

THOREAU'S MESSAGE FOR MAN

[This is Part III of the four-part series on Henry David Thoreau, by Richard Groff.—Editors.]

SINCE Thoreau was no metaphysician, he spells out no formal theories. One finds in his writings, however, certain concepts recurring often enough so that patterns begin to emerge. The core of his teaching on the spiritual life of man, for example, can perhaps be reduced to three closely related points: (1) Absolute values exist. (2) Man is capable of perceiving something of absolute values directly. (3) Absolute values are not to be comprehended by the intellect alone; man, to fulfill his destiny, must enable them to work themselves out in his own life process. Let us take up each of these points in turn.

Absolute values exist. Human beings seeking the certainty of absolutes fall into two classes. One class seeks, perhaps unconsciously, to evade personal responsibility and find psychological security in some religious, political, ideological or intellectual orthodoxy which claims to have all the correct answers. This quest is born of weakness. Those embarking on it never find the real absolutes, but instead are sold a cheap substitute masquerading as the genuine article. The other class of seekers of absolutes is motivated by a deep dissatisfaction with the welter of conflicting standards of society, and an inner prompting that with the great issues of life, earthbound values fall short, and for them we need a kind of fourth-dimensional yardstick, calibrated not in terms of time but eternity. This quest is born of strength. For these seekers it is a sign of degeneracy that man's morality is expedient and relative instead of ultimate and absolute. Thoreau belongs in this class. The acceptance of only relative values can never rescue us from chaos, he seems to say: "The expedients of the nations clash with one another, only the absolutely right is expedient for all."³⁵ And again, "The fickle person is he that does not

know what is true or right absolutely,—who has not an ancient wisdom for a lifetime, but a new prudence every hour."³⁶

It may be easier to recognize absolute values in the simplicity of the abstract than in the complexity of the concrete, but in Thoreau's view they are central to sound thinking, for they direct our attention away from rationalizing our shortcomings and compromising our principles by focusing it upon those constant and changeless standards by which—our enlightened intuition whispers to us—a man's life is ultimately measured. It is easy enough to insist upon an inflexible standard of accuracy and truthfulness when a ticket-seller is short-changing us; the test comes for example, when we are required to sign on the dotted line that our income tax return is true and correct to the best of our knowledge and belief. A mature faith in the absolutes is born of an intuitive sense that one's cleaving unto truth has a permanent value which cannot be discounted, which somehow contributes to the harmony of the cosmos and endures in eternity, whatever may prove its consequences in time.

To postulate the existence of absolute or ultimate values is not necessarily to assert one's thoroughgoing understanding of them. Can we not be perceptive without being presumptuous? Thoreau had intimations of the higher laws, to be sure, but he never claimed infallibility or clairvoyance concerning them. Moreover, it is chiefly in man's relationship with the "noble abstractions"—pure truth, pure freedom, pure love, and the rest—that absolutes are to be applied. Introducing absolute concepts into the derived and arbitrary issues of social customs, political questions, and the like often proves only confusing.

There can be little doubt where Thoreau stands on this point of the existence and importance of absolute values: "It is not so important that many should be as good as you, as that there be some absolute goodness somewhere, for that will leaven the whole lump."³⁷ Further, he declares: "Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only investment which never fails."³⁸ And his obedience to a higher authority than his neighbors recognized is captured for all time in his observation, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away."³⁹

Where others would wrangle confusedly on the periphery of an important question, Thoreau with his clarity of mind cut through the confusion by seeing its absolute and not merely its relative implications. For example, to those for whom the validity of the Fugitive Slave Law hinged upon its Constitutionality, he says: "In important moral and vital questions, like this, it is just as impertinent to ask whether a law is constitutional or not, as to ask whether it is profitable or not. . . . The question is, not whether you or your grandfather, seventy years ago, did not enter into an agreement to serve the Devil, and that service is not accordingly now due; but whether you will not now, for once and at last, serve God,—in spite of your own past recreancy, or that of your ancestor,—by obeying that eternal and only just CONSTITUTION, which He, and not any Jefferson or Adams, has written in your being."⁴⁰

There is a vast difference between the merely verbal affirmation that one believes in the existence of absolutes, and the direct knowledge of their existence which the true mystic has experienced. Which brings us to our second point.

