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RELIGION AND THE DREAM OF REALITY

IT is probably a lot more difficult to imagine a modern man making a start-from-scratch, symmetrical approach to religion than it is to really do it. We move, today, in a world littered with the debris of past religions. Belief after belief has been punctured, exposed, ridiculed, discarded by the cold, analytical eye of rationalism and the scientific method. Two centuries of militant reductionism have stripped us of our fables, emptied our allegories, and trained us in a tough-minded skepticism which, after the tough-minded political substitutes for religion also began to fail, presided over a period of elaborately rationalized sensualism, as the only remaining area of human experience in which we could still generate the tang of "reality."

The human body is a fairly tough organism—more resilient, without doubt, than the fragile, ideal structures made by the mind. The body has its own instinctive responses—spontaneous "definitions," you might say, of its good—and if you can't trust anything else, you can at least trust *them*, or so many men have argued. But the body finally rebels against having to play a role that it cannot do properly or well—a surrogate for those higher realities which come into being through exercise of the mind—and strange psychosomatic maladies now erode the body's physical well-being. These ills resist all but philosophical diagnosis, and our medical men, being otherwise schooled, only redouble their efforts to seek out some physical cause. It is as though we try to press our psychological failures back into the matrix of nature—the physical organism—in the fond hope that this will make "all things new." By such means are born all the passionate sectarianisms of the flesh—the rituals of a D. H. Lawrence, the prescriptions of a Wilhelm Reich, the cocksure solutions of an Albert Ellis. These gospels of the "organism" have little durability. Their feedback in devitalizing attitudes and new problems is well summarized by Rollo May in his recent (March 26) *Saturday Review* article on the new Puritanism, in which he says that "modern man's rigid principle of full freedom is not freedom at all but a new strait jacket, in some ways as compulsive as the old." Even if it be claimed that such failures are due to imperfect application of the sense-engrossing faiths, it remains to be asked whether it is even possible for a whole man to submit his being to such partisan and primitive doctrines.

The external or social side of the modern idea of "reality" has its appalling fulfillment in the endowment for destruction of the quasi-omnipotent nation-state. How much of our life's energies has been sucked into the dynamics of these murderous devices? And what has happened to the *freedom* which once belonged to the self-reliant, do-it-your self Yankee, or the Western Pioneer, who now allows himself to be cast as the endlessly acquisitive free-enterpriser, a man without ground for ethical behavior beyond the confinement of his competitive, win-or-lose psychology? We live under circumstances which, only a few years ago, made Dr. Edward L. Strecker say "that, judged by the criteria of mental illness, the world is insane."

When a man questions himself, wondering where he stands in relation to ranges of inquiry suggested by the word "religion," he is likely to fall first into the intellectual trap made for him by the sociology of religion. To find out about a subject, you read some books, and the general consensus of books *about* religion (those that assume a scientific approach) is still flavored with the assumptions of August Comte, to the effect that "religion" represents an outlook to which no modern man can return. This may be true enough in institutional terms. Jagjit Singh probably

expressed the psychological sense of a law of history when he said (in *Great Ideas and Theories of Modern Cosmology,* Dover, 1961):

> . . . the practice of rationalism is an irreversible process. If once one loses the *innocence* of naïve belief by venturing to stray into rational thought, there can be no honest way of recovering it. When one has cut himself off from God by a first sip from the cup of knowledge, one will not rediscover him by drinking its dregs, no matter how hard they may be boiled.

But suppose the seeker knows enough to recognize that primeval human innocence is lost forever; suppose, instead, he is one who, as Ortega said of the shipwrecked, is ready to "look around for something to which to cling, [with] tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation"; and suppose, finally, that as the price of his hope, he is prepared, not to forgo, but to revise, his understanding of what is "rational." Suppose all these things about the man who wonders about the meaning of religion—what then can he have as guide?

Where, amid the endless rubble left by the great army of iconoclasts, will he find a clue? Is there a sufficient clearing in the area suggested by Tillich's "ultimate concern"? If anything, the clearing left by Tillich may seem too large. You can get lost in it. Tillich's definition includes even the atheists, which may be entirely legitimate, but it is necessary to find out why. The investigator we have in mind already feels "ultimate concern," since he has decided to look around. But every peak he ascends to gain perspective is whipped by high winds of critical attack.

Just possibly, this may be an entirely *normal* situation for us, the natural environment of twentieth-century man—the psychological jumping-off place which he, or his culture, has created. Let anyone set up a structure which is intended to reveal something about the meaning of religion, and immediately the critics go to work; but both the frustration and the glory of this situation may be in the sense in which these critics are *right.* Yet think of the desperation implicit for so many in the conclusion of Wilfred Cantwell Smith: "a religious understanding of the world does not necessarily imply that there is a generic religious truth or a religious system that can be externalized into an observable pattern theoretically abstractible from persons who live it." Can it be that religion is *only* the living it, and that there all definition ends?

