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MORAL AND RELIGIOUS IDEALS IN EDUCATION

1

IT has often been said that we are facing today a moral crisis in American civilization. To overcome the discrepancy between morality and technology, between ideals and actuality, education should take advantage of the resources and insights of religious idealism.

American democracy itself owes much to the religious environment in which it developed. For democracy, in a spiritual sense, is a faith based upon inalienable rights given to us by our Creator; it stresses the rationality and dignity of the individual. Its emphasis upon natural laws is derived from both Stoicism and Christianity. As Jefferson pointed out already, in a democratic society there can be no dualism between individual and social standards of morality. Freedom does not imply irresponsibility or spiritual nihilism. *Without a cosmic perspective, which can be best obtained through religious insight, democratic institutions are constantly threatened by the rule of expediency, if not Machiavellianism.*

The great thinkers of American civilization such as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, William James, John Dewey and Robert Hutchins, all showed a faith in the creative potentialities of the individual. They may have differed in their specific religious views, but they all stressed the need for reflection and mediation if the highest potentialities of the individual are to be realized. To them institutions were never ends in themselves, but only means for the moral training of the citizens.

While in the nineteenth century there was often a bitter conflict between religion and science, today we find that mainly because of the new quantum physics and Heisenberg's theory of indeterminacy, more harmony exists between science and religion. It appears that materialism based upon matter and motion is obsolete, that scientific objectivity is not the *summum bonum of* scientific methodology, and that many scientists are concerned about the moral implication of their researches. The best example of this concern lies in the actions of the atomic scientists who so valiantly fought for civilian control of atomic power.

It appears then that philosophy, science, and religion are partners, and allies in the quest for a civilization based upon rationality and the dignity of the individual.

2

Much confusion exists regarding the nature of man because of the dogmatism of fragmentary viewpoints. Some of the early American thinkers like Edwards stressed the evil of man, while the Transcendentalists emphasized man's goodness. Modern behaviorists like Watson have overemphasized reflex actions and they have been too much concerned with quantitative measurements.

A full view of man would take into account his spiritual yearnings and his quest for creativity. As Schweitzer remarked, in man we find a union of spirit and nature. This does not imply that materialistic views of man are to be ignored, rather that often they tend to be fragmentary and tend to describe, but not explain the ultimate nature of man.

Man yearns for immortality. For most of us annihilation would be worse than the most austere torments on earth. There will probably never be universal agreement regarding either the existence or non-existence of an after-life. What could be a unifying basis for our philosophy would be the ideal to act in such a way that if there is no immortality it would be an act of cosmic injustice. In genuine education as in religion, we can find a

vision of timeless truth which transcends the boundaries of race, nationality, and economic circumstance.

While totalitarian countries emphasize the evil of man, our democratic tradition stresses man's perfectibility. It is the task of education not only to perfect the scientific, philosophical, social, and esthetic capacities of our citizens' but also to develop our moral sensitivity sight and our spiritual insight.

3

This raises the problem of secularism. It can be interpreted in two ways. First, secularism may be viewed as a hedonistic and materialistic way of life, dominated by the perspective of immediacy. This type of secularism is based upon an unexamined way of life and generally has largely negative consequences for the development of American civilization. But secularism interpreted more broadly as the free play of intelligence in the quest for knowledge and championing the separation of state and church may be combined with a genuine religious perspective. We must not make the mistake of being coercive in our religious views or trying to use political measures to impose religious ideals.

As religious authority has declined in Western civilization, secularism has become more and more dominant. But often secularism has acknowledged no authority whatsoever and thus has created a spiritual wasteland. Millions of students have graduated from our high schools and colleges uninformed about religious values, ignorant of the great religious traditions, unacquainted with the noble documents of the major religions. Not only have they been religious illiterates, but they have become ready tools of materialistic philosophies, and as citizens they have often exhibited an attitude of political amnesia. Separation of state and church does not mean that religious values should be excluded from the school, rather that they should be taught in a universal manner with a compassionate spirit, and with sympathy for the diverse views which are part of the American heritage.

As a matter of fact, the diversity of religious views in America offers a paramount opportunity to educators. For diversity often encourages profound thinking. *Contrast is the foundation of creativity.*

4

As individuals we cannot escape the moral imperative of achieving convictions and commitments by which to live. These moral convictions, however, must not be held in a puritanical spirit. The Puritans often felt that anything pleasant was bound to be immoral.