Man is capable of perceiving something of absolute values directly. This idea is implicit in Thoreau's whole career. He rejected as

insufficient, if not actually misleading, every source of authority commonly accepted by society—civil law, the church, custom, and all the ill-grounded enthusiasms of his time, falling back upon his own resources altogether. Props were for scarecrows. He would stand or fall as a man: "Alas! this is the crying sin of the age, this want of faith in the prevalence of a man. Nothing can be effected but by one man. He who wants help wants everything. . . . We must first succeed alone, that we may enjoy our success together."⁴¹

That the intensity of Thoreau's meditations sometimes carried him into an ecstatic state of mystic union can scarcely be doubted. Hear his own testimony:

Then idle Time ran gadding by
And left me with Eternity alone
I hear beyond the range of sound,
I see beyond the range of sight,—

I see, smell, taste, hear, feel, that everlasting Something to which we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very selves; the one historic truth, the most remarkable fact which can become the distinct and uninvited subject of our thought, the actual glory of the universe; the only fact which a human being cannot avoid recognizing, or in some way forget or dispense with.

I hearing get, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before,
I moments live, who lived but years,
And truth discern, who knew but learning's
lore.⁴²

Thus does Thoreau catch a glimpse of the order in a higher realm.

How did Thoreau come by such knowledge? Why should he rather than, say, his friends Alcott and Channing, who were perhaps equally intelligent and idealistic, have been favored to receive this wisdom? What Thoreau learned at Walden did not drop into his mind unsought. It was no windfall. He was *looking* for something, though he may not have known exactly what. He was willing to pay a price for it and even chance that it would not be forthcoming. Possibly it would be more accurate to say he was *willing to*

fulfill certain prerequisites rather than "willing to pay a price," for it is no loss when one loses that which one is better off without—that is to say, attachments to refined physical comforts, to reputation, financial security, and the whole timetable of trivia which most of us ordinarily allow to rule our lives. With the man of wisdom, clear thinking becomes a function of right living. Certain secrets of life forever concealed from those who accept uncritically the standards and goals of their society, and from the rebel who defies them without a valid reason, may be revealed to the man whose means and ends are of a higher sort altogether. Whoever found the headwaters of a stream by drifting with the current? Pointedly, Thoreau asks, "How can we expect a harvest of thought who have not had a seed-time of character?"⁴³

Here was a man who did not lean. He sought and to a considerable extent found the strength and equilibrium to stand upright alone. Nor was he in doubt as to the ultimate origin of those powers: "Knowledge does not come to us by details," he says, "but in flashes of light from heaven."⁴⁴

Absolute values are not to be comprehended by the intellect alone; man, to fulfill his destiny, must enable them to work themselves out in his own life process. Thoreau has a paragraph concluding with a revealing couplet which illustrates that by which he believes man is measured: "There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with the production of this, stereotyped in the poet's life. It is *what he has become through his work*. Not how is the idea expressed in stone, or on canvas or paper, is the question, but how far it has obtained form and expression in the life of the artist.

"My life is the poem I would have writ
But I could not both live and utter it."⁴⁵

This then is less an apology for unfinished work or artistic inadequacies than an affirmation of his faith that it is the *quality* of a man's life which is most important after all, whatever other

achievements he may prefer to point to. Thoreau's life was his message. Nor could he deliver it in any other form. Let him read it who can.

This recognition of Thoreau's, that he was *living* his message, recalls Cicero's observation that "the whole of virtue consists in its practice," and that of Thomas à Kempis, "I had rather feel contrition than know the definition thereof."

We have already heard Thoreau's conviction that to be a philosopher is chiefly "to live . . . a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust."⁴⁶ It is—mark it well—to live. Not to preach or to write or merely to speculate academically, not to subscribe to any creed or join any organization, but to *live* the good life. The Confucian, Wang Yang-ming, said, "To know and yet not to do is in fact not to know." No thinker's words, however eloquent, can carry him further than the solid underpinning of his deeds, as the boards of a floor cannot project beyond the last joist. It was clear to Thoreau that higher knowledge could not be separated from life itself: "The title *wise* is, for the most part falsely applied. How can one be a wise man, if he does not know any better how to live than other men.;—if he is only more cunning and intellectually subtle? Does wisdom work in a treadmill? or does she teach how to succeed by *her example*? Is there any such thing as wisdom not applied to life?"⁴⁷

For Thoreau the good life exists—where it exists—as a living awareness practiced from moment to moment. Thus in the end the only sermon a man can preach is his own righteous life. The life of the alert, wholesome, creative man speaks with a compelling eloquence forever denied to his tongue or pen. Its influence for good, if subtler and less immediate than that of the garden variety of pulpit orator or popular writer, is deeper, and takes root in richer soil. Throughout his life everyone whose path crosses his may see clarity and uprightness and good will, clad in flesh and blood, walk the earth. He would be a rash judge who should insist that this sight is

of little significance in the shaping of men's characters.

