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THE DARING AND PERILOUS PROJECT

THE world of modern thought exhibits a curious ambivalence toward metaphysical ideas. There is much condemnation of "metaphysics," as such, with repetition of the now conventional claim that openly metaphysical doctrines take leave of the "real" world and tend to close out the importance of *immediacy* of feeling, or "being," by launching the mind on far-reaching but empirically groundless odysseys of the intellect. Yet when a serious work makes ardent and wise use of great metaphysical conceptions, the interest it arouses seems to have no limit. A case in point is the enduring popularity of W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation* (Galaxy paperback), a volume of the 1935-37 Gifford Lectures, which by now has been through dozens of printings. It hardly needs pointing out that books of this sort speak to some profound hunger in contemporary man. It is as though a secret Faustian longing breaks out of the ghetto made for it by Scientism and ranges freely over territories of meaning long ignored by conventional intellectuality. A condition of this freedom, however, seems to be that the use of metaphysics must be rich in poetic imagination and at the same time sagaciously critical. And it must not belabor the fact that it is metaphysical.

Why, it might be asked, all this caution about flights of metaphysical speculation?

There are really two questions here. The first has to do with the importance, or rather the inevitability, of metaphysical thinking. The other involves the practical necessity for skepticism.

A first proposition, then, would be that all human thought about meaning rests upon metaphysical assumptions. The decisions and motivations behind all volitional human action arise from a consideration of what is real, or good, or to be desired, and the conclusions so drawn grow out of ideas about the nature of man and the world. Any group of related assumptions about man and the world represents thought that is either explicitly or implicitly metaphysical. That is, it embodies judgments about the nature of man and the world and a structure of reasoning about both. Even a denial of the validity of all metaphysical ideas is itself a metaphysical judgment, since it takes a position on the nature of man and draws inferences about action and the good from that position. It is simply silly to deny the role of metaphysics in philosophy, since *any* assertion concerned with meaning uses metaphysics. (F. H. Bradley demonstrated this a long time ago.)

All metaphysical propositions are subject to criticism and argument. The fundamental questions of human life—the meaning of the moral sense in human beings, whether there is a life after death, the kinds of relationships people have with other people and with their environment, the explanation of evil, the ground of both love and hate, the grading of differing and competing fulfillments, the idea of Deity and of Law, the basis of growth or evolution: these and many other questions are met and dealt with by metaphysical thinking—either openly, as such, or in various "practical" or theological disguises.

It is easy to show how metaphysical assumptions govern practical decision. We have only to ask, why do we send our children to school? The Pilgrim Fathers would have explained that the salvation of the soul depends upon knowing the Word of God, and since the Word of God is printed in the Bible, children must be taught to read. A modern who places his faith in the socializing objectives of the Welfare State might say that in order to participate in the cooperative enterprise of modern life, and to enjoy its benefits, the child must acquire the skills of communication on which the operation of its

social-economic processes depends. He must learn what it means to be a "good citizen," and education teaches him this. A Humanist might say that in school the child will learn what the best men of the past have thought about the major encounters and problems of life, and equip himself to meet them as best he can. For some others, education may mean no more than access to livelihood, and for still others, a conventional avenue to improved status. Then there are replies which would reflect little more than unthinking conformity—public schooling for children is required by law.

The reasons given by people for their political opinions or for their support or objections to national policy are also at root metaphysically based. (The metaphysical assumptions behind most political views are commonly over-simplified to the point of meaninglessness, and are used here simply for illustration.) If, for example, you think that human beings are or were meant to be self-reliant individuals engaged in a competitive struggle for survival, your political position will reflect this view. Here, there is usually a further metaphysical assumption to the effect that the differences among men are on the whole more important than the similarities, and the "ethical" arrangements of political economy are to be adjusted to this view. Or if, on the other hand, you have come to believe that the extensive want and misery in the world result mainly from economic inequalities and the abuse of political power, you will reject the idea that these differences are an expression of "nature law" (a metaphysical judgment) and argue that they are caused by correctable injustice (another metaphysical judgment involving conclusions about morality in human relationships), proposing either legislative or revolutionary remedies. Again, if you are one of those who see in human nature a blend of contradictory qualities, you may despair of finding a simple political solution for the ordering of human affairs, and seek subtler or more complex answers In any case, metaphysical judgments are involved.

By this time, it will have become easy to see why skepticism is in order in all such questions. There is no argument here, against skepticism itself, which we obviously cannot do without, but against the sweeping rejection of conscious metaphysical thinking of every sort, on the ground that it gets us into trouble. Some kind of "trouble," it is beginning to be plain, is built into the human situation, and the recent cycle of scientific materialism, which Western man entered into with such great hopes—and with such high contempt for all metaphysical "notions"—has not put an end to our trouble at all, but has created new and almost incomprehensible varieties.