This prejudice extends to education. One teacher recently said to me, "If the students dislike the tests I give, this only indicates how much they are learning,"

To Jonathan Edwards, a famous Puritan thinker, children were "young vipers, and infinitely more hateful than vipers" in God's eyes. Adults are even in a more deplorable condition. "The God that holds you over the pit of Hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked."

Today we have gone to the other extreme and we often cherish a philosophy of extreme materialism. Our lives and choices are largely conditioned by the radio, the press, television, the motion-picture, and the climate of opinion which Whitehead described so well in *Science and the Modern World.* The dominant philosophy reflected in the agencies of communication is one of sensationalism. Superficial values are glorified; adolescent ideals appear to be dominant. Success, regardless of moral consequences, is being sought, often in a ruthless spirit.

The school can counteract these tendencies by rational knowledge and by critical inquiry, but scholarship and formal knowledge alone are inadequate. A genuine religious perspective can

deepen our convictions and can give us a vision which transcends success and material advantage.

5

Philosophical and religious convictions can contribute to the life-affirming strains of our civilization. They can instill in us a reverence for the dignity of the individual and a fervent desire for peace and international harmony. They can and should imbue us with a fervent love not only of those who agree with us, but also of those who oppose our viewpoints. This certainly implies more charity and humility in philosophical disputes.

Humility is important not only in philosophy, but also in other fields of inquiry. There is too much arrogance in our society. As we survey the rise and decline of civilization we note that no institution is eternal. The more we realize our limitations, the more we feel that we can learn from others; and the more we accept the insights not only of Europe but also of Asia, the more we become cosmopolitan in our outlook upon the world.

Today we need again a new group of philosopher-kings who will apply intelligence in a functional way to our civilization. Without reason, ultimate goals are neglected and chaos rules supreme. We should remember that a nation is defined not so much by its material resources as by its intellectual leaders. *Philosophers thus should not be aloof from political and economic matters, but should take an active part in our institutional life.*

Recently I visited the philosophy department of one of our leading universities. The department has almost an ancient tradition and is now reclining upon that tradition. I asked the professor who was interested in the problems of reality what his major purpose was and he replied that he was reflecting upon the nature of the Absolute. Apparently, the Absolute had not been very communicative, for the researches of the professor had been rather fruitless.

I thought that perhaps the professor who taught esthetics might have a more humanistic regard for the philosophic discipline, but I was mistaken. He was writing an opus on art criticism in which he wanted to demonstrate the decadence of contemporary literature, non-objective painting, and atonal music. I asked him whether he had read Hesse, Joyce, Gide, and Kafka, but he thought that these authors were second-rate and that he would not waste his time reading their books.

Still I did not give up hope and so I went to the professor who specialized in Ethics. He complained bitterly about logical positivism (a philosophical movement which tries to eliminate value judgments and which worships the scientific method). He felt that the world could be saved by a return to Kant's sense of duty and that most thinkers should unite and demonstrate the fallacies of materialism, logical positivism and Freudianism. He was a thinker of the old school and he was bewildered by the standards of modern youth. His students were reading the Kinsey report, while in his youth his favorite authors were Tennyson and Browning.

The logicians of the department were logical positivists and they carried on a philosophical war with the professor of ethics who was not on speaking terms with them.

In a rather cynical frame of mind I next talked to the professor who gave his major attention to the philosophy of religion. He confessed that he was rather confused by some of his colleagues, especially the logicians, and that often he did not understand what they were saying. His own training in mathematics had never gone beyond a freshman course in college. But he was not disheartened, for he knew what philosophy needed: a return to the Middle Ages.

Certainly, *philosophy should play a more dominant part in our educational curriculum.* It may be objected that this will mean a new scholasticism and a blind return to the classics. Some probably will say that the domination of

philosophy will lead to an abstruse and impractical approach to education. It is true that many American thinkers have a rather narrow view of their function and that they spoil the student's taste in philosophy. Hence, it is important to re-examine philosophical teachings and to reorganize most philosophy departments. Departmental barriers should be removed and philosophers should work together in co-operative projects with artists, theologians, social scientists, psychiatrists, and natural scientists.

This implies a re-education of American thinkers. Unfortunately, in many cases their outlook upon life is extremely provincial. Their knowledge of European and Oriental religions is often very superficial. Yet it is the task of the thinker to be open-minded and to be a constant learner. We can learn especially from the wisdom of the great faiths. For example, the study of Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism would add immensely to the vitality of the philosophical curriculum and would counteract the extreme chauvinism which is often prevalent in our civilization.

