cutting establishments, the head barber and owner made himself heard loudly and at length. The oration was mostly an expression of supreme disgust for Mayor Norris Poulson of Los Angeles, for having behaved so ungraciously (the barber used another adjective) to our country's guest. At the dinner for Mr. Khrushchev at the Ambassador Hotel, Mr. Poulson made an unfortunate reference to something that the Soviet representative had said in the East—a matter of who would bury whom, in the competition between Communism and Capitalism. Mr. Khrushchev had been questioned on this statement, and had explained, while still in the East, that Marx, Engels, and Lenin had predicted the downfall of Capitalism, not from war, but from the forces of history. Mr. Poulson decided to challenge the "burial" statement again—a development which annoyed Mr. Khrushchev considerably. "I have already clarified that," he said. "I trust that even mayors read."

The barber found Mr. Poulson emphatically wanting in both political and social graces. He argued that there was no reason for an American political figure to attempt to seize the stage when greeting a foreign "celebrity" whose coming might mean a great deal to the future of the United States. "*No one*," the barbershop owner exclaimed, "said anything about war between the United States and Russia until Mr. Poulson spoke up!" A man waiting for a trim

commented, saying, "It seems to me that we invited this man to come here, and the least we can do is refrain from trying to embarrass him while he is here. Now, I guess you could say that Los Angeles has shown itself to be the most warlike of cities, and if there is a war, this city will be at the top of the list to get bombed!" This looks pretty grim in cold type, and it should be noted that it was an attempt at humor—a successful one, for the men having their hair cut.

The head barber in the other shop was shearing away when a man came in with a little card which he passed around among the patrons. This card was a solicitation for people to join in a movement to demonstrate and picket against Mr. Khrushchev. The head barber looked at the card, shook his head slowly, and said, "Crazy, crazy—these people are crazy." A patron waiting for a chair read the card and echoed, "It's crazy." This man made it plain that he did not think much of the Russian visitor. But he said, "The thing to do, when someone like that comes along, is you walk right along. You don't do anything for or against him."

Well, this is our Gallup Poll of the week—to which we might add one more story. A competitor in the Pacific Southwest Amateur Tennis Tournament was waiting to take part in a match. But he couldn't get his mind on the match, only fifteen minutes away. He was too upset by the behavior of Americans charged with official welcome of Mr. Khrushchev. "We ask him to come here, and then we insult him," he said. "It's not a matter of what you think of the Russians, or of Communism. It's a matter of courtesy. If we can't show a visitor courtesy—"

These unstudied and casually observed responses to the events of the Khrushchev visit reflect an elemental decency which we hope got through to the Soviet premier, along with his other impressions.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves NOTES ON CREATIVITY

ONE might expect the content of *ETC.*, the review of general semantics, to be far too rarefied for helpful discussion of educational problems. However, the Spring issue contains three feature articles on "creativity," with numerous applications in both home and school.

The first, "The Nature of Creativity," is by Prof. Rollo May, author of *Man's Search for Himself*. Dr. May again gives evidence that his concern for the rules of logic in discourse does not prevent him from appreciating Plato. From the *Symposium*, he derives a distinction often missed by Plato's critics, for here Plato is all in favor of artists and poets, provided they help to "bring into birth some new realities." May proposes that, according to Plato, "creative persons are the ones who express *Being itself*." He adds: "Or, as I would put it, these are the ones who enlarge human consciousness. Their creativity is the most basic manifestation of man's fulfilling his own being in his world."

Dr. May points out that the general disposition of psychology during the first half of this century induced prejudice against discussion of "creativity," on the grounds that its analysis was vague and mystical. But this is ridiculous, for, as May shows, the creative act is primarily a successful *encounter* with life. The child in nursery school, as well as the theoretical physicist, is most alive when he finds a new perspective.

The second article in the *ETC.* symposium, by Harold H. Anderson, a research professor of psychology at Michigan State University, concludes that the democratic society will fail to fulfill itself without conditions which stimulate creativity. As Anderson puts it: "It is not just 'acceptance' or the 'permissive' atmosphere of an open system that produces creativity. There must, in addition, be stimulation, intense, invigorating

stimulation through the confronting and free interplay of differences. It is only partly true to say that one can be as creative as the environment permits."