The use we need to make of skepticism, then, along with its ally of impartial investigation, is to distinguish between good and bad metaphysics. The so-called non-metaphysical systems are really systems resting upon unexamined and unidentified metaphysical assumptions of either scientific or theological origin.

Well, if the scientific cosmology and the only scientific society attempted thus far ("scientific socialism") have led, like the previous schemes, to a "no exit" impasse, this is not, from a metaphysical point of view, such a dreadful situation, after all. Its practical meaning is that we are free to start all over again. We need no longer be skeptical of metaphysical systems as such, but only of bad metaphysics; and we need no longer take seriously the anti-metaphysicians, except in order to show the naïvely reactionary character of attacks on metaphysics and the concealed metaphysical assumptions which are behind them.

Nonetheless, there should be some restraint. Close attention must be given to avoiding the kind of metaphysical assumptions which lead to closed systems of thought and one-dimensional societies. This is a way of saying that the big judgments we make about man and his good must be of a sort which take into full account the central paradoxes and dilemmas of human nature and life, and not gloss over them as though they did not exist. If you say, for example, that man is a soul created by

God, and that the hope of man for the good depends upon his obedience to the rules set down in God's Book; and, moreover, that the correct reading of the Book depends upon the decisions of the officials of the Church, you have an unequivocal system which cannot possibly go wrong, except in the incidental destruction of what are plainly the most valuable qualities of human beings.

Probably the most difficult aspect of the problem of making metaphysical assumptions about man and society lies in the fact that, given what may be conceded to be a partial truth about themselves, both individuals and societies have a notorious capacity to pretend or to insist that they know the whole truth, and are often ready and willing to persist in a course of absolute ruin in order to prove themselves right.

There is an interesting parallel between metaphysical systems and systems of social institutions. We plainly have both, and the two systems perform similar functions, although at different levels of existence. It is often pointed out that the most important role of institutions is to serve as buffers between us and the great unknown "out there" which we feel ill-equipped to cope with as individuals. Suppose, suddenly, that we had no army, no air force, no nuclear bombs; suppose they were made by magic to disappear, leaving us to face a world of alien forces shorn of our accustomed weapons of "defense." It is not difficult to imagine the hysteria that would result. We have been for so long schooled to believe in the absolute necessity of the military and its tools of destruction that the anxiety at losing them would be intolerable. A few people, of course, would be enormously relieved, and they would point out that by far the larger proportion of the inhabitants of the earth have also been living, until now, without these guarantees of national security. Most likely, however, such psychological independence of the implements of war would arouse much anger in their countrymen. Then, apart from security, there is the question of national identity. Every country has traditions of excellence in which the people think of themselves as sharing. An Englishman has certain qualities. He expects certain things of himself and of other Englishmen. Norms of behavior are established by such means. A man comes to realize what assumptions he ought to make about himself by absorbing the traditions of his culture and from family life. The institutions of a society are like the familiar landmarks of one's home town—you see them, pursue your course in their presence, and you feel at home. The reflexes of collective behavior are controlled and triggered by the psychic conditionings produced by these institutions. Once in a while you meet someone who gets his feeling of identity and his rules of conduct and obligation from less local sources. To find out what happens in the behavior of men who bypass familiar institutional influences, you have only to read Henry David Thoreau, or Leo Tolstoy. And then, if you take such unusual individuals seriously, you have the problem of reconciling yourself to the possibility—for some men a certainty—that the norms of behavior and loyalty followed by the great majority of men are not the best ones to accept. You will be obliged to wonder how, in such circumstances, it is possible to apply the utilitarian rule of the greatest good for the greatest number—how to balance, in your own decisions, the "reality" of what is with the desirability of what might be.

It now begins to be manifest that the problems for individuals created by the prevailing set of institutions—almost any set of institutions—are really little more than the shadow of the problems of metaphysical assumptions—the assumptions which attempt to answer the questions: Who am I? What am I supposed to be living for? What are my rights and my responsibilities? Why do I love? What do I fear? *Should* I fear? Have I gone to the right place for answers to such questions? How does one recognize the right places? Does it really matter? Should one ever stand alone? Aren't such matters too much for any one person to deal with?

With questions of this sort marked on the portals of any serious philosophical undertaking, it is no wonder that most people have looked about for reliable authorities in preference to trying to work out private solutions; no wonder that religions tend to develop supernatural means of escape from the dilemmas of individual decision; and no wonder that, starting in the eighteenth century, revolutionary men of persistently independent mind began marking all these questions empty abstractions, turning to "nature" in the hope of getting indisputable objective evidence about the good of man in terms of his physical organism and its manifest needs.