Carmichael, former President of the Carnegie Foundation, notes the need for more philosophy:

> One wonders what would impress a professor of seventy-five years ago if he should return to resume his labors. He would doubtless be amazed to observe the change in emphasis in the undergraduate curriculum. He would probably be prepared, however, to accept the increase in science and technology and the great stress on graduate and research work in the atomic age. He would probably understand also the reasons for many of the new courses listed under the social sciences and the humanities and for the decline of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. His real shock would come when he began to examine the relative position of philosophy as a subject of study.
>
> Our imaginary nineteenth-century professor would not only be puzzled, he would in all probability be greatly disappointed. Judging by the curriculum he would inevitably conclude that in the modern university search for truth had been displaced by *search for facts*, that moral values had given way to *social organization* as a subject of study, and that specialization had sacrificed not only breadth of understanding, but other even more fundamental elements of the old curriculum.
>
> It is the vague realization of this fact that has resulted in a deep discontent with the curriculum at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional levels.[1]

6

Spiritual concepts appear to have a dual origin. On the one hand, they involve the *mores* of the group and the configuration of the institutional system; on the other hand, they touch the perception and sensitivity of the individual. Spiritual ideals[2] appear to evolve in four different cycles:

(1) The first stage is tribal; morality is based on custom; tradition rules supreme.

(2) The second stage is national; God is regarded as the protector of a chosen people; hence nationalism dominates religion; morality is interpreted in categorical terms.

(3) The third stage is universal; God is regarded as the ruler of all nations; compassion dominates morality.

(4) The fourth stage is nihilistic. Examples of this condition can be found in Hellenistic times and in the twentieth century. Skepticism dominates religion; moral ideals are subordinated to the struggle for power.

As can be seen, it is possible to accept religious views and yet act on a tribal moral basis. In early Egyptian religion and in the *Vedas*, for example, we find a separation of ethics and theology. In modern times neo-orthodoxy preaches the necessity for faith and yet has contempt usually for the faith of non-Christian believers. On the other hand, it is impossible to develop the highest moral standards without a profound religious perspective. *For morality is deepened for religious insight and is universalized by the sense of identification and*

[1] Carmichael, *Some Educational Dilemmas*, p. 5

[2] These are not deterministic in the Spenglerian sense.

voluntary suffering that the great religious leaders have advocated.

A most eloquent manifestation of religious idealism recently was represented by the actions of a couple in Los Angeles. They had one son, Jim, who was going to college when I first met him. He was an A student, an excellent athlete and his teachers had great hopes for him. His father was a lawyer and he looked forward to the time when his son would take over the law practice.

When World War II broke out, Jim volunteered and he joined the air force. His mother worried day and night, but Jim wrote cheerful letters home and he told his parents that he was as safe in the air corps as if he were in Los Angeles. Then he was shipped overseas and he took part in the bombing raids over Germany. His letters came regularly and he told his parents that the anti-aircraft fire was light, and that he would soon be home.

Then for two weeks no mail came from Jim. His parents waited every day for a letter and they were both frantic. Then one day came the telegram from Washington: Jim had been killed in action.

His mother had a nervous breakdown and his father aged at least ten years. Both became very bitter, they gave up all social engagements and his father retired from the law practice.

I met them for the first time a month after Jim's death. I had liked Jim as a student and I had received several letters from him. When I talked about him, his mother started to sob and his father had tears in his eyes, so I changed the subject. Before I left they showed me Jim's room; nothing had been touched. His high school pennant was still on the wall; his textbooks were still in the bookcase.

The next day I wrote a letter to the parents and suggested that they should give a scholarship to a foreign student. They agreed, for both had deep religious concern, and with their financial aid a German student was brought over to this country.

The German student, Heinz, was Jim's age; he had lost both parents during an air-raid and he had left East Germany. I took him over to meet Jim's parents; at first they were rather cold. After all, he was an ex-enemy and their son had been shot down over Germany. But when they found out that Heinz likewise had suffered during the war, they became more understanding and sympathetic.

He was living at their house. He had Jim's room. Jim's mother told me that Heinz was like a second son to them. "There is still a great emptiness inside," she said, and her eyes were moist. "But did not Jesus say to turn the other cheek? And I know Jim wanted us to do something like that."

7

Definitions of religion necessarily vary:

Matthew Arnold defines religion as "morality touched with emotion."

William James defines religion as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine."

To Whitehead "religion is what a man does with his solitariness."

My own definition of religion is:

A subjective quest for cosmic comradeship, objectified in institutional relations, in which man's faith is tested by his moral action. Religion then basically is a total quest for completeness and permanent meaning in a universe which often appears to be incomplete and without meaning.