To whom does Thoreau address his message? In *Walden* he appeals to his Concord neighbors, common men no less than intellectuals, to start doing now what they most deeply believe in. His challenges dare all comers. One needs no scholarly training to understand the core of what Thoreau has to say. His ideas, being universal in their applicability, address themselves to no intellectual or social elite, but only to that aristocracy of the spirit whose members are to be found in every station of life and which sometimes recklessly ignores traditional boundaries.

In the life and writings of Thoreau we see a man who dared to take his life in his hands and with his own unaided powers seek out the golden treasures of the mind and spirit which the rest of us are dumbly content to hear others talk about, as if we could know them only through another. You can send a foreign correspondent to bring you news of distant war or earthquake, but for knowledge of heaven you must journey there yourself, if your strength carries you only to the outskirts. Reading Thoreau may encourage us to come to grips with life boldly ourselves instead of adventuring upon it vicariously, as when reading Thoreau. Is it not this legitimate confidence to face life bravely and joyously alone which each of us ultimately seeks? What Thoreau says to us, is only a confirmation of that which we have already sensed in our highest intimations.

Ambler, Pennsylvania RICHARD GROFF

(*To Be Concluded*)

NOTES

The complete *Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, 20 vols., Boston Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1906, have long been out of print, but numerous selections of his representative writings are available. For a full length biography see H. S. Canby's *Thoreau*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co. 1939, recently re-issued as a Beacon Press Paperback (BP 65). An excellent critical biography is J.

W. Krutch's *Henry David Thoreau*, New York: William Sloane Associates, T948.

35. Week, "Monday."
36. *Journal*, as quoted in Canby, p. 186.
37. "Civil Disobedience."
38. *Walden*, Ch. XI.
39. *Walden*, Ch. XVIII.
40. "Slavery in Massachusetts."
41. "Paradise (to be) Regained."
42. *Week*, "Monday," and "Friday."
43. Quoted in R. W. Emerson's "Thoreau" (biographical sketch).
44. "Life Without Principle."
45. Week, "Friday."
46. *Walden*, Ch. I.
47. "Life Without Principle."

REVIEW

HOWARD FAST'S LATEST FICTION

THE first story in Mr. Howard Fast's "science fiction" collection, *The Edge of Tomorrow*, has already drawn comment in MANAS for August 2. The first *true*, complete men are portrayed by Fast as waiting to be born, and it is the underlying thesis of the tale that they will be born as soon as we let them. For these "true" men of the future are really among our own present infants; their amazing potentialities, in our culture, remain hidden from parents and teachers. Now this, it seems to us, is what Mr. Fast has always been concerned with: What are the highest human potentialities? What prevents their realization? How may they be encouraged to appear?

When Mr. Fast was a Communist, his dream was a society which would eventually transform itself for the sake of generations unborn. Well, the Communist dream failed for Mr. Fast, as for many another eager idealist. But Fast's idealism perseveres. Every story in *The Edge of Tomorrow* either illustrates what is holding back man's highest potential, or suggests what may conceivably draw it forth. Psychological understanding and the will to envision values beyond politics and conventional religion are now portrayed as the only real hope.

So let's take a look at some of the Fast "fantasies," for here are some non-preaching messages which make a good deal of sense. One tale, called *The Large Ant*, has to do with the sudden appearance of an antlike creature from another planet, which has never been conditioned to the acceptance of competition and conflict. Whenever one appears, it is immediately slain by a terrified human being—though the ant is itself quite friendly in disposition. The central character in the story has encountered one of the first of these remarkable visitors while on a fishing trip, and after obeying his destructive impulse, asked a psychologist why he had killed first and asked questions afterwards. The psychologist replies:

Look at yourself, Mr. Morgan—a cultured and intelligent man, yet you cannot conceive of a mentality that does not include weapons as a prime necessity. Yet a weapon is an unusual thing, Mr. Morgan. An instrument of murder. We don't think that way, because the weapon has become the symbol of the world we inhabit. Is that civilized, Mr. Morgan? Or are the weapon and civilization in the ultimate sense incompatible? Can you imagine a mentality to which the concept of murder is impossible—or let me say absent? We see everything through our own subjectivity. Why shouldn't some other—this creature, for example—see the process of mentation out of his subjectivity? So he approaches a creature of our world—and he is slain. Why? What explanation?