The iconoclasm of the death-of-God theologians goes even further. These temple-destroying Sampsons are doing for theology what John Dewey did for philosophy. All truth is realized as act in the secular world. This is a way of saying that there is no transcendent but only an immanent spiritual reality. It is by implication a form of materialistic pantheism and a rude disavowal of mystical search as no more than pious escape. Here one senses an admission of caste-guilt and self-castigation by modern preachers of religion—more of a criticism of the historical consequences of the quietistic, contemplative practices of the West than a serious evaluation of the inner life. They seem to be saying: See how guilty we are; the Marxists, those terrible men, have shown us up; so, as an act of contrition, we will sacrifice God! Then we shall minister with all our talents to the secular city, which is all that remains.

How, then, are these men to be distinguished from the humanitarians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, except for their charged and sometimes rather precious vocabulary? What now *is* their religion, beyond the lingering flavor of church *mores* and certain language habits preserved from the enormous deposit of theology-tinged thought?

Well, whatever their religion may be, there is great honesty and great courage in it, and a great deal of commitment. What will happen as a result of this powerful impulse in modern Christian life remains to be seen. Whether, when the impulse passes from leaders to followers, it will decline—as, say, the Progressive movement in education

declined in the hands of its followers—is a question that will probably have an answer within twenty years. Wholly doctrineless religion is no doubt an ideal solution, but requires extraordinary men to embody it. The practice of pure, unstructured religion would be at least as demanding as the anarchist dream of a structureless social order—and as impossible of attainment, just now.

One could feel only gratitude for the intellectual integrity and the moral resolve of the death-of-God theologians, save for what seems the unconscious arrogance of their position. Out of habit as churchmen, they seem to be speaking for us all! *They* are telling us "the way it is now." Their desperate pronouncements have an *ex cathedra* tone. We, the people, have spoiled them, of course. And we have let this sort of thing go on for centuries. Leaders of various sorts and churchmen have played a mutual-toleration-and-acceptance word-game in public for so long that the habit is hard to break. And the excuse given for continuing as public figures, even though "God" is dead, that they can hardly leave their flocks without guidance, is not really good enough. They neglect to note, when making this explanation, that the flocks have almost always been allowed to understand that they need not take religious matters too seriously. Leaving them alone would bring no religious crisis, but only a middle-class identity problem. This might be a good thing.

Yet the fact of the courage remains. It is bound to make many people realize that the time has come for them to "look around" for themselves.

But what, essentially, is wrong with the idea of religion without structure?

Only the fact that there is no human life, or any kind of life, without structure. This is practically the sole weakness of the agnostic position. Since the agnostic pleads ignorance in respect to the roots of a philosophy of life, he must find roots and structure elsewhere. Often what he finds is not good enough. In some respects, the new iconoclasts of religion seem to be declaring, as a great, new discovery, the relevance of politics to religion, or at least of social welfare action to religion. This is hardly a new idea, but rather a new ardor for an old idea, born from shame. One wonders how long it will take for these committed men to discover that the truths of politics suffer from the same over-simplifications and misrepresentations as the truths of religion, and that hot-gospel determination is no substitute for *knowledge* in doing good.

To stand heroically against manifest social injustice, to attempt to repair the most shameful cruelties and inhumanities of the mass-man welfare state, and to "witness" against war and racism are callings in which any man may find fulfillment, but these are all rear-guard actions so far as the basic objectives of the good society are concerned. "Revolutionary love" is not enough, in either politics or religion. It doesn't last.

There are profound questions which these impatient and guilt-ridden men of religion need to ask themselves. What, for example, is the *right* way to resolve the incommensurabilities between what we have called "social progress" and individual growth? What is the relation between the psychology of maturity and the processes of social change? How does the spiritual realm (whatever it is) intersect with the social processes and practical needs of human beings? Is there an "anatomy," here, that can be studied? What should a conscientious man attempt to do for his fellows, directly, or mechanistically, and what should he leave to the osmotic, unpredictable influence of a slowly regenerating culture? If, as Popper says, the main flaw of popular radical theory is the naïve belief that Utopia can be legislated into being, how *can* the kind of society we long for get born? Upon what efforts, processes, influences will its essences depend? To be born into a Christian society, to be ordained as a Christian priest, and to have revolted against the

major hypocrisies of status may be developments which produce a heroic state of mind, but they are not a background likely to supply serious answers to these questions.