Spiritual values involve:

(*a*) Subjectivity, a feeling of awareness, man is sensitive to the needs of others and he realizes his own potentialities.

(*b*) A sense of total dedication to ideal goals and a willingness to suffer and sacrifice for them.

(*c*) A sense of paradox. On the one hand, the individual feels a sense of inadequacy and the distance which separates him from perfection; on the other hand, the vision of perfection fills the individual with a sense of joy and bold adventure.

(*d*) Spiritual values are involved whenever momentous choices are made in the life of the individual or in the life of the group. Education ought to give us enough perspective so that our choices are meaningful. Without a religious perspective our choices tend to be dominated by the Baconian idols; the idols of the tribe, the market-place, the theatre and the cave.

8

The major religions agree that certain ways of behavior and certain attitudes are to be preferred. Catholics and Protestants, Moslems and Hindus, Confucianists and Taoists agree that love is greater than hate, that moral actions should not be guided by expediency, that disputes should be settled by peaceful means, that no one has a monopoly on virtue, that faith must be substantiated by action, that religion involves not only belief, but our relationship with our neighbor, and that education involves not only our intellect but also our emotions.

These ideals are fundamental in our democratic society. Thus Jefferson in his *Second Inaugural Address* said: "We are firmly convinced. . . . that with nations, as with individuals, our interests soundly calculated, will ever be found inseparable from our moral duties." Also he pointed out "that the patriot like the Christian, must learn that to bear revilings and persecutions is a part of his duty."[3]

Religion in education involves more than a faith in the rationality or spirituality of the universe. It involves constant self-examination on the part of the teacher, a willingness to test his faith by compassionate action, and a rejection of expediency and egoism. It involves an attempt to universalize our ideals through inspiration and example. It stands for an attempt to transcend narrow specialization and to emphasize co-operative endeavors in education. *Religion thus appears as the gateway to universality.*

FREDERICK MAYER

[3] *To Judge Sullivan,* 1805.

REVIEW
SOME UNMUFFLED TRUTHS

IN one of her estimable accounts of the detecting exploits of Lord Peter Wimsey, Dorothy Sayers reports the dissatisfaction of the defense attorney with Wimsey's findings:

> "That's a nice thing to say," cried Peter indignantly, "when we've cleared up such a lot of points for you!"
>
> "I dare say," said the barrister, "but they're the sorts of points which are much better left muffled up."
>
> "Damn it all, we want to get at the truth!"
>
> "Do you?" said Sir Impey drily. "I don't. I don't care two pence about the truth. I want a case."

The most engaging thing about this exchange is the candor of the barrister, who has a fine Roman disdain for discoveries which seem irrelevant to winning his case. "Roman" applies, since the Romans saw little merit in pursuing questions which would produce no support for their "public philosophy." The Roman religion was no more than an instrument of government, and the Romans knew and sometimes admitted it. Varro distinguished clearly between the three sorts of theology he held to be possible—the poetic mythology of Homer, the civil theology of the State, and natural theology investigated by philosophers. Only the last kind had any claim to being true, Varro maintained. The myths served as entertainment, while the civil religion was meant to give cohesion to the empire. As the pontiff Scaevola observed, summing up the Roman spirit, only the civil theology has any social utility, and it is not true.

What sort of a society, one wonders, can *afford* to distinguish between making a "case" and finding the truth? Hardly our own, nor any of the societies of the present. In fact, many of the tensions in existing societies throughout the world, whatever their political coloring, seem to result from the blurring of this distinction. Take for example the student revolt at Berkeley. The argument about what the students did commonly focused on the freedom/order equation, instead of inquiring into the *role* of the university. It was simply assumed that a university is a place where the young acquire the knowledge possessed by their elders, and where they learn certain skills in its use, the argument then turning on what is "propriety" in student behavior. But as the Byrne Report pointed out, this analysis ignores the most important function of the university, which is to be the "continuous critic" of its parent society. "If a state," the Report said, "habitually imposes popular opinion on its university, the result is that the state acquires a reputation for being inhospitable to the life of the mind."