Well, we know, or are learning to know, that the society which claims to be totally based on objective knowledge is a totalitarian society, and that the theory of man which takes account of no more than the mechanisms of behavior looks forward to producing, not free, but completely "conditioned" human beings—flesh and blood robots, you could say.

In the present, therefore, the fundamental questions are still unanswered, still stare us in the face. We may not be able to answer them, but we cannot fail to try. Nor can we dare, once more, to delegate finding the answers to any authority. No device or evasion of this sort will work. That is what we have found out.

It would be foolish, of course, to go about formulating a metaphysic for oneself without giving any attention to the attempts of others in this direction. And to the extent that earlier systems or ideas appeal, and also avoid in their religio-political implications the disasters we are determined to avoid, they should be looked at closely. The thing to remember is that the individual has to accept full responsibility for what he adopts, and that if he makes a mistake, he must not blame it on someone else. Ideas are the common property of mankind, but the responsibility for their use and effect can only be individual.

Already, by suggesting these provisos, we have the germ of a metaphysic. It starts with the idea of the individual man as responsible for what he does, and capable therefore of *some* self-determination. This idea is not new. In the West it begins with Plato's account of the soul as a "self-moving unit." But the soul—if we may now use this term—is far from entirely self-moving. It is also moved by outside forces; in fact, it is so much moved by outside forces that the entire science of Stimulus-and-Response psychology is based upon a study of how human behavior is shaped by outside influences. So, we have the idea of the human soul as a center, a conscious unit, which both moves of its own motion and is moved by motion from an external source. This view seems to fit our daily experience.

Let us, after Leibniz, call this partially self-moving unit a monad. The monads are many—as many monads as men (other forms of life are another problem)—but taken together they may be thought of as one. They are one in the sense proposed by humanitarian arguments for universal brotherhood. They are one in the sense that great religious teachers have urged a common origin for human beings. They are one in the intuitive longings of men for the companionship of one another, the understanding of one another, and in the spontaneous services they render and the sacrifices they make for one another. They are one in the common human situation experienced by all. They are one in having essentially the same attributes and capacities as human beings. They are one in the not infrequent capacity of individuals to feel, without being told, what other men feel, to intuit their thoughts, and speak to their hearts in a common tongue. They are one in the excitement of learning to understand and in the thrill of teaching each other to understand.

So, it is not unreasonable to propose some kind of common ground or sense in which all men—all monads—are one. We may say, therefore, that there is a principle of unity and a principle of diversity in all. We have thoughts of

unity which we communicate with the language of feeling and by declarations expressing the idea of identity. We have thoughts of diversity in terms of relationships, which we order and attempt to understand by the language of mathematics. Relationships, we might argue, are the form taken by unity in diversity. We might add that the relationships of the static, moved-from-the-outside aspect of man can be objectified and made objects of scientific study, but that the relationships of the monad as a self-moving unit are in unstable equilibrium, variable in a fashion made unpredictable by self-induced motion—by, so to speak, uncaused causes (free will?)—and cannot therefore be objectified, except, in some measure, in statistical terms, and therefore in terms which neglect the fact of individuality. This is an intolerable reductionism, nihilistic toward human individuals. Further, the unpredictable aspect of the monad exists as a "wild" factor which continually modifies the otherwise fixed relationships of the part of man which is moved by outside forces. Here we have an abstract analysis which contributes to understanding of the mythic view of man in which he rises to triumph over seemingly impossible obstacles.

What shall we say about the "purpose of life"? We might borrow further from Leibniz and say that the most perfectly developed monad is one which has gained the capacity to reflect in itself all the other processes of life. This would be, as we say, *wisdom.* Human life, then, is fulfilled in terms of consciousness. A man who has within himself a universal consciousness, a universal awareness, is the most we can expect of the most perfectly developed human being. This, surely, will do as a goal.

We really have little difficulty, with the resources of all the high religions and philosophies of the past at our disposal, in building an initially reasonable metaphysic. The problem is not in elaborating positive doctrine, but in understanding the subtle and utterly bewildering difficulties in making it *work.* A logical hypothesis about emancipation from pain and struggle is not emancipation from pain and struggle.

For example, human beings organized in societies, busy pursuing personal and partial or partisan ends, show an apparently ineradicable tendency to crucify their-wisest teachers. The human capacity to know and to understand is *almost* equalled by the capacity to know falsely and to be deceived. Our metaphysic will have to account for all this, along with its propositions about ideal identities and social structures and relationships. What this amounts to is a theory of perfection that can be grasped in principle by obviously imperfect beings. The paradoxes of Buddhism come the closest of anything we can think of to this.

Actually, abstract metaphysics is not enough for the solution of problems of this order. You might say that a magical component is called for, and this would be frightening except for the fact that a lot of people are looking around for just that, although they call it by other names.