An *ad hoc* approach to human suffering and obvious evil may be the proper beginning, but there is still the abyss in the lives of ordinary men which authoritarian religion sought unsuccessfully to fill by the surrogate means of the Vicarious Atonement, the Sacraments, and other devices of theological invention. What if these devices hid from view certain acts of self-discovery all men ought to have been making for themselves, throughout long centuries? Have those who now break out of traditional religion no responsibility to consider such questions? Is a new, religious twist in the pragmatic approach to human problems all that they need contribute?

As another way of examining these issues, let us compare two forms of voluntary association common in Western civilization: the religious and the scientific. Both, traditionally, have declared their concern with the "truth." Characteristically, religious associations have maintained that they were *in possession* of the truth—or, at any rate, of the saving portion of it—and offered to share its immeasurable benefits with those who would join their number. Different and competing claims as to what really was the saving truth have bloodied our historical record for close to two thousand years.

These formulations of the saving truth have constituted the structure of traditional religion, and it is this structure, as the origin of religious wars, the source of exclusiveness and self-righteousness, of complacency and inaction, that is now rapidly being abandoned by those Christians who, in the pitiless light of twentieth-century experience, acknowledge the anti-human result of their institutional past.

The structural element in science has a somewhat different identification. The essential structure in science is its method. An association of scientists is a body of men who share the assumptions of the scientific method and a consensus of publicly tested conclusions about the nature of things. On the whole, they exhibit a certain modesty in respect to the "truths" they have found out. They think of themselves as seekers and now and then discoverers, not proud treasurers. You don't join a scientific group in order to feel secure, but in order to find out. The scientific stance, in short, is that of investigator, not revealer. The "revealers" are popularizers, often exploiters, not scientists.

This seems, in general, to be true, despite the case that can be made in criticism of dogmatism in science. It still remains a fact that dogmatism is not a principle in science, but the negation of science.

The only point we are trying to make, here, in respect to science, is that the idea of structure as *method* has fewer undesirable consequences in human life than structure branded "truth," in the form of a creed or religious doctrine promising salvation.

Of course, you could argue that there is a suppressed "religious" element in science, in the form of its uncriticized metaphysical assumptions which, even though denied, or treated casually, have a far-reaching effect on human behavior, for which scientists must accept a certain responsibility. Then, for reasons of parity, you could also argue that there is a scientific element within religious tradition in the form of the mystical approach to truth, involving a kind of hypothesis about religious "knowing" and a "method" which has been variously defined, sometimes with great particularity. Mystical experience, of course, is lacking in the criterion of objectivity, but there is objectivity of the second degree in the consensus of mystical report, and still another sort in the moral qualities which seem to develop in those who persist in this difficult undertaking.

Nonetheless, the truths found out by the mystics cannot be said to have a "public" character, and their appeal, however expressed, is

heard mainly as invitation to spiritual questing, with serious hazards promised and few guarantees. The similarity of mysticism to scientific inquiry seems to stop with the will-to-find-out. Yet it may be a law of mystical experience that the "uniqueness" of individual religious tradition, in terms of which this path is entered, diminishes in direct proportion to the progress gained. In view of this characteristic effect of mystical inquiry, one might add that a fundamental virtue of the scientific method—the elimination of personal or initial bias, through the experimental approach—is at least present in principle in the search attempted by the mystic.

Well, is there anything "mystical," in turn, about science? We should be reasonably careful about declaring that there is, since a too-easy neglect of the great differences between science and religion would only increase our confusion. We turn, then, to an article by Dr. Albert Einstein, in the *Journal of the Franklin Institute* for March, 1936, for a stage-setting quotation. Dr. Einstein wrote:

> Physics constitutes a logical system of thought which is in a state of evolution, and whose basis cannot be obtained through distillation by any inductive method from the experiences lived through, but which can only be attained by free invention. The justification (truth-content) of the system rests in the proof of usefulness of the resulting theorems on the basis of sense experiences, where the relations of the latter to the former can be comprehended only intuitively. Evolution is going on in the direction of increasing simplicity of the logical basis. In order further to approach this goal, we must make up our mind to accept the fact that the logical basis departs more and more from the facts of experience, and that the path of our thought from the fundamental basis to these resulting theorems, which correlate with sense experiences, becomes continually harder and longer.