The pertinence of this comment is not recognized by people interested only in case-making. The idea of independent inquiry into truth, as a description of the university, and of the students as inquirers, seems to them quite unreal. This is partly because truth is popularly identified with "science," partly because "happiness" is identified with possessions, and partly because the shallow pragmatism of Western thought has politicalized the idea of truth, making it into a utility for case-makers of every description. Resistance, in this situation, seems to lack a rational ground. People who think they already "know" the truth see as silly and mischievous any conflict and uproar over the right to seek it. So, in a culture which habitually blurs the distinction between making a case and looking for truth, deep feelings of personal integrity have difficulty in becoming articulate. The prevailing rationalizations have gained a monopoly of "reason," and the opposition one wants to express arises from an uneasiness which is something like a toothache. As Milosz says, "Not only can he not express the pain in words, but he cannot even tell you which tooth is aching." The great merit of Mario Savio's short statement, "An End to History," lies in its accurate diagnosis of the source of the pain. This and other student writings insist upon open examination of points which, in the Establishment view, "are much better left muffled up."

Black on White, a critical study of the contributions to literature by American Negroes, by David Littlejohn (Grossman Publishers, New York, $4.50), is informed by clear understanding of the fact that talented Negro writers are compelled by circumstances to seem to "specialize" in writing

about racial issues, despite a breadth of understanding going beyond the limits of any "racial situation." It is not the fault of the artist that he is so confined, but of the times. In his final expression, Mr. Littlejohn looks to the day, perhaps a generation hence, when there will appear—

> a Negro writer who can turn his sympathies outward, and acquire an understanding of suffering whites or Orientals, people everywhere; a man who can reach out and know by sympathy the sufferings of others, possessed (like the mythical twentieth-century Jew) of a unique and world-wide sympathy for suffering, for the inner frustrations of all manner of men. He, this unborn Negro writer, may teach the rest of America—James Baldwin has served, after all, as a crude, first-stage national conscience—what suffering, endurance, uncertainty, desperation, fury, communal understanding, and pity are like.

The book, *Black on White*, is infused with this temper. It begins with a brief summary of what the author terms "race" writing, in which Negroes do little more than speak to one another. Negro contributions to universal literature, he thinks, began about 1940, with publication of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, although James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes may be regarded as forerunners of the awakening with which Mr. Littlejohn is mainly concerned. The writers who stand out, in his estimation, are Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and LeRoi Jones. The reader of any one or all of these distinguished writers is sure to have his perspectives enriched and perhaps corrected by this critic's impersonal and searching judgments. Mr. Littlejohn draws a fine line between impassioned use of the materials of racial injustice and the exploitation or caricature which leads to artistic failure. His book is essentially the work of a man of letters who looks at the work of men of letters who happen to be black. Letters set the standard, not the passions of the hour, although there is both aesthetic and moral justification for the use and portrayal of these passions. We especially recommend the perceptive evaluations of the work of Ralph Ellison and LeRoi Jones. Here we offer the author's contrasting judgments of James Baldwin as playwright and Baldwin as essayist. Of *Blues for Mr. Charlie*—an attempt, as a reviewer put it, "to give the Caucasians in the audience an inferiority complex,"—Mr. Littlejohn says:

> . . . it is an essay in artless bullying, not a play. Its wicked South is faked, its white villains are flat collages of prejudice-clichés. . . . There are playable, even moving moments, bits of ritual drama . . . But the dialogue, for the most part, is hopeless: faked banter, faked poetry, doctrinaire racism, dated slang, all conflated with artificial violence and obscenity. The play rarely comes to life, enough life to hurt a serious listener, because Baldwin lacked either the skill or the patience to imagine completely the place, the story, or the people. . . . It provided a perfect example of the relinquishing of judgment by an undiscerning and intimidated white audience.

At the conclusion of a section on contemporary Negro novelists, Mr. Littlejohn writes of Baldwin:

> He is the most powerful and important American essayist of the postwar period. *Notes of a Native Son* and *Nobody Knows My Name* will maintain their place among the small collection of genuine American classics. They have already been adopted as standard texts and models of style in American college courses, and this is not just a "vogue," an offshoot of the Civil Rights movement. Two such books would sustain any reputation, as long as men can tell the true from the false. . . .
>
> Baldwin is fully aware of the ambiguities and ironies implicit in his subjects (primary among them the sick paradox that calls itself America), and he weaves these same ambiguities and ironies into his prose. He is also drivingly and constantly self-critical, which is why his writing is so strong and clear, his thinking so often unassailable. His paragraphs work like a witty colloquy of two sharp minds, Baldwin's and his critic's, one with the other. . . . As Baldwin himself admits, Negro literature "is more likely to be a symptom of our tension than an examination of it," and this includes his own three novels, his plays, and his stories. The exhilarating exhaustion of reading his best essays—which in itself may be a proof of their honesty and value—demands that the reader measure up, and forces him to learn.