What is wanted, you could say, is some kind of "sign," some bite-into-and-remember-the-taste-forever evidence that the longings felt by the human heart have some hope of realization, that the dream of perfection has a ground in natural possibility. One of the characteristic developments of our age is that people seem to agree, practically without discussion or debate, that the goal is a state of *feeling.* Disappointed mystics have been known to ask their dentists for a good source of nitrous oxide (laughing gas), perhaps having read in Vivekananda that this gas produces a chemical imitation of *samadhi,* and it will probably take the mushrooms and cactus school of psychodelic liberation a generation or so to get around to the austere view that the delights and spectacles induced by drugs belong to a range of subjective experience that does not even reach up to the foothills of Plotinus' alone with the Alone.

There may nonetheless be a sure instinct in the search for truth in feeling. Feeling is

awareness of being, and the highest feelings are almost certainly those which come with a sudden extension of the radius of one's being. This, quite apparently, is what happened to Arjuna when, as recounted in the eleventh discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita,* Krishna gave him a temporary consubstantiality of being with the entire world. It was too much for Arjuna, of course, as it would be for us, but only a glimpse, now and then—a brief æolian tremor of the noëtic strings of our being—is often enough to set echoing the timeless chords. "Peak-experience" is a happy generality for all the octaves that may be involved.

In any event, it seems clear that in every human being there is a sensitive core of reality-knowing and reality-feeling which on occasions—rare occasions, for most of us—is able to radiate a kind of psycho-spiritual "field," and when this happens the individual needs no words of explanation to grasp what the Christian means by "the peace that passeth all understanding," and finds nothing obscure or out of proportion in the Eastern injunction, "Look inward, thou art Buddha."

The monad, in short, is already what it must become. That there are in life intervals, conjunctions, juxtapositions, when past, present, and future are joined by magical fusion, however momentary, with the timeless, is perhaps the closest we can come to "natural revelation."

But since it must also be possible for every limiting container of life to produce a finite version of beatitude, the hungering, inner layers of the human psyche are endlessly vulnerable to illusion and even self-betrayal. Here, the analogy of the mirror-like sphere of the monad tends to break down, for how shall we explain the mechanisms of all this self-deception? But explainable or not in metaphysical image, the deception is certainly a fact. Sirens and Circes may have as much functional meaning in present-day psychological experience as they had for the trials of Odysseus.

REVIEW
NOSTALGIC RECOLLECTIONS

> It is an interesting, though idle, speculation, what would be the effect on us if all our reformers, revolutionaries, planners, politicians and life-arrangers in general were soaked in Homer from their youth up, like the Greeks. They might realize that on the happy day when there is a refrigerator in every home, and two in none, when we all have the opportunity of working for the common good (whatever that is), when Common Man (whoever he is) is triumphant, though not improved—that men will still come and go like the generations of leaves in the forest; that he will still be weak, and the gods strong and incalculable; that the quality of a man matters more than his achievement, that violence and recklessness will still lead to disaster, and that this will fall on the innocent as well as on the guilty. The Greeks were fortunate in possessing Homer, and wise in using him as they did.
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> H.D.F. KITTO, in *The Greeks*

IT is not easy to take an intellectual position on the slice of American history reported on by Harvey O'Connor in *Revolution in Seattle* (Monthly Review Press, 1964, $5.00). The world and the American Northwest have changed so much since the first quarter of the twentieth century—the period with which Mr. O'Connor is concerned—that you wonder, first of all, how the social struggle of those days can be related to the present. Taking an emotional position is no problem at all—for then the issues were well marked, with little doubt about where right and justice lay, and Mr. O'Connor, who was eye-witness and participant, tells a story with epic ingredients.

The time, in its beginnings, was the golden age of the socialist movement in the United States. Leaders of the working class were busy assimilating Bellamy and Marx. Thinking men in the rank and file of labor were dreaming of ideal social communities, and more—they were starting them on the Pacific Coast. Eugene Debs, the railway union labor organizer who had been called to help with the Pullman strike of 1894, had used his time in jail at Woodstock to read Gronlund's *Cooperative Commonwealth* and Bellamy's *Looking Backward.* Soon a convinced socialist, and discouraged by the half-measures and failures of the Populist movement, Debs became (in 1897) national organizer of the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth. The plan was to found a community which would introduce "cooperative industry," gradually extending, the founders said, "the sphere of our operations until the national cooperative commonwealth shall be established." Filled with utopian dreams, Debs wrote to John D. Rockefeller for financial help:

> The purpose of the organization, briefly speaking, is to establish in place of the present cruel, immoral and decadent system, a cooperative commonwealth, where millionaires and beggars . . . will completely disappear, and human brotherhood will be inaugurated to bless and make the world more beautiful. . . . In this movement there are no class distinctions: Rich and poor are equally welcome to help dethrone Gold and elevate humanity. Then the strong will help the weak, the weak will love the strong, and the Human Brotherhood will transform the days to come into a virtual paradise. . . .Believing that you will find yourself in accord with your own feelings of social and patriotic obligations by your generous contributions to a worthy cause for freedom, I remain,
>
> Sincerely yours,
> EUGENE V. DEBS

This letter shows both the ardor and the naïve simplicity of the social idealism of the time. Several communities were established in the West, with varying fortunes. The point, here, is that the area was seeded with radical conceptions. The brutal encounters to come were between men with this background and the inheritors of the freebooter, get-rich-quick spirit which regarded the rape of the land and the ruthless exploitation of working men as standard operating procedure in the American way of life. Labor and radical newspapers sprang up in the area. The vote in the national elections of 1912 revealed the socialist temper of the time: "Debs polled 900,000 for president, of which 40,000 were cast in Washington. In Seattle, Hulet Wells (a Socialist editor) got 11,000 votes for mayor against 14,500

for George F. Cotterhill, the winner, and one Socialist candidate for a county office amassed 21,000 votes." Meanwhile, the Wobblies had become a decisive factor in labor disputes. First heard of in 1907 when they struck a Tacoma copper smelter, the Industrial Workers of the World were creating "a new and strange form of unionism." The I.W.W. was an industrial union which paid no attention to craft lines and its members could and did completely tie up the operations they struck. They were mostly migratory workers of the lumber camps and mines. The songs of Joe Hill approximate their spirit. It was the Wobblies who fought for and won decent working conditions and an eight-hour day in the logging camps of western Washington. Before they took over, the bunk houses were jerry-built structures which packed the men in like sardines. They slept on straw mattresses, supplied their own blankets, and for heat they had a wood stove. Ventilation was through the open door. Hours were from 7 A.M. to 6 P.M. In that country the annual rainfall ranges from 80 to 160 inches and for many days at a time the men had to dry their clothes around the stove. The work was all done with muscle and was exceedingly dangerous. O'Connor writes:

> A man could stand this life—unending toil, no recreation—for only two or three months at the most. Then he quit and went to town. There, in a burst of release, he got drunk, whored, gambled, and spent his stake. Within a week he was down on the slave market looking for another job, another few months of work in a camp. That the men who produced the fundamental wealth upon which the economy of the region rested should be regarded as pariahs, condemned to body-breaking toil and to animal-like existence whether on the job or away, that in the city they should be assigned to a skid road pale which existed only to rob and debase them—this was the supreme confirmation to the I.W.W. and the socialists of the fundamental truth of Marxist theory. It gave point to the line in the "International," "We have been naught, we shall be all"; from this arose the revolutionary determination to wipe out a system that inverted values and condemned the most useful members of society to the most repugnant existence.
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> In the dreary degradation of the skid road there was one haven of hope—the Wobbly hall. This was a huge second-floor hall near the center of the skid road. Apart from the small space roped off for the office, most of the big hall was dedicated to the needs of the migratory worker. Benches, chairs, a space in which to check his bindle, the latest radical papers, books, but most of all the confraternity of fellow workers from all parts of the West. Every evening there was a program—first the Wobbly songs, then speakers on industrial unionism, first-hand reports from hotspots of the class struggle, songs and sketches presented by the foreign-Language fraternal, choral, and literary societies, and then more songs. These were his people, their ideas reflected the hard facts of his life. He was at home.

In 1917, a lumber workers' I.W.W. union convened in Spokane and demanded an eight-hour day, a six-day week, good mattresses and bedding, no more than twelve men to a bunkhouse, improvements in eating, drying, laundry, and eating facilities, showers, free hospital service, and a minimum wage of $60 a month with board supplied. It took years to get these demands satisfied, with knock-down, drag-out struggles with the Lumbermen's Protective Association, but after dozens of strikes, slowdowns, and some killings of their leaders, the Wobblies won. Actually, it was pressure from Army procurement representatives which finally made the lumber interests sign the contracts. The country was at war and had to have lumber. Using soldiers as strike-breakers failed to work and the operators, faced with cancellation of government orders, gave in. "It was," Mr. O'Connor remarks, "the greatest victory the I.W.W. was ever to win in the industrial field."

The triumph of the Wobblies in the Northwest woods is only one of the climaxes in Mr. O'Connor's book, which is a record of consistent toughness on the part of men who would never compromise on what they believed was right. People who don't know the story of these struggles can make no claim to understanding American history.