Here we have a clear statement of the fact that the *origin* of the scientific enterprise is in the underivable and inexplicable faculty of "intuition"—a view which is amply confirmed by any serious account of the initial formation of scientific hypotheses, whether the text be a standard one like Cohen and Nagel's *Logic and the Scientific Method*, or any of the books concerned with the psychological mysteries of invention and creativity. But why, in the first place, do people make hypotheses and formulate theories? Dr. Einstein has an answer to this question in an article in the *Scientific* American for April, 1950:

> Because we enjoy "comprehending," *i.e.*, reducing phenomena by the process of logic to something already known or (apparently) evident.... There exists a passion for comprehension, just as there exists a passion for music. That passion is rather common in children, but gets lost in most people later on. Without this passion there would be neither mathematics nor natural science. Time and again the passion for understanding has led to the illusion that man is able to comprehend the objective world rationally, by pure thought, without any empirical foundations—in short, by metaphysics. I believe that every true theorist is a kind of tamed metaphysicist, no matter how pure a "positivist" he may fancy himself. The tamed metaphysicist believes that not all that is logically simple is embodied in experienced reality, but that the totality of all sensory experience can be "comprehended" on the basis of a conceptual system built on premises of great simplicity.

In *Personal Knowledge*, Michael Polanyi offers interesting evidence in confirmation of Dr. Einstein's defense of the metaphysician (tame or not), and some of this evidence relates to Dr. Einstein's own scientific discoveries. But what of the final fruit of the scientific undertaking? Utility byproducts apart, the end of scientific inquiry is again a metaphysical goal, if we may take the word of another distinguished theoretical physicist. In *Science* for April 23, 1954, the views of Pierre Duhem are quoted in contrast to the positivist revolt against dualism. He thinks that without a "conceptual system," one that is even subtler than the system spoken of by Dr. Einstein, science remains nothing but an élitist brand of technology. Physical theory by itself, Duhem maintains, "explains nothing," but accomplishes only representation and classification. Indeed, physical theory is not aimed at and cannot hope to give an account of "ultimate reality"; nonetheless,

it may achieve a kind of parallelism, and this, Duhem proposes, is its chief importance and value:

> Physical theory never gives us the explanation of experimental laws; it never reveals realities hiding under sensible appearances; but the more complete it becomes, the more we apprehend that the logical order in which theory orders experimental laws is the reflection of an ontological order, the more we suspect that the relations it establishes among the data of perception correspond to real relations among things, and the more we feel that theory tends to be a natural classification. . . . the physicist is compelled to recognize that it would be unreasonable to work for the progress of physical theory if this theory were not the increasingly better defined and more precise reflection of a metaphysics; the belief in an order transcending physics is the sole justification of physical theory.

This may be pretty pure, but it is also pretty good. Science achieves its highest end, it seems, in going beyond itself. It may bring us, in some intellectually orderly fashion, to the threshold of another level of awareness and being, of which it provides intimations, but no certainties or definitions.

We should note, also, if only in appreciation, the invaluable services of science in the past as critic of the excesses of religion, whenever religious ideas became partisan doctrines which produce weakness in men, instead of strength, or embody mere beliefs which are claimed as or mistaken for actual knowledge.

A modern man, then, is not in such bad shape to make a new beginning in the religious quest. Whatever the condition of the world, and however strewn with failure the paths of modern thought, this man has before him a clear record of what the greatest religious teachers have been willing to say, what the philosophers of more than two millennia dared to declare, and he has fairly decisive evidence of how mistakes are made in both religion and science. What more does a man need?

We said at the beginning that it is probably more difficult to imagine a modern man making a start-from-scratch approach to religion than it is to really do it. The point of this is that thinking *about* the primary inquiry into meaning leads to an intellectual inspection of external "settings" and recommended approaches, whereas *doing* it may involve the discovery that the religious dialogue a man holds with himself cannot even begin until he personally recognizes the irrelevance of authoritative settings and approaches. Either he is himself the way, the truth, and the light, or there is no hope. The breakdown of all other views, in the present may have made this the best of all possible times for seeking the truth.

REVIEW
NAMING THE REVOLUTION

THESE, we say, are revolutionary days, but if anyone sets out to discuss the actual revolutionary happenings, he soon finds it necessary to speak not of one revolution but several. A few years ago (in *Foreign Affairs* for October, 1960), A. Whitney Griswold, President of Yale University, produced evidence for five separate revolutionary trends. With a little effort he probably could have found five more.

What does this mean? It means, at least, that the present revolution is very different from what happened in America in 1776. It means that if you want to understand the present revolution, you have to assemble a number of differing issues and then find some recognizable common denominator for them.

This was not the problem at the end of the eighteenth century. History brought the revolutionary issues to our door. When Tom Paine composed *Common Sense,* the grounds of his contention were plain to all. He gave the "issues" fiery summation, but they were not previously unknown. He precipitated out of the atmosphere of the times the elements of a new social synthesis and gave them the luminous intellectual and moral objectivity which great principles take on for people when they are well articulated and clearly understood. As John Adams said, the American Revolution was accomplished in the minds and hearts of the people before it was played out in history. Eighteenth-century Americans knew what their revolution was about.