COMMENTARY
THE TASKS OF EDUCATION

IN a passage quoted by Dr. Mayer in this week's lead article, the following quotation from Sir Richard Livingston was omitted for lack of space:

> The most important task of education is to bring home to the student the greatest of all problems—the problem of living—and to give him some guidance in it;—that youth needs a philosophy of living, for shaping conduct, for reference in doubt, for challenge, stimulus, and driving power.

There can be no doubt but that Sir Richard himself had a "philosophy of living," and that he gave much inspiration to others, but one wonders whether, indeed, it is possible for any person—or teacher—to convey to another a "solution" for the problem of living. It seems clear, at any rate, that the kindly, devoted men who believe in the communicability of such solutions are among the world's most disappointed people, today.

One might add a supplementary proposition: that the most difficult task of education is to help the student to become aware of the true object of education, and to generate in himself a sense of reality for the kind of content in his studies which will bring him closer to this end.

It is clear enough that many people go through life without ever noticing that these two realizations are in fact incommunicable by any "public" means. The present breakdown of communication between the generations is a dramatic case in point.

At the root of the dissatisfaction of modern youth is a profound sense of deprivation—but deprivation of *what?* There is only one important answer: Deprivation of a sense of mystery which the older generation has lost or denied. It is the pretense of "knowing" what is in fact *not even sought,* encountered by students in their elders, which makes them angry and iconoclastic. And if their revolt seems without respect for the past, this is because that past shows no comprehension of the human necessities of the future. Therefore the students must revolt—and being but students, they make mistakes. But their mistakes are mistakes of the heart, not of sterilizing compromise and pretended answers.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

RETURN OF THE INCOMMENSURABLES

IDEAS which were last heard of in educational thought in the form of transcendentalist intuitions and the faintly neoplatonic mysticisms of Bronson Alcott are returning under other auspices—in the discussions of the "self" and other incommensurables by humanistic psychologists. The idea of the self now has a slightly clinical air. Its rebirth is taking place in delivery rooms still starchy with the functionalism of a scientific vocabulary, although the zest for precise definition is fighting a losing battle with the protean realities which keep making their presence felt.

What has created this new foreground of psycho-educational inquiry? First of all, no doubt, *selves* have begun to demand conscious recognition. We want no mechanistic explanation of a happening which is intrinsically a self-declaration of moral agents and of independent identity. The self is a starting-point of causation, not an epiphenomenal link in an endless cause-effect chain. Yet it seems clear enough that an existential burst out of conventional self-effacing definition—objectifying definitions by science, collectivizing definitions by politics, reductive definitions by economics, and dehumanizing definitions by war—has been a contributing factor. *I will not be so abused* is a gasping, desperate cry of the self. Collaborating on the positive side is the boundless renascence of the arts, as undeniable as it is formless and confused. Then there is the wild determination of the young to be seen and known as selves, and if we have given them no suitable language of self-identification, they can in the meantime let their hair grow long. If they need it, they have Biblical precedent.

The difficulties of verbalizing about the self are made clear by Clark Moustakas in *The Teacher and the Child* (1956):

> Unfortunately, most research studies on the self have been highly structured and intellectualized. An increasingly narrow definition is emerging. Descriptions imply and sometimes state that a definition of self is self, rather than as aspect or partial expression. Statements an individual checks about himself or that someone else makes about him are tabulated. The score an individual receives is interpreted as the individual's self. These reports abstract, analyze, and divide the self into such parts as "self-concept," "negative self," "inferred self," and "ideal self." The self finally becomes limited to verbal statements and categories. Viewing the self as categories, characteristics, and in other abstractive ways makes such studies possible. This approach does not enrich our understanding of the experience of self. Thus conceptions of self are shared, communicated, and conveyed in words, but the natural immanence of self spontaneously expressed is somehow lost.

How can we incorporate these new "insights" into the curriculum? Well, we can't, and hand-wringing by manual-writers will not help.. It is just as Michael Polanyi says in *Personal Knowledge*, about the essence of the practice of scientific research or of an art: such matters are ineffable. You can read off profiles of such practice, take snapshots of the action, and make maxims that are occasionally helpful, but you cannot tell precisely what is going on, and it is the sin against the Holy Ghost to pretend that you can. Mr. Moustakas has his way of conveying this view:

> The self is not its definition or description but rather the central being of the individual person. In the classroom the teacher comes to know and understand this self in a special relationship with the child. Comparison, relatedness, and association to other selves, situations, and events become necessary in a communicable definition of self. Such an approach breaks up the self and violates its nature. What is peculiar and idiosyncratic cannot be conveyed in common language. To be understood it must remain essentially different and *known* in the experience of an interpersonal relationship. The self involves the totality of the child which cannot be studied or examined by external measures or ratings. The self is a natural, automatic, and complete expression of experience. Understanding of self is

possible through unqualified perception and empathy, that is, human presence or being.