We end this sketch of *Revolution in Seattle* by quoting from the author's final musings:

> What a contrast the education afforded in socialist and Wobbly halls, and in the logging camps, was to the sterile political hoaxes of the day. In 1912 the big political issue the old parties were arguing about was the tariff—free trade vs. protectionism; in 1916 "he kept us out of war"—but a few months after the majority had voted for that, Wilson took us right in. The difficulty of the people getting what they wanted by voting was burned in on my mind in those formative years and the parliamentary farce deepened into tragedy in later years, as the people voted but got the same old run-around after every election, except for a few of the Roosevelt terms. . . .
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> Years later I was reproached by an associate who had defected from radicalism. "Only fools or knaves don't change their minds," I was told. I was not impressed. "In my own lifetime I have seen two world wars, with their debasement of humanity, and I see no end to it as long as the drive for profits is the chief motive force in society," I said. "In the first world war soldiers were forced to take potshots at each other and the slaughter in the trenches was barbarous enough. Now demoniac button-pushers have the power to blot out entire nations and destroy the planet. Certainly socialism has something better than that to offer. Nor am I impressed with the welfare state. True, my parents might not have died of tuberculosis under the welfare state; but have workers as a class gained much by exchanging a little comfort and a little—very little—security, at the expense of being helots in a warfare state? The 60,000 Boeing workers in Seattle, most of them employed in turning out murderous instruments of mass destruction—what kind of a job is this for a civilized man? No, I see little reason to change my views on society fundamentally; the system if anything is more barbarous than it ever was, although its stench may have had a bit of perfume sprayed around."

The question of whether or not you share Mr. O'Connor's advocacy of socialism is hardly at issue, here. Lots of intelligent people, including some distinguished socialists—among them Jayaprakash Narayan in India, and Erich Fromm and others in the United States—are questioning certain of the assumptions of standard socialist doctrine? these days. The point is whether you can take seriously the ideas of any social critic or reformer who does not care about the things Mr. O'Connor cares about. To feel the full weight of this conviction, it is a practical necessity to read his book.

COMMENTARY
REVIVIFYING MYTHS

THE discussion of the book by Rollo May, ended all too briefly in Frontiers, goes on to consider the part played by symbols in classical literature. Examining anxiety, guilt, and fear as they appear in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Dr. May shows that these feelings are seen in an "aura of objectivity" because the Greek dramatists accepted the psychological reality of myth and symbol. The consequence, he suggests, was a "spontaneous therapy":

> In this classic phase of Greek culture we notice that the problems which are dealt with in psychoanalysis in our modern world seem to be taken care of by a kind of "normal" psychotherapy operating spontaneously through the accepted practices in Greek drama, religion, art and philosophy. It is not difficult for a modern psychoanalyst to imagine the great abreactive effect on some person burdened with guilt feelings because of hostility toward an exploitive mother, who watches, let us say, the public performance of the drama in which Orestes kills the mother who had destroyed his father, is then pursued over hill and dale by the punishing Erinyes (who, since they track evil-doers and inflict madness would seem psychologically to be symbols of guilt and remorse), and finally achieves peace when he is forgiven by the community and the gods. I do not mean, of course, that these therapeutic experiences would be consciously articulated by the citizen of Greece in fifth century B.C. Indeed, our point is that just the opposite was true, that "therapy" was part of the normal, unarticulated functions of the drama, religion and other forms of communication of the day. One gets the impression in these classical periods of *education* rather than *re-education*, of normal development of the individual toward *integration* rather than desperate endeavors toward *re-integration.*

The foregoing, it seems to us, leads naturally to a mature educational approach to the study of religion for the future. We are here reminded of an illuminating passage in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces:*

> Wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history, or science, it is killed. When a civilization begins to reinterpret its mythology in this way, the life goes out of it, temples become museums, and the link between the two perspectives is dissolved.
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> To bring the images back to life, one has to seek not interesting applications to modern affairs, but illuminating hints from the inspired past. When these are found, vast areas of half-dead iconography disclose again their permanently human meaning.

Today, you might say, the myths are becoming psychologically "transparent," obliging us to render them into new terms simply because we find them so necessary. And these new terms, it may be, will be the philosophical language of the future.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
NOTES IN PASSING

AN interesting phase of sputnik-induced admiration of Russia's tremendous investment in technical education is the realization that the USSR is also campaigning for widespread general education, including the arts and literature. An article in *Adult Leadership* (for November, 1964), a publication of the Adult Education Association of the United States, acknowledges the pragmatic value of the Soviet belief that a government ought to provide continuing education for the members of every community.

Federal support for expanded adult education in the USA is negligible at the present time, and Robert Belding, who writes this article, feels that there are many practical lessons to be learned from Soviet dedication to the "continuum of learning" concept:

> Certain of these successful means have been essayed Stateside, others have not been given a fair chance. Whatever their status here, they bear our close scrutiny by virtue of their sheer success, for if they have been convertible to immediate objectives in the Soviet Union, they might well be transferred and shaped to the diverse purpose for which we in America are currently running our adult-education enterprise.