The third article, by Franklin J. Shaw, director of clinical studies in the psychology department of the University of Alabama, is headed "Creative Resources: Their Care and Nurture." Dr. Shaw's thesis is that while educators cannot "make" people creative, it is possible to work toward freeing each individual's potential, whatever it may be. The parent or the teacher must first see the necessity for passing beyond orthodox points of view and beyond the trepidation caused by overwhelming authority. But he must also understand orthodoxy and accord it tolerance by recognizing that "prevailing points of view serve a good purpose in that they present us with ideas or interpretations that can be overturned." Shaw continues:

Let us, therefore, select one such point of view for upheaval and see where it leads us. Our hope is that it might lead to adventures into inner space that might even compete with our current fascination with the prospect of Sunday afternoon excursions to the moon. The point of view chosen for upheaval is that conflict is a burden to be endured. The substitute proposed is that *creative resources and expression through the resolution of conflict or the reconciliation of contradictions*.

Dr. Shaw has some illustrations of what may be done at the university level:

If creative resources find expression through the reconciliation of contradictions, as we have proposed, it would seem to follow that contradictions can be precipitated for the purpose of activating creative resources, a possibility that lends further credence to the proposition that contradictions or conflict may contribute something more than burdens to human experience. An illustration of a maneuver designed to precipitate contradictions for the purpose of activating creative resources is afforded by the following incident: A student responded to an examination question asking for an explanation of Maslow's hierarchy theory of motivation with a very good account of the theory as well as a gratuitous criticism of it which he concluded, however, with the qualification, "But who am I?" The instructor wrote

on his paper before returning it, "Who is Maslow?" The intent of this maneuver on the part of the instructor was, of course, to precipitate a contradiction between deference to authority and departure from authority as well as a reconciliation of this contradiction to the effect that one can respect authority without sacrificing independence of thought. The activity emerging from such a reconciliation or larger view, as we like to call it, might be taken as a definition of what is meant by the expression of creative resources. In this instance it would take the form, hopefully, of the student's paying greater heed to his own ideas.

Speaking of the reconciliation of contradictions as a larger view, be it noted, connotes "going higher," which may be a more felicitous term than "going deeper," as psychoanalytic usage has it. The purpose of "going deeper" is presumably to strike gold in the form of emotional insight. It strikes us that this is actually a matter of going higher or getting on top of the problem rather than going deeper. While preoccupied with semantic problems, the term "psychosynthesis" might also be suggested to refer to the process of reconciling contradictions or attaining the larger view. This process, we have said, is basic to the expression of creative resources.

An older word for this "going higher" is *philosophy*, and to our mind it still has some advantages over a term like "psychosynthesis." Psychosynthesis sounds like a process which sometimes goes on and sometimes doesn't, whereas philosophy is something that men *do*. Of course, we are in sympathy with Dr. Shaw for his choice of the newer term, since, until recently, few academic philosophers have done much more than play around with entirely familiar arrangements of words and conceptions; like the historians, they have seldom tried to resolve contradictions by referring to every conceivable possibility—and this is precisely what the creative thinker must do.

In any case, even young children need to understand that the joys of thinking involve a perception of contradictions or paradoxes, plus the expectation that the contradiction or the paradox can be challenged by some new resolution. For this reason, attempts at impartial discussion of controversial issues may make all the difference between the indoctrinated mind and the

educated mind. Philosophy, as consciously attempted "psychosyntheses," is indeed a matter of "going higher" in an effort to get "on top of the problem."

The wise parent will always grant some meaning to any child's thought or desire. If the thought runs contrary to the parent's conception of truth, or if the desire runs counter to the welfare of others, it is the parent's task to build up the case for the "contradiction" and then—to encourage the child to undertake reconciliation.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Trap of Abstractions

A READER'S letter of comment on a recent lead article is so unexpected a reaction, and so closely argued, that we print it entire:

In "Direct Encounter," MANAS, Sept. 9, you fail to cover a more serious aspect of man in flight.