To a fully-developed intelligence, the psychiatrist adds, "the concept of murder would be monstrous beyond the power of thought."

The story called *Cato the Martian* describes how the high civilization on the planet Mars is finally corrupted through discovery of the meaning of the earth-word "righteous." This Cato, like his Roman predecessor, devises a use for the word "righteousness"—but only to create the spirit of wrath. He addresses the Martian senate in ringing tones:

We on Mars had never known the meaning of *war*; it took Earth to teach us that. We had never known what it meant to kill, to destroy, to torture. Indeed, when we first began to analyze and understand the various languages of Earth, we doubted our own senses, our own analytical abilities. We heard, but at first we refused to believe what we heard. We refused to believe that there could be an entire race of intelligent beings whose existence was dedicated to assault, to murder and thievery and brutality beyond the imagination of Martians.

Who could believe such things? We were a race of love and mercy. We tried to rationalize, to explain to excuse—but when our receivers picked up the first television signals, well we could no longer rationalize, explain or excuse. What our ears might have doubted, our eyes proved. What our sensibilities refused, fact forced upon us. I don't have to remind you or review what we saw in the course of fifteen Earth years of television transmission. Murder—murder—murder—and violence! Murder and violent death to a point where one could only conclude that this is the dream, the being and the vision of Earth!

Man against man, nation against nation, mother against child—and always violence and death.

The twist in this story is that Cato's concern with the immorality of earth is strictly a smoke-screen for his desire to make Mars a martial planet, in order that Earth may be wiped out and himself glorified. Well, Mr. Fast is hardly a pessimist, but in this story he lets himself go to the extent of envisioning the destruction of both the earth and Mars—and all because of weasel uses of that word "righteousness."

The Sight of Eden, the concluding story, is concerned with the ultimate powers of man's constructive and benevolent thoughts. A party of earth-men in space, after traveling for five years among the stars, finally comes to a planet which draws them irresistibly through psychic attraction. When they land, they find something like the Devachan of the Hindus—a series of visions characterized by idyllic beauty and proportion:

A little road or pathway, full of dancing light and color, led up over the brow of a low hill. On the other side of the hill was a garden and in the center of the garden a building that was like a castle in fairyland or a dream, or the laughter of children.

If the building was like the laughter of children, then the garden was like all the dreams that city children ever dreamed about a garden. It was about a mile square, and as Briggs led them in a winding path through it, it appeared to open endless arms of delight and wonder. There were nooks and corners of secret delight. There were benches to rest on that were marvels of beauty and comfort. There were hedges of green and yellow and blue. There were beds of flowers and bold beautiful birds, and there were drinking fountains to quench the thirst of those who used the garden.

They saw groups of buildings that reminded them of the Acropolis of ancient Athens, if the Athenians had but a thousand years more to work and plan for some ultimate beauty. . . .

Nowhere did they see a living man, woman or child.

After nightfall, after they had eaten, they sat and talked. Their talk went in circles, and it was full of fear and speculation. They had come too far; space had enveloped them, and although their starship hung

a thousand feet in the air above a planet as large as the Planet Earth, they felt that they had passed across the edge of nowhere.

"Just suppose," Carrington said, "that all our dreams had taken shape."

"All the memories: and wishes of our childhoods," said Frances Rhodes.

"Taken shape," Carrington repeated. "Who knows what the fabric of space is or what it does?"

"It does strange things," Gene Ling, the physicist, agreed.

"Or what thought is," Carrington persisted. "A planet like this one—it's a fair land—it's the stuff of dreams—all the dreams we brought with us from home, all the longings and desires, and out of our thoughts it was shaped."

All the dreams of humankind had finally taken shape and *created* a society which politics and religion had made impossible on earth.

COMMENTARY

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TODAY

ARTHUR HARVEY, a youthful veteran of nonviolent demonstrations against war, has put together a pamphlet entitled *Theory and Practice of Civil Disobedience*. For those who wish to gain some insight into the spread of Gandhi's influence in the West, to become acquainted with the scope of the actionist phase of the war resistance movement in the United States, and to have for consideration a number of statements by participants in the several major acts of civil disobedience in this country during the past five years, this pamphlet will be invaluable. Copies may be purchased from Harvey at 20 cents each. Orders for ten or more copies will be filled at 12 cents each, postpaid. Orders should be addressed to Arthur Harvey, Raymond, New Hampshire.