These are revolutionary days, all right, but we don't know what the revolution is about or how it is going. We don't know much, for example, about our Enemy. No George III is bringing issues to our door. Or if, somehow, they are left on the stoop, they just stay there like accumulating bottles of souring milk and old newspapers.

An obvious issue, of course, is the concealment by the mass media of the grossest symptoms of what is wrong with our society. To get an account of these symptoms, you have to read little papers devoted to "causes," or radical papers concerned with injustice, or foreign papers put out by people who see us as others see us. Who wants to read papers like that?

Yet such papers are about the only thing worth reading, these days. Take for example *Renewal* (monthly except July and August), a magazine published cooperatively by several Christian groups, in which may be found some very clear thinking about several of the issues of our revolution. The March issue of *Renewal* has an article by Dick Gregory in which this distinguished Negro humorist and entertainer tells how he joined with the Indians of the state of Washington in a "fish-in" intended to oblige the state authorities to honor a treaty made by the federal government with the Indians. One hundred and eleven years ago this country gave to the Nisqually Indians the right to fish in any waters using any means. Now the state of Washington tells the Indians they cannot fish with a net, but must hooks. But the hooks don't work, because when the steelheads come up the river to breed, they're not especially hungry and they won't bite. To make a living from fishing, the Indians have to use nets.

The compulsion used by the state of Washington against the Indian fishermen is devious and pretty messy. As a means of ignoring the treaty, the state officials arrest the fishing Indian and then invite him to *prove* he is an Indian. As Gregory relates (commenting, "I couldn't prove legally I am a Negro"), an Indian so brought to court "is forced to spend a fortune, using up all of his legal funds, trying to satisfy the court that he is an Indian." What is exciting is not just Gregory getting himself arrested for fishing with the Indians, producing good publicity for their cause, but most of all the way he shows that injustice to the Indians is injustice to *all.* As he says:

> I told the Indians I would be involved until the problem is settled. I personally feel that if America knew the conditions under which the Indian is living, there would be some radical changes. Fishing rights are just a beginning. There are so many other problems—schooling, health, and economic deprivation. The time has come when we have to be fair with the Indian. . . .

> We must realize that this *was* the Indian's country. We send money all over the world—even to Tito, whom we do not like. Either we admit that the Indian is an American and say we are sorry for what we did. This would mean reviewing the treaties and wherever we have violated them paying reparation. Or we should say that the Indian is not an American. Then it becomes his duty to throw off colonialism, as people all over the world are doing. They are reclaiming their land, which is the Indian's only alternative, if America is not going to share equally with him.
>
> I am particularly pleased to be a part of the Indian's struggle because I have always felt that the struggle for human dignity is not a matter of black against white but of right against wrong. Every minority group in America has had a struggle. It has always bothered me to hear people pride themselves on their victory against a nation full of bigotry. People say the Irish had a fight and won. So did the Jews, the Catholics the Italians and other minorities. And this seems to be a matter of pride for most people. But it is a pity that the Irish, Jews, Italians and others did not fight for the Constitution instead of themselves. We will probably look back some day and be forced to say the same thing about the Negroes. Somebody has to fight for the Constitution and do away with all bigotry.

Dick Gregory is trying to burn one or two of the issues of the time into general human awareness so that if another Tom Paine comes along to synthesize them all, we may be able to understand what he says.

The story of how a Congregational minister of the "prestige" church of Elmhurst, Illinois, was voted out of his job, why it happened, and what the large minority which supported him did about it afterward is another reason for buying the March number of *Renewal* (send thirty cents to 19, S. La Salle St., Chicago, Ill. 60603). Many of the issues of the age, one begins to realize, are obscured by the really bigger issue of hypocrisy and stultifying convention.

Another distinguished periodical, *Man on Earth,* begun two years ago, offers a kind of philosophical discussion that will almost certainly bring issues of a different sort out into the open. While the level of the writing in this typographically exquisite magazine (which also comes out ten times a year, and may be purchased in annual subscription for $7.50 from S.P.R. Charter, Olema, Calif. 94950) is a bit learned, the quality of the discourse and its universal appeal would be hard to duplicate anywhere. The following paragraph, concerned with the "two cultures" (scientists and men of letters), gives evidence of the insight afforded:

> The bridging of Two Cultures cannot create the compound that is Man but only the mixture of segments that readily separates should the bridge fracture and come tumbling down.
>
> It is possible that men of science, seekers of external truth arranged in a rational provable system—and men of letters seeking the internal subjective Truth of the Poet—are incapable of themselves of extending purpose to their separate endeavors, for all of Man. If that is so, as it seems to be, what are then needed are meta-scientists able to search through and beyond science, beyond the externally rational, and meta-poets able to nurture their seeds of internal Truth through the strains of germination and into a nourishing harvest for all of Man, for the many universes of his being. Internal Truth can be manifest—not to self, but to the beyond-self—only through external expression. This meta-requirement presupposes an exceedingly rare combination of abilities and awareness but one that is surely not impossible to find once the need for such a union has been established. It would also seem that what is needed in our technological world are not more do-ers in science but fewer do-ers and more creative thinkers. Perhaps what is needed is not more scientists but more men of letters who neither fear nor ignore the implications of science. . . .