I am of the opinion that man today has a problem of personal identity in this era of specialization. What do you think of the selfhood of a human being, of the unchangeableness of human character? What, at the bottom, is this thing called character, this frequently heterogeneous combination of qualities which, in their totality and common functioning, constitute the ego, the self? Is it not annoying, and at the same time frightening, to be forced all one's life long to represent the same individual self, endlessly to react to the same stimuli in the same manner? Does it not appear to you a Prison, to have been sentenced to be during your life a precise creature and no other—to be sentenced to this city (you name it) and to no other, to this house, to this activity, from which you cannot stir in any manner that does not correspond to that aggregate of qualities and conditions which is labelled John Doe?

Suppose, for example, that a man were to become tired of his *I*, thoroughly and unmitigatedly tired of the despotism of his own character, of this conglomeration of habits, inclinations, preoccupations, idiosyncrasies of speech and of thought. Couldn't one conceive of such a rebellion against oneself?

Wouldn't that be precisely as though an image in a mirror were to take on life and march forth to act on its own initiative? How many people—scientists, professional men, semiskilled people—become thoroughly disgusted with the ever-changing hypotheses of their job or science; or become deathly sick of practicing a profession or job which forces them to conceal the inadequacy of their means and their complete skepticism beneath a deluding assurance? What doctor does not suffer from the beseeching looks of those who are destined to death and whom he cannot help, and from the questions for which there are no answers, while he must pretend to satisfy with prescriptions and methods the rules and prejudices of a profession into which he has become embedded by tacit and reciprocal agreements?

Suppose a man wants to step out of his own life: life's framework holds him fast. If he attempts to turn to another calling, the discovery awaits him that he hasn't as much skill as a plumber needs to remove an obstructed drain. Perhaps he has a family. Every free decision is checked and all decisive knowledge throttled. To his last hour he must continue what he began in his earlier hour, implacably, unchangeably, even though he goes mad.

All the wisdom of the philosophers never got one ahead; not so far forward that one could loosen one's environmental chains to a point of decent freedom. . . .

We are not sure whether or not this reader has deliberately set up a straw man for an opponent. Very few people we know are tired of themselves; on the contrary, the common human tendency is to have an overweening affection for oneself. Yet it must be admitted that something like the distaste for self expressed by this reader shaped the strongest passages of Tolstoy's *Confession*, a book that is required reading for every Westerner who is struggling to grasp the meaning of maturity.

But perhaps the key to the difficulties voiced in this letter is found in its last paragraph. Here, "getting ahead" is identified as "decent freedom," and the obstacle to decent freedom is the confinement of environment.

What seems important to determine is who or what is the Enemy, in this situation. If the objective is freedom, then we have first to acknowledge that the very idea of freedom requires *some* kind of environment. Freedom in an endless void would be an intolerable monotony. We want freedom only because we want to do something with our freedom, and *some* environment must provide the field for this doing.

Well, what sort of environment shall we have in which to exercise our freedom? This is the important question. Our correspondent obviously wants one without *chains*. But what are "chains"? Chains are things which keep us from doing what we want to do.

Men are prevented in three ways from doing what they want to do. They are prevented from walking on the water, or flying unaided in the air, by the law of gravity. Yet there are ways to travel on the water and in the air, and we have found them out. So, should we look upon gravity as a "chain," or as a condition which supplies recognizable alternative for human decision? Learning about these alternatives is called progress. If the alternatives we know about concern the physical world and the possibilities of action there, we call it scientific progress. So, you could say that while the laws of nature prevent us from doing things, they enable us to do others. Should we object to these laws, or accept them as a necessary part of an environment in which freedom is a possibility—a possibility depending upon our knowledge of the laws?

This, we think, is what John Dewey meant when he said that freedom is knowledge of necessity.

A second way in which we are prevented from doing what we want to do arises from the limitations placed upon our behavior by other men. These limitations constitute what we call our political environment. But the laws of the political environment, unlike the laws of the physical environment, are not immutably fixed. They are subject to discussion, evaluation, and to change.