While Gandhi is the principal source quoted by Harvey for background in nonviolent philosophy, Henry David Thoreau is cited at the outset as the virtual "founder" of what has become an important revolutionary expression in the twentieth century. The cover of the pamphlet bears this inscription:

Thoreau was required by law to pay a tax for the support of the Mexican War. He thought payment would make him an agent of injustice, and said the best response to such a law is to "transgress it at once."

From that simple situation the term civil disobedience was born. The simple idea has been developed into new forms and its practitioners have made traditions which are various and complex. This essay deals with the forms and rationales for civil disobedience as applied to modern injustices.

One interesting feature of *Theory and Practice of Civil Disobedience* is a review of the various positions taken by demonstrators in regard to conduct at the time of arrest, the question of bail, pleading guilty or not guilty, and attitudes toward prison and the conditions in prisons.

A section, "Notes on Recent Projects," briefly describes the civil disobedience projects at Las

Vegas in 1957 (eleven pacifists entered the desert nuclear test area and were arrested); the voyages of the *Golden Rule* and the *Phoenix* in 1958; the Cheyenne project, which brought jail sentences for most of the demonstrators and an injury to one man who sat down in the path of trucks entering the construction site of the first American ICBM base; Omaha Action, in 1959, at the entrance to an Atlas missile base, during which, after repeated trespassing, eleven offenders were given jail sentences; the Livermore (California) demonstration in August, 1960, and Jerry Wheeler's similar trespass at the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona a few months later. Also reviewed are the various civil defense protests since 1955 and the Polaris Action program centering in New London, Conn.

In a concluding section, Arthur Harvey writes:

Is there a danger that disobedients will become "professional" prison-goers? I doubt it, since whatever glamor prison may have in prospect is soon destroyed by the reality. Prison-going is a discipline, done for the sake of society and one's own integrity and soul. Gandhi said at the beginning of his campaign for free salt:

". . . civil disobedience begun this time cannot be stopped and must not be stopped so long as there is a single civil resister left free or alive. A votary of Satyagraha [a disobedient] should find himself in one of the following states: (1) In prison or in an analogous state; or (2) engaged in civil disobedience; or (3) under orders at the spinning wheel, or at some constructive work advancing self-rule."

Civil disobedience is not, of course, the only means of opposing injustice, but it is among the most powerful and direct. In some situations, such as the present attitude of America toward war preparation, it seems the only technique which might break the apathy and fatalism of the people. In my own life, I estimate time should be—

25% for imprisonment;

25% for picketing, leafleting, speaking, writing, etc., in connection with civil disobedience;

50% for constructive program—developing an economy to eliminate injustice. In my view this must

be agrarian, vegetarian, poor, decentralized and not dependent on technology.

In its twenty-seven pages, this pamphlet covers a great deal of ground. The mood is wholly nonsectarian, the moral foundation ethical and unconnected with any specific religious tradition or belief, although Harvey remarks that "followers of Jesus, Tolstoy, Buddha, Gandhi and others will recognize that nonviolence is a key religious doctrine." A certain impatience with and criticism of "old-line" pacifist efforts is evident in these pages, but considering the resistances encountered in almost all human nature to radical innovations, this is perhaps understandable. Arthur Harvey obviously believes that what he is doing is the most important thing for human beings to do at the present time. There is the possibility, even the likelihood, that readers who have not worked out a personal philosophy of action or behavior as the most important thing for them to do may be made uncomfortable by this pamphlet. This is probably one of Harvey's purposes. However, one way to read his work is as valuable evidence of a new current in American life that has found energy and direction during the past decade, and which may play an increasingly decisive part in shaping the moral life of the future. This is a time of new beginnings, and the young men and women for whom Harvey in this instance has become spokesman are among the very few that have resolved upon definite steps of action.

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

NOTES BY A THOUGHTFUL READER

The following communication represents the sort of letter *MANAS* would like to receive in quantity—the quality here being evident. We find no flat disagreement with any of the points made, though as in the case of the Peace Corps, it is possible to choose another emphasis and offer a little praise—as we did—without contradicting the philosophy expressed in the present analysis. As for Dr. Bettelheim's *The Informed Heart*, we too believe this to be a remarkable "book for our time," and one which invites continual "cross-referencing."