As the best example we know of a literary man of this sort, we offer W. Macneile Dixon—his book, *The Human Situation* (now a Galaxy paperback). Subsequent copies of *Man on Earth* consider the issues involved in population control in a way that takes this subject out of the hands of both the conventional moralists and the mechanistic planners, and deals with it in terms of the authentic human values which are at stake. This discussion, contained in numbers three and four of the first volume of *Man on Earth,* gains its impressive power of persuasion simply from the strength of an argument developed from classical Humanist assumptions.

COMMENTARY
THE STRENGTH OF SOCRATES

THE most difficult thing to understand about Socrates in his relations with his fellow citizens of Athens is his immovable moral strength. Here was a man who seemed to found his life on the principle of uncertainty—yet those who were seriously looking for truth sought him out, and his faithful companions came to regard him as a veritable rock of stability.

But what was it about him that they relied upon? Not Socrates, a squat, sturdy old man with a friendly, garrulous disposition. Dozens of men of this description could have been found in Athens. It was the workings of his mind in relation to the commitment of his moral intelligence that drew them. Here was a man, they felt, who almost alone among his countrymen had grasped the nature of man and was living a life consistent with the highest human purposes. And while they only felt his faith, they *saw*, through their daily association with him, the fruit of that faith in action.

A scrupulously honest ignorance is the most important raw material of meaning-seeking. This Socrates understood. By means of the dialectic he demonstrated this understanding to others. And so, through the dialectic, and with the example of his strength in using it, he gradually won the faith of his followers in the capacity of man to fulfill his meaning-seeking nature. It is thus that an honest ignorance may become a source of impregnable strength for the human community. The strength arises from the wholeness of Man Thinking.

The deep and torturing question which arises for those who today watch with apprehension the decline and breakup of authoritative institutions is—How can this strength obtain a cultural embodiment? How can it become a reference of security for the anxious and desperately wondering people of our time, and a mould for the restless and anarchic energies of the young?

Thoreau is one of the few who have had an answer to this question. "It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a conscience." This is the formula for creating cultural institutions endowed with Socratic strength. The viable scientific, educational, and religious institutions of the future can have no other guarantee, if they are to come into being at all.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
AFRICAN TALES

BOTH Blake and Keats, and especially Keats, complained because Isaac Newton converted the stars into mere units of a system of celestial mechanics, thereby removing them from the store of poetic resources. There is surely a sense in which they were right. The blight on works of the imagination accomplished by the spirit of scientific cosmology was certainly not necessary, but was probably an inevitable consequence of the anti-clerical and anti-religious bent of most scientific thinking from the eighteenth century on. In any event, the anti-fantastic view of natural "reality" had the effect of stultifying response to flights of the imagination, and in time led to learned attacks on even poor Mother Goose.

So what about stories for the young? We have been reading lately in several collections of folk tales gathered in Africa, and a more delightful assemblage of whimsy, tenderness, humor, and shrewd insight into human nature would be difficult to recall. One story with an unexpected ending is about a "Do-Good" Genie who healed a leper. "You shall be cured," the Genie, which has the form of a beautiful bird, told the poor sufferer:

> "Your scabs shall fall into dust. You shall live the life of a man again. But on one condition: that you guard the nest in this tree. You shall protect my eggs."

No sooner had the leper, whose name was Bakora, promised to guard the eggs faithfully, than the magic began to work. His sores healed. He grew new fingers and toes. Before long he became rich and prosperous. He got himself three wives and had some children.