Nobody gets emotional about the injustice of a hurricane—almost nobody, that is. Morals turn on human behavior, not upon the behavior of the elements. We become indignant and aroused to action by the circumstances of the political environment because we are convinced that those circumstances can and ought to be changed. But the fact of the matter is that we lack wisdom concerning *the best way* to change them. We are frequently horrified by the results of what was originally well-intentioned political action. Revolutions don't turn out in the way they are expected to turn out. As a result of our manifest ignorance concerning the essentials of human

freedom, we have a wide spectrum of political theories, all the way from complete anarchism to complete totalitarianism, and each theory proposes to give men what they want—or, under the practical necessities of politics, what political theorists think that men ought to want or ought to have. (It is a pretty basic characteristic of human nature that men often feel justified in making decisions about the freedom, happiness, and well-being of other men—and this, of course, complicates the problem presented by the political environment.)

But if you object to the unreliable character of our knowledge about the political environment, who or what are you objecting to? The complexity of the problem? The stupidity or unmanageable nature of human beings? Our common ignorance of all these matters? Is this, as in the case of the limitations of the physical environment, an argument with the universe? Men, after all, are a part of the natural order. On this basis, political problems are also natural problems, although of a much subtler sort. We might say that while we know something about physical necessity, the facts of political necessity are the footballs of the modern ideological conflict.

It seems probable, however, that the facts of political necessity are not political in origin. Some of those facts derive, very likely, from the physical world, but most of them derive from the subjective qualities of human beings, and this is a field where our ignorance is notorious.

This brings us to the third way in which we are prevented from doing what we want to do. We prevent ourselves. The internal obstacles to human freedom or happiness have been variously named. The common terms are "sin" and "ignorance." The dynamics behind these labels are *Will* and *Mind*. The meaning of sin turns on what we consider to be the meaning of Will, and our relation to ignorance is defined by either a pessimistic or an optimistic conception of the role and potentialities of mind.

Let us now make some generalizations about the comparative success experienced by men in overcoming these three sorts of obstacles to freedom. We know of no serious complaint about the problems presented by the physical environment. In fact, the greatest claims to achievement by our technological civilization lie in this region. We are exceedingly proud, perhaps justly, of our knowledge and use of physical "necessity." We have turned the laws of nature into a monument to the manipulative power of the human mind and the skills which result from application of the mind to the laws of nature. No problem here.

Our historical situation in relation to politics is quite different. Despite the impressive record of political thought, from Plato's time until the present, we are now questioning the validity of many of our political assumptions. Three works may be cited: Dwight Macdonald's *The Root Is Man* (Cunningham Press, Alhambra, Calif.); Roderick Seidenberg's *Posthistoric Man* (University of North Carolina, 1950); and Jack Jones's *To the End of Thought*, an essay first published (in part) by *i.e.*, *The Cambridge Review* (November, 1955), more lately by *Newspaper* (for November, 1958), a monthly periodical issued in New York, and soon to appear in book form. The radical pacifist monthly, *Liberation* (Summer, September, and October issues), is currently running discussion of Jones's work. Macdonald's book is an examination of the fallacies of Marxism and an endeavor to lay out the ground of humanist principles for political thought and action; Seidenberg and Jones are concerned with the dangers of the completely rational society, although their development of this subject is by no means the same.

As for the success achieved in the region of inner or subjective freedom, which results, or ought to result, in reconciliation with the physical and political conditions under which we live, there is almost nothing to report. Western civilization, that is, has no commonly accepted yardsticks with

which to measure achievements of this sort. For systematic evaluation of this kind of freedom, we must turn to the canons of Oriental philosophy, to the *Bhagavad-Gita* or the Buddhist sutras. Only in the past twenty years or so have Westerners begun to give serious attention to this question. The psychologists most frequently quoted in MANAS—Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, A. H. Maslow, and Carl Rogers—are in large measure responsible for what is now being said, in a scientific frame of reference, concerning this aspect of the problem of human freedom.

As for the general body of the letter of our correspondent, it seems to us that a review of the questions we have raised should have the effect of changing the problem he sets into another kind of issue, or group of issues. To accept this letter in its own terms is to acknowledge defeat, and where defeat is accepted, no discussion is possible.