Of course, from a Jeffersonian point of view, the most important ingredient of continuing adult education is attitudinal; growth in free intelligence cannot be supplied by subsidies and administrative structures, nor can the source of learning be censored. The NEA year book, *A New Focus for Education*, in a chapter headed "The Process of Becoming," has this to say:

> The concept of the adequate personality as one consciously involved in the process of becoming brings an optimistic faith. The person who understands he is changing realizes he is creating self through experience. He looks forward to new experience. He has trust in himself as a free functioning individual, an instrument rather than a victim of his experience.
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> The person who is cognizant of this process of becoming accepts change as a universal phenomenon. He welcomes change in himself, in others and in his situation. It follows that education must assume its responsibility for encouraging individuals to anticipate and to be able to cope with changes as they occur. . . .
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> The person who is aware of the process of becoming and accepts changes in himself accepts the emotional qualities of life. Maslow suggests that healthier people accept impulses instead of rigidly controlling them. One characteristic of the adequate personality is his enjoyment of nonsense, fantasy and laughter. The process of becoming involves feeling and sensing as well as knowing. The fact that such affective experience is an essential dimension of becoming raises serious questions about the almost exclusively objective orientation of our society and its expression in our schools.
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> Finding joy in his own self-development, the person who is moving toward adequacy is willing to permit other people to "be," that is, he can accept others in the stage he finds them. He trusts them to grow and to "become." Administrators, supervisors and teacher educators are challenged by this concept to develop relationships which facilitate the process of "becoming.'

Considerations such as the foregoing have a certain bearing upon the revival of the once-radical views of Maria Montessori. An article, "The Return of Montessori," in the *Saturday Review* (Nov. 21, 1964) describes a kind of "do-it-yourself resurrection wrought by parents concerned about the education of their preschool children." Dr. Edward Watkin says in the *SR* article:

> The Montessori mystique comes through dramatically in the writing of Dr. Montessori. *the Montessori Method* and *Spontaneous Activity in Education* constitute a personal, carefully reasoned, and inspired exposition by the movement's founder. It is the same mystique that fills those Montessori classrooms which this writer has observed. No parent would hesitate to surrender his child to such tender and attentive hands. Anyone who has confronted his own child or other children in a Montessori

classroom is bound to respond with sympathy and appreciation.

Dr. Montessori's own words take on tremendous significance for men and women who perceive the futility of an education which aims only at more effective competition for global survival. Sentences such as the following, from *The Montessori Method*, ring out loud and clear: "Even as life in the social environment triumphs against every cause of poverty and death, and proceeds to new conquests, so the instinct of liberty conquers all obstacles, going from victory to victory." In Montessori's book *The Secret of Childhood* (1939), the characteristic emphasis is upon the relationship of child and adult, indicating the travesty which occurs when "technical" training is started too soon or with an eye to value as the adult world conceives it. The child cannot and should not try to "take part" in the work of the adult world. In a section titled "The Child's Task," Maria Montessori writes:

> But the child too is a worker and a producer. If he cannot take part in the adult's work, he has his own, a great, important, difficult work indeed—the work of producing man. If from the newborn baby, helpless, unconscious, dumb, unable to raise itself, comes forth the individual adult with perfected form, with a mind enriched with all the acquisitions of his psychic life, radiant with the light of the spirit, this is the child's doing. It is the child who builds up the man, the child alone. The adult cannot take his place in this work, the exclusion of the adult from the child's "world" and "work" is still more evident from the work producing the social order superimposed on nature in which the adult reigns. The child's work belongs to another order and has a wholly different force from the work of the adult. Indeed one might say that the one is opposed to the other. The child's work is done unconsciously, in abandonment to a mysterious spiritual energy, actively engaged in creation. It is indeed a creative work; it is perhaps the very spectacle of the creation of man, as symbolically outlined in the Bible. A divine spirit breathed into man, of whom the Scriptures say only that he was "created." But as to how he was created, how that living creature received the attributes of intelligence and power over all created things, though he himself had come from nothing, we may see and admire in all its details in the child. This wonderful spectacle is under our eyes every day. What was done was done so that it should reproduce itself in every human creature as in every living being. There we find the living source of immortality, in which nothing perishes and everything is renewed.

The point is that a technique-dominated educational structure misses seeing that the same "mystique" which applies to the child totally, according to Madame Montessori, should apply to every adult as well, in some degree.

FRONTIERS

The Significance of Symbols

ROLLO MAY'S introduction to *Symbolism in Religion and Literature* (Braziller, 1960) is likely to be appreciated by MANAS readers for its lucid account of the relationship between the field of nonsectarian religion and the writings of Kurt Goldstein and Abraham Maslow.