The Bird-Genie came next year and laid four eggs, then went away. One morning the house-cat brought an egg to Bakora. He fried it in butter. He gave one of the others to a wife, ate a third raw, and the fourth he broke, leaving it for the cat to lick up. This is the end of the story:

> One evening the firebird came back to the nest. The eggs had vanished.
>
> The man had fallen into the trap. He had not fulfilled his contract.
>
> Do you think the bird found anything to be surprised at in that? Do you think he flew into a fearsome tantrum like a bad genie (or, come to that, like a good genie, for most of the good ones can be just as vindictive)? No. Nothing of the kind!
>
> This genie saved his breath. He looked down from the top of his tree upon the former leper now growing fat, his clear skin blooming, sitting there surrounded by his wives and beautiful children.
>
> Bakora was finding happiness at every turn and showed no surprise at all at the fact that it lasted. He was a man like all men; he had forgotten the evil days when his feet were falling to pieces.
>
> He enjoyed his bliss as if by right.
>
> The firebird had had a good deal to do with men in his time and had come to the conclusion that they were all alike.
>
> "I shall lay no more eggs in this tree," he said.
>
> And he flew away to continue his good offices as a genie elsewhere, looking for some other poor wretches to lift out of their despair.

Here, at the finish, the Genie ("he") seems to be speaking editorially, since there *was* a hen-bird, and *she* laid the eggs; but for this, apparently she could have been left out.

"The Do-Good Genie" is one of many stories collected by René Guillot in West Africa over twenty years. These were published in several volumes in France, and a selection of them have been translated by Gwen Marsh and issued last year in the United States by Franklin Watts, Inc. (New York), under the title, *René Guillot's African Folk Tales.* The other stories we have been looking at are in *The Cow-Tail Switch* (Holt, 1947) collected by Harold Courlander and George Herzog in West Africa; and in *The Fire on the Mountain* (Holt, 1950) gathered in Ethiopia by Harold Courlander and Wolf Leslau. The title

story, "The Fire on the Mountain," exists in many versions, from India to as far as the islands of the West Indies. It deals with a favorite theme in Ethiopian literature—the spirit versus the letter of the law. A poor youth, Arha, boasted to his rich employer that he could stand naked and alone on a frigid mountain peak for all of one night. His master then promised to give him land, house, and cattle if he stayed alive. Arha managed it, but only because a wise old man built a good fire the youth could see, far across the valley. No warmth came from it, of course, but sight of the fire, and knowledge of the wise old friend's presence tending it gave Arha strength.

But the rich master broke his promise. "That fire saved you," he told his servant. The young man appealed to the judge, who ruled in favor of the employer. "The condition," the judge said, "was that you must be without fire." So, while the young man had to remain a landless servant, he did not give up hope. Finally, his old friend who had built the fire thought of a plan. He found a prosperous individual who had himself once been a servant, and got this man to give a big party. The young man's employer came, and so did the judge. Well, a great feast was prepared. Rich aromas filled the house. You could almost, but not quite, taste the flavors that floated out from the kitchen. Finally a guest said he was getting very hungry. The host, whose name was Hailu, looked surprised. "Can't you smell the food?" The guest replied:

> "Indeed we can, but smelling is not eating, there is no nourishment in it."
>
> "And is there warmth in a fire so distant that it can hardly be seen?" Hailu asked. "If Arha was warmed by the fire he watched while standing on Mount Sululta, then you have been fed by the smells coming from my kitchen."

So the young man was given his house and land, and the guests were then fed.

No element of the supernatural here, but another West African tale, "The Blood Pact," has a long and affecting version of the "appointment in Samara" theme, in which the tragic hero at last encounters his friend in the guise of a wild animal and kills him.

What sort of content do tales of magic and ineluctable fate add to the psychic life of a child? Are there "truths" here that can only be communicated obliquely, as in myths? May such stories, along with their fun and delight, have archetypal meanings? In any event, many parents know better than to try to do without them.

FRONTIERS

Fuller—More with Less

NO one likes to be taken entirely by storm, but that seems to be the way in which R. Buckminster Fuller is fated to become known—and known as well, perhaps, to coming generations as Albert Einstein is known to this one. Inventor of the Dymaxion House and the Geodesic Dome, champion of the tetrahedon as the fundamental building block for both Nature and Man, obviously an intuitive genius in mechanics and structural engineering—who cannot or chooses not to explain how everything he devises actually works—Buckminster Fuller has lately become an open crusader for world peace and disarmament, on the ground that ignorance and stupidity are the only barriers to universal plenty, and that want is the only barrier to harmony among the peoples of the world.

Fuller is now on the faculty of Southern Illinois University, where he teaches something called Design Science and heads a research group that is busy collecting and correlating inventories of all the world's resources. But he spends most of his time circumnavigating the globe (he does this about once a year) to fulfill various lecture and teaching commitments. He regards students as the hope of the world, and he thinks that architects—although he despises what they get as education—are the professionals who have the best chance of changing the human environment into what he thinks it ought to be. Students flock to him, and he talks to them for as long as six or eight hours, once he gets going. Fuller is a vigorous seventy-two, very deaf (hearing-aids bother him; he carries a bull-horn which he aims at the people he wants to hear), but it doesn't matter much since ordinary dialogue with such a man is hardly possible. He always speaks extemporaneously, seldom with interruption. And his hearers are always glad they kept still and listened, although there was little else to do.