What shall we do, then, about this crucial subject, if there can be, concerning it, no "communicable definition"? The most important thing to do, probably, is to stop feeling "deprived" by natural reality. We have exposed, in this encounter, one of the ultimate barrens of our culture—the desert of meaninglessness created by the sterile passion to define what cannot be defined. If we do not know what are the things which must be left undefined, then our philosophical education has been totally neglected and we are unready to live in the presence of incommensurables.

Continuing to do what cannot be done, because we know of nothing else to do, is as wrong as, and probably inwardly related to, our compulsion to use napalm in Viet Nam, because this is what we "know how" to do, and therefore must do. Nation-states are insensible to the profound morality of the philosophical or conscientious drop-out.

Yet the incommensurables are here, are "presences" among us—and since they cannot be defined, but will not be denied, they are productive of pain. The pain, being existential, comes from within, arising from encounters between our own incommensurable nature and the incommensurable nature of the world. And while existential pain cannot be eliminated, it can nonetheless be *used.*

To be stopped, frustrated, prevented, is a basic, characterizing reality of human life. We call it evil, yet who could live in a world where obstacles never arise? The uses of obstacles are of course well known, and sometimes sophisticated rulers and managers imagine that they can stimulate growth by simulating obstacles. Besides the arrant paternalism of such efforts, the trouble with this sort of planning of "obstacle courses" is that even very clever men do not seem able to create the circumstances of existential experience for others. They try, but sometimes they end by becoming Robespierres and Stalins. A basic respect for selves seems at issue here. What is planned for the regulation or control of growth turns out to work only as Procrustean mutilation. The rhythms of existential confrontation remain unknowable, although we know that they exist. Mr. Moustakas has a passage on this also:

> Knowing the content of the child's experience does not explain the dynamic factors which motivate his behavior, any more than knowing that a tree has a trunk and branches tells how it will be perceived by different people who see it. The "facts" regarding human behavior have little meaning in themselves. It is the manner in which they are perceived that tells how they will influence behavior. Experiments at the Hanover Institute, Hanover, New Hampshire, have shown that we do not get our perceptions from the things around us, but that our perceptions come from within us. These studies indicate that there is no reality except individual reality, which is always based on a background of unique experience. It is this personal world of the child which the teacher must come to know in order to help children understand themselves better.

Selves, one might say, can be invited, but they cannot be manipulated. And since every situation involving human relations has two aspects—a finite, commensurable aspect, and an unlimited (unpredictable), incommensurable aspect, the act of teaching is clearly an art, like the making of a poem. The forms and disciplines are necessary, but to use them for giving space to instead of confining the self results from the refusal to make limiting definitions. This becomes very difficult in a culture which celebrates the manipulation of the finite as the highest achievement of man. Existentially speaking, the project of the educator is to generate a new "self" for his entire culture—an undertaking that is bound to be filled with existential pain, although also with discovery and delight.

FRONTIERS

Unharming Affirmation

THE rebirth of an affirmative spirit in the context of openly admitted ignorance is beginning to give the present a new character. This change takes different forms at different levels. In the area of social thinking, a pragmatic humanism is replacing ideological commitment. The emerging temper is well illustrated in Arthur Miller's answer to a question about his political views, as reported in a *Paris Review* interview in the Summer 1966 issue. Mr. Miller said:

> Nowadays I'm certainly not ready to advocate a tightly organized planned economy. I think it has its virtues, but I'm in deadly fear of people with too much power. I don't trust people that much any more. I used to think that if people had the right idea they could make things move accordingly. Now it's a day-to-day fight to stop dreadful things from happening. In the Thirties it was, for me, inconceivable that a socialist government could be really anti-Semitic. It just could not happen because their whole protest in the beginning was against anti-Semitism, against racism, against this kind of inhumanity; that's why I was drawn to it. It was accounted to Hitler; it was accounted to blind capitalism. I'm much more pragmatic about such things now, and I want to know those I'm against and who it is that I'm backing and what he is like.