The Informed Heart, by Bruno Bettelheim, is, in my opinion, *the* book of our time, for it epitomizes as no other book does the moral struggle of our time. Some reviewers have felt that Bettelheim did not fulfill his promise of treating of the problem of "autonomy in a mass age," but instead spent most of his book upon the problem of life in the German concentration camp. These people have missed the point of the whole book. For the German concentration camp is a symbol—a symbol of the concentration camp that the whole contemporary society presents to contemporary man. The German concentration camp was merely the epitome of the evils of present day society, *a society which is itself one big concentration camp*. The "extreme situation" of the Nazi concentration camp is only the more graphic embodiment of the "extreme situation" presented by life in contemporary society, a society that reeks of sickness and immorality, and is lacking in virtually all of the supports which enable a dignified, civilized life to be carried on. It is this "extreme situation" which we all face, and with which we must come to terms, and it is this which makes all of us who are seeking a better life, members of a concentration camp—even though it is not called by that name.

In your article dealing with Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*, you bemoan the prevalence of "aimlessness" in the suburbs and note that "there are few challenges presented." But surely there is plenty that is wrong in the suburbs, and anybody who wanted to, could find challenges aplenty—providing

he was willing to take the risks that such challenges required. The superficiality and mediocrity, the sophistication, smugness and false glitter, the inverted scale of values, the conformism and insensitivity to underlying social realities—here is a whole bevy of evils to do battle against. But anyone who took up this battle would soon find himself ostracized, rejected and alienated. And so, rather than experience the unpleasantness of speaking out in behalf of a deeper and more honest reality, the suburbanite—youth or adult—prefers to drift along with the crowd and engage in the meaningless and innocuous inanities that keep the suburban machinery oiled. All of this means that the suburbs are not *lacking* in conditions that need improvement (a position some writers almost seem to imply), but that the suburbanite is unwilling to risk his status' security, and superficial acceptance in order to struggle for such improvement. If he then faces the ennui of aimlessness, he has only himself to blame.

As for Goodman's book, I have only one criticism to make of it and this in connection with his diatribe that there isn't enough manly work in our society. No one could argue with this, of course. But I would question the solution which Goodman seems to be looking for. Oddly enough, he makes the very observation which could, I believe, yield the right solution. But he draws the wrong moral from it. Goodman writes:

"Thwarted, or starved, in the important objects proper to young capacities, the boys and young men naturally find or invent deviant objects for themselves; this is the beautiful shaping power of our human nature. Their choices and inventions are rarely charming, usually stupid, and often disastrous; we cannot expect average kids to deviate with genius. But on the other hand, the young men who conform to the dominant society become for the most part apathetic, disappointed, cynical and wasted.

"(I say the 'young men and boys' rather than the 'young people' because the problems I want to discuss in this book belong primarily, in our society, to the boys: how to be useful and make something of oneself. A girl does not *have* to, she is not expected to, 'make something' of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying, like any other

natural or creative act. . . . Our 'youth troubles' are boys' troubles. . . .)"

Now, there is nothing wrong with what Goodman says here. What *is* wrong is that he seems to accept the structure of the problem as the society has formulated it; he then goes on to look for a solution in terms of this prestructured problem.

Goodman notes that the female has a self-justifying occupation in the raising of children; the boy has to go out into the world and make something of himself, and find his justification there. In other words, the female finds her justification in the home, the male must leave the home and find his justification in the world. But may it not be that so much of the male delinquency, criminality, "apathy and waste" are connected with this fact that the male is driven from the home, and from the responsibilities and satisfactions which the home, and only the home, can provide? There has been much lament about the decline of the father in the American home (and Adlai Stevenson, upon being named Father of the Year, sadly opined that "father has become a dodo, a simpleton, an object of mirth"). Goodman seems to accept this ejection of the male from the home, and then asks what can be made of the male's homelessness, what alternative satisfactions and compensations can the male find in the outside world. But perhaps the solution to all of the problems which Goodman documents with such care is to *bring the male back into the home*. After all, if the home and its "self-justifying" role is able to cut female delinquency to one third or one fourth that of male delinquency, to reduce the incidence of female criminality to only a fraction of that of the male, as well as the incidence of the serious psychoses—why then not give it a try for the male? But to bring the male back into the home would cut through some of the deepest and most cherished masculine values in American and Western society and would require a more radical break with the existing mores than any changes that Goodman—or anyone else, for that matter—has contemplated. Perhaps for this reason, he never even raised the question, but took the problem as the society has already formulated it.