Dr. May begins with a review of the negative bias toward ideas of inner truth in myth and symbol evidenced by most psychologists during the first half of this century. Speaking as one such former psychologist, May writes that "we left these esoteric topics to the poets and literary critics." He continues:

> Neither term, symbol or myth, even appears in the index of the standard psychology textbook—written not by a Watsonian behaviorist but by a dynamic psychologist who was certainly enlightened and broad of interest—which my class and many similar classes studied in colleges throughout the country. We tried to be "hard-headed" men, as Alfred North Whitehead put it in his essay cited in this volume, who "want facts and not symbols," and who therefore "push aside symbols as being mere make-believes, veiling and distorting that inner sanctuary of truth which reason claims as its own."

This position in psychology was a natural concomitant of what Dr. May calls "the proclivity for singling out for study those aspects of human behavior which overlapped with that of animals, and which could ultimately be described in physiological or stimulus-response terms." But, he adds, "the general upshot of this tendency was a widespread impoverishment and beginning of our knowledge of man."

Next we come to a point often suggested in these pages—that the illuminations which now characterize the "third force" psychologists did not grow out of theory, but from moments of insight which came as therapists worked directly to alleviate the sufferings of distorted or impoverished psyches. In Dr. May's words:

> The revolutionary change in the middle of our century with respect to psychological interest in symbols is due chiefly to the study of the inner, deeper levels of human experience by Freud, Jung and the other psychotherapists. It is ironic indeed that those psychologists who *really* had to be "hard-headed," that is, to deal with actual suffering people whose anxiety and distress would not be calmed by abstractions or theories, were the ones who could not escape becoming concerned with symbols. Once we were forced to see the patient in relation to his world—what Freud called his "fate" and "destiny," or what the existential psychoanalysts were to call the "being-in-the-world"—we could not overlook symbols, for they have their birth in just that relationship of the inner experience with the outer world, and are indeed the very language of the patient's crises and distress.

In other words, clinical work in therapy compels the dedicated psychologist to realize that "symbols and myths, far from being topics which can be discarded in psychology, are rather in the very center of our psychoanalytic understanding of men." Kurt Goldstein, a neuropsychologist, as director of a large mental hospital in Germany after World War I, studied many patients with brain lesions, especially soldiers with permanent damage to the cerebral cortex. While the latter could function adequately if the context of their world in the hospital was "shrunken" in space and time to correspond to their limited capacity, they showed profound anxiety in any confrontation beyond this regulated pattern. Goldstein tells of patients who, when asked to write their names on a blank sheet of paper, chose the extreme corner of the margin, the more open space representing an intolerable "unknown." Dr. May summarizes:

> Now what had broken down in these patients was the capacity for symbolic behavior, the capacity to relate to themselves and their worlds in *terms of symbols.* They could no longer experience the self over, against, and in relation to, a world of objects. To have a self and a world are correlates of the same capacity, and it was precisely this capacity that in these patients was impaired. They lost the capacity, in Goldstein's words, *to transcend the immediate concrete situation, to abstract, to think and live in terms of "the possible."* Though we can never draw a one-to-one relationship between a specific *part* of the

neurophysical equipment and a specific way of behaving (the organism reacts as a whole or it does not react at all) it is still significant, nevertheless, that the part of the organism which was impaired in these patients was the cerebral cortex. This is the part which most radically distinguishes man, the part which is present in considerable size in human beings but very small or not present at all in animals. Goldstein points out, furthermore, that these patients, in losing the capacity to transcend the concrete situation, lived in a radically shrunken range of possible reactions, and in proportion to this, they therefore lost their psychological freedom.

It follows, thus, that an individual's self-image is built up of symbols. Symbolizing is basic to such questions as personal identity. For the individual *experiences himself as a self* in terms of symbols which arise from three levels at once; those from archaic and archetypal depths within himself, symbols arising from the personal events of his psychological and biological experience, and the general symbols and values which obtain in his culture.

A second observation impressed upon us by our psychoanalytic work is that *contemporary man suffers from the deterioration and breakdown of the central symbols in modern Western culture.*

Dr. May observes:

Our historical situation in the last of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is one of breakdown of transcendent symbols. . . . The emergence of psychoanalysis and its widespread popularity in America reflects this breakdown. Psychoanalysis is an activity which occurs in a culture when such symbols disintegrate; and it has the practical purpose of helping individuals endure, live, and hopefully fulfill their creative potentialities despite this situation. This does not deny that we may learn a great deal of basic truth about man in his times of crisis, his periods of being robbed of the protection of his symbols and myths. It does imply, however, that in a culture which attains some unity—in a *community* toward which, if we survive, many of us feel we are heading—the therapeutic functions will become more widely a normal and spontaneous function of education, religion and family life. This unity will be expressed in symbol and myth.