A few years ago (in the issue of Dec. 19, 1962), MANAS quoted from the occasionally published *Evangelical Agnos*tic on how religious dogmatism leads to the justification of political evil. This paper, now named *Foolscap* and issued even more "occasionally," in its Summer 1966 issue examines the agnostic-seeming rhetoric of the God-is-dead clergy. The editor, William Henry Young (Box 5040, Fresno, Calif. 93755), observes:

> . . . all of the new theologians miss the essential point of agnosticism and the faith which comes with resignation to unknowing about God. . . . One of the few statements which seems to come close to the gospel of agnosticism is the definition of God given by Van Buren in reviewing Michael Novack's book, *Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge.* Van Buren says: " 'God' is the name the believer uses for the utterly silent emptiness, the inconceivable void which he and the unbeliever face in common." Whether we use the "God" term or not for this realization, is not important (although to use it may be confusing because of other definitions); it is the acceptance of utter silence which provides the basis of our faith.
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> It is not that the world is any less in need of the humble faith which agnosticism brings. Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement especially force us to determine how we can be effective in combating the arrogance and aggression which appear in both issues. Unknowing itself does not bring a quick and easy solution to these, or any of life's situations, but a humble acceptance of one's own finiteness before the ultimate questions should impel one to the same posture in solving proximate problems. An agnostic base gives no moral sanctions or categorical imperatives to follow, but it does preclude actions and attitudes which imply certainty about one's position. In both the issues of Vietnam and Civil Rights a humble beginning might also be the beginning of solutions—and in any event the arrogant and aggressive actions which are so prevalent should be opposed.
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> How we who do not believe in arbitrarily forcing our will on others can effectively keep others from using force and violence to accomplish their ends, is one of the major problems which faces us and which calls us all to take up the pen of persuasion.

One thing to notice, here, is the need to consider such judgments in a context of history. There is an enormous amount of literature affirming (with considerable reason) that action for good always grows out of deep conviction, and while there is a difference in feeling-tone between "conviction" and "belief," the two terms are very close in meaning for most people. The dilemma is obvious enough. Great movements of history are intimately related to idea-systems which, if not sets of beliefs, have many beliefs connected with them. And if the uncertainties in human life lend a kind of splendor to the man who acts on principle, it is the hidden uncertainties behind belief which turn a man into a dogmatist.

On this view, then, the crucial distinction may be between principle and belief. When Mr. Young speaks of taking up "the pen of persuasion," he

has to mean something more than persuading people to doubt themselves. Socrates, that champion doubter of all time, was not a "negative" thinker. He declared the positive doctrine of *anamnesis*, or reminiscence—the idea that there is a basic competence in all human beings to meet their problems and to grow in knowledge out of their own resources. So you could say that evangelical agnostics like Mr. Young are not just doubters and unbelievers, but people who declare for belief in the process of growth, and whose iconoclasm is directed, like Socrates', against beliefs which are or have become *obstacles* to growth.

What this gets down to, then, is recognition that the problem of truth is a problem in the psychology of individual awakening, a view which is acceptable and fine until someone comes along to insist that the issues of justice and human equality, as we encounter them in the world, are *social* problems and that they call for organized solutions. This is how the pressure gets turned on—when men are overwhelmingly tempted to look for a sort of "truth" that will compel other men to behave.

Yet the instruction of recent history is that the truth which compels is not a truth but a betraying lie. So that the next question becomes: When the pressure gets unbearable, should you ignore the instruction of history, and the facts of individual psychology, on the ground that you can't *afford* to notice them any more, or do you say that a social application of these conclusions *must* be found?

Gandhi thought he had found an answer to this question. He said that what must be done is for those who see the problem to constitute themselves a voluntaristic fabric of social relationships which would operate outside, beneath, and in the interstices of, the existing society. He had, you could say, two reasons for this: first, he didn't want what truth he could find out to be turned into a lie by compulsion; second, he was sure that compulsion would not work toward the ends for which it is held to be "necessary."

In short, Gandhi resolved the dilemma by making the processes of individual psychology the basis of the social order. The philosophical foundation for this course is found in the doctrine of Maya in Eastern metaphysics—expounded at length by the Buddha in the *Diamond Sutra.*

What can fairly be said of the present is that it is a time when this dilemma is gradually being recognized as the central socio-ethical issue of the age. And what can be fairly predicted is that the harsh outlines of its insolubility will be softened only by facing it without compromise. Both Socrates and Gandhi seemed to acquire their invincible faith in man by refusing to settle for solutions which could "succeed" only by ignoring the individual learning process.