As for reconstructing the work life of the society so that it would provide more "manly work"—I am all for this. But I very seriously question whether even the best work arrangements could ever provide the satisfactions that the home is able to provide. For work is, by definition, an instrumental activity. The home, on the other hand, embodies the consummatory satisfactions, and it is these consummatory satisfactions from which the modern male has been so tragically cut off. If he is then found to be "accepting inadequate substitutes," we would then do well to recognize that he has no other choice.

Your writer closes his article with a reference to "Mr. Kennedy's Peace Corps." Unfortunately, I cannot share his optimism over this. At first, I too reacted with enthusiasm. But after learning more about it, and listening to some of the galling public pronouncements, I have lost all enthusiasm. For the purpose of the Corps seems to be a propaganda one, viz., that of representing America to the world. I have not seen the application forms, but I have seen the reference form which an applicant must submit. The applicant is to be evaluated in terms of team-play, ability to get along with others, efficiency, competence, skills, "emotional stability and maturity," etc.—all solid organization "virtues." The Peace Corps seems bent upon selecting organization men, and eliminating those who are genuinely concerned with doing something about the wrongs in the world. (Again, the public announcements make it plain that the Corps does not want "extreme types," idealists, "do-gooders," etc. The whole idea of the Corps thus becomes a farce.) It is clear that, far from a benefit, there is a real danger in the Peace Corps: the danger that it will select men who possess only the phony, organization traits that Goodman laments in his book, men who have no understanding of or sympathy for the social revolutions going on in the rest of the world—except as they help or hinder America. The Peace Corps seems well on its way toward being a contingent for men who are seeking prestige, and a useful addition to their career dossier.

FRONTIERS Review of "ETC."

THERE are several periodicals which this department could hardly do without, for the reason that, unlike many publications, they often seem to bite into the actual realities of the human situation. So far as we are concerned, they constitute some of the important growing-tips of human culture. One of these magazines is *ETC.*, a quarterly review of general semantics, "concerned with the role of language and symbols in human behavior." If you should happen to go through the April, 1961 number of *ETC.*, the reason for our enthusiasm will become clear. First, this issue has reprinted entire Jerome D. Frank's paper, "Breaking the Thought Barrier." When we first saw the manuscript of this paper, we wanted to go into the publishing business, just to make sure Dr. Frank's lucid analysis would get a wide circulation. (It could now be reprinted from *ETC.* at comparatively low cost, in booklet form. We throw out this suggestion, since another enthusiasm of ours, a paper on Henry David Thoreau, has since found a courageous small publisher who will make it available as a small book after it has appeared in four parts in *MANAS*.)

Another article in the April *ETC.* is "General Semantics and Zen," by J. Samuel Bois, a thoughtful comparison of these approaches to meaning. Dr. Bois begins:

General Semantics is a phenomenon of our Western culture. It is a symptom of the phase of self-correction and development through which our generation is passing. It is at the same time an attempt to manage the cultural mutation that is taking place.

Zen belongs to a different world. It is a refined product of Eastern culture. It is an attempt to stabilize in a theory and translate into a skill the human experience of living in conscious contact with oneself and with the world.

Dr. Bois has an unacademic sort of daring to which we are attracted. For example, to speak of

a "cultural mutation" is a bit wild. Mutations are apparently spontaneous transformations which come in response to no-one-knows-what stimulus, unless it be cosmic rays, or some similar, practically supernatural cause. Nonetheless, the expression seems entirely justified, in view of the rapid psychological changes now making their impact felt throughout the world. There is no reason to ignore the changes simply because we are far from being able to explain them adequately.

A second instance of Dr. Bois's daring is in his scheme of the development of Western culture, which he has adapted from work done by Prof. Gaston Bachelard of the Sorbonne. This scheme has five stages:

1. The *sensing*, uncritical stage of the primitive and of the infant;
2. the *classifying* stage introduced by the Greek philosophers;
3. the *relating* stage of classical science from Galileo and Newton to the beginning of the twentieth century;
4. the *postulating* stage of relativity and indeterminacy in which we are now;
5. the *unifying* stage of immediate nonverbal cosmic experience. This last one is not restricted to our age, but we are just beginning to study it with the tools developed in the earlier stages.

There is daring here, also, because this scheme has a greater resemblance to Plotinus' stages of Opinion, Science, Illumination, than it has to August Comte's Positivist categories. Dr. Bois uses this scheme to make his comparison between general semantics and Zen:

I see general semantics as a discipline of stage 4 formulated laboriously in a logical emergence from stages 2 and 3. Many writers in the field are still calling it non-aristotelian, which means that, although it is in the Western tradition, it is not limited to the techniques of stages 2 and 3.