The best portrait we know of Fuller as a human being is the Feb. 7 *New Yorker* profile by Calvin Tomkins. For insight into his design ideas, his contributions to the *Saturday Review* (in a series called "Notes on the Future") seem to communicate better than his books. The first article was called "The Prospect for Humanity" and appeared in *SR* for Aug. 29, 1964. Then, for a statement of his basic philosophy, it would be hard to improve on his "Vision 65 Summary Lecture" given last year at his own university and printed in the Spring 1966 *American Scholar*. This lecture seems to distill everything Fuller cares about and regards as important. For a somewhat choppy but interesting account of Fuller in operation in England and Paris, there is Ray Gosling's article in *Anarchy 57* (November, 1965—single copies 30 cents, published by Freedom Press, 17a Maxwell Road, London, S.W. 6, England).

We'll use our remaining space to indicate briefly why we think Buckminster Fuller is so important to look up, understand, and support.

First, as to realistic peace-making, he is clear on the fact that it will never be accomplished by politicians. The *New Yorker* article quotes him:

> It comes to those who discover it, all round the world, as a dismaying shock, to realize that continuation of the weapons race and of cold and hot warring are motivated only by intramural party fears of local political disasters. The world's political fate does not rest with leaders at the summit, expressing the will of world people, but with the local ambitions and fears of lower-echelon political machines, within the major weapons-possessing nations, whose vacillation is accompanied by an increasing spread of the atomic weapons-possessing nations. . . . All political machine professionals of all political states will always oppose loss of sovereignty for their own state. Solution of the impasse, if it comes at all, must clearly come from other than political initiative.

Fuller, Tompkin reports, "is sure that the solution can come only from a design revolution to be carried out by today's students." Fuller puts this hope clearly in his first *SR* discussion:

> Parading in multitudes, students demand that their political leaders take steps to bring about peace and plenty. The fallacy of this lies in their mistaken, age-old assumptions that the problem is one of political reform. The fact is that the politicians are faced with a vacuum and you can't reform a vacuum. The vacuum is the apparent world condition of not enough to go around—not enough for even a majority of mankind to survive more than half of its potential life span. It is a "you or me to the death" situation that leads from impasse to ultimate showdown by arms. Thus more and more students around the world are learning of the new alternative to politics—the design science revolution, which alone can solve the problem.

But isn't this just another version of the cybernetic claim of salvation through technology? How can one distinguish between Fuller's ideas, and proposals which seem to rest on the total organization of society by a technological elite whose specialized knowledge will cast them as practical dictators? We can't answer this question with any great security because we don't really know what Fuller has in mind, but he is the one man who is not in the least dismayed or over-awed by the unearthly power of the computer, and who seems quite able to regard all the skills and techniques of technology as *tools,* not as oppressive systems-masters of human destiny. Basically, it is his temper that is reassuring, the way his thought develops. You get the impression that no *machine* will ever compel Bucky Fuller to stand up and salute. Instead, the machine will do exactly what Fuller wants it to do.

Fuller doesn't delegate any of the big problems. And there is absolutely no air of "authority" about anything he says and does. He has a style that grows out of a game he describes in the Vision 65 Lecture:

> I often play a mental game, which I started a great many years ago. I patterned it after the physical discipline, with which all humans are familiar, of lifting progressively heavier weights on successive days, thus gradually to become more physically powerful. When I started playing my mental game, my scheme was to ask myself a little larger and more difficult question each day. I also gave myself a basic playing rule, that I must always answer the questions from my own direct experience.

Nobody, it seems to us, who builds his convictions and intellectual habits on such a discipline could tolerate any kind of authoritarianism, either in education or government. And since it seems clear that we are going to have to do *something* in the way of organizing technology for human benefit, the choice of a man like Fuller to lead the way would be a good one because he has such a high estimate of human potentiality. He isn't going at the problem like a specialist who patronizes the "masses" who have to be "serviced"—have their "needs" classified and filled and their foibles indulged by all-wise technological planners. Fuller—this comes out clear in the Vision 65 Lecture—thinks of man as the intelligence in the universe which has the job of counter-acting the second law of thermodynamics. Man is continually making order out of entropy by organizing material forces and by understanding metaphysical forces with his *mind.* Man, for Fuller, is more than a biped with an appetite (consumer)—he is a being with a *mission,* and Fuller thinks of technology as a tool to help human beings do their work in the world. This is part of a basic evolutionary scheme. As Fuller says: "We are probably coming to the first period of direct, consciously assumed responsibility of man in the universe." It is hard not to trust a man who says things like that.