I see Zen as the art of taking a long jump from stage 1 to stage 5. There lies, it seems to me, the radical difference between general semantics and Zen Buddhism. The first is a product of our discursive,

rational, and technically oriented culture, the second is a product of the intuitive, contemplative and naturalistic culture of the East. Such a statement is an over-simplification, I know, but it has proved useful more than once. . .

The interesting thing about this discussion is the writer's suggestion—if we understand him correctly—that Westerners ought not to jettison analytical techniques they have with great pain and labor evolved to reach stages 3 and 4 of the cultural evolutionary scheme. Dr. Bois rejects the Zen postulate that the mind cannot understand itself. There are aspects of experience, subtleties of perception, which we ought to take with us into stage 5. *Samadhi* or *Nirvana* is not a continuum which is "out there," but a vision to which each man brings his own radius. The cycle of Western civilization is now learning to make its own distinctive contribution to self-knowledge. In this venture, there is a lot of baggage you can't take with you, but there are also qualities of being that you can't leave behind—not and really get there.

That, at any rate, seems to us to be the substance of Dr. Bois's idea, although we may have extended him a bit, according to our own inclinations.

The lead article in the April *ETC.* is called "Three Classes of Truth: Their Implications for the Behavioral Sciences." The author, Garrett Hardin, makes this discussion into an enormously clarifying review of matters that cause human beings endless confusion. The three classes of truth are as follows:

CLASS I—Truths that are unaltered by the saying of them.

CLASS II—Those truths that are made true by being said.

CLASS III—Those truths that are destroyed in the act of saying them.

The most familiar form of the truths in Class I is scientific knowledge. Class I truths deal with well-behaved stable facts such as things which are and happen regardless of what we think about them. Persuasive rhetoric or slanderous innuendo

does not alter the path of the earth around the sun or the sum of 2 and 2. The sycamore tree persists in the quadrangle, whether or not we are looking at it.

Class II truths include what modern writers now call "self-fulfilling prophecies." When a doctor encourages a patient to get well, by whatever psychological art he can bring to bear on the patient's feelings, and the patient does get well, a Class II truth has been at work. Illustrations of Class II truths, quoted from a paper by Thomas D. Eliot, include the following:

A stock rises in value following the prediction by a reputable advisory service that it will rise—which result reflexively increases the service's reputation, thus making its next prediction still more likely to come true. The rumor that there will be a lynching party this evening creates one. "People throw stones at a dog that puts his tail between his legs." . . . "Listen to the next record: this tune is slated to become one of the top ten."

Pep talks, sermons, and exhortations of every sort all hope to qualify as Class II truths.

Well, perhaps we knew all that. Propaganda, advertising, and public relations depend upon making things happen by getting people to think they are happening or ought to happen. But what about Class III truths?

Dr. Hardin starts out with an amusing illustration—a conversation between two monks: "We may not be as clever as the Jesuits or as learned as the Benedictines, but when it comes to modesty, our order is second to none!"—but soon gets to an elucidation which brings wide implications:

"An emotion which is a passion," said Spinoza, "ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it." And what does it mean, "to form a clear and distinct idea of it?" One can only suppose, since Spinoza worked within the verbal tradition, that he meant "to express it in words." That is, a *passion which is precisely verbalized is destroyed*. Historically important passions are generally connected with the myths men believe. But what we have just said can only be said *ex post facto*, by one

who is beyond this belief. . . . Calling a myth "a myth" is to destroy it surely.

This discussion goes on, but the exciting parallel of this development seems to us to be with the old Eastern idea of "Not this, not that," in the process of distinguishing between the self and the not-self. Myths or beliefs about the self and the world are operative as dynamic causes of behavior only so long as they remain a *part* of our selves. When we make them objective, when we see that the storms they create, the pains they impose, the longings they inspire, are not really ourselves, but only things which go on about us, as a result of our feelings of identification, then, suddenly, we are able to make Class I generalizations about them. We are free of their glamor.

We go, no doubt, from myth to myth, getting closer to the core of being or reality as our conceptual formulations approximate more accurately the actual processes of life. It seems inevitable that finally one must reach a kind of realization which cannot be voiced at all, without creating new illusions. But whether the general semanticists will admit this possibility is a question.

In any event, the student who pursues "the role of language and symbols in human behavior" is bound to raise such questions. It is difficult to think of a more important function.