

## THE COMMITMENT OF SELF

THE good books, these days, tend more and more to have the word "Self" or "Creativity" in their titles, or these ideas are somehow implicit in the way the book is described. The attraction to the idea of Self is a basic tropism in the essays, the poetry, the drama of the time, and it seems entirely good.

The book which precipitated this generalization is *Self-Renewal*, by John W. Gardner, president of the Carnegie Foundation (Harper & Row, 1963, \$3.50). It is a book about the confinements imposed by institutions on the awakening individuality of human beings. It is a wise and balanced study of the situation of the individual, with a lot of sagacious notes and comment. The author's warmth, joined with what can only be called a classical temper, reminds us of the similar qualities of Sir Richard Livingstone in his books on education. The differences—and these are important—are in the framework. Mr. Gardner writes in a context of rich assimilation of the practically hot-house growth in human understanding of the new psychology. His book, you could say, is evidence that a new consensus of insight into the nature of man really exists. The light of this position is turned on the anatomy of modern technological society, not with scientific particularity, but at a level of generalization which most readers will understand and accept. Toward the end is a passage which will characterize the broad movement of the book:

This is a day of inner estrangement and outer conformity, and we must combat both. On the one hand, the processes of modern society have placed subtle and powerful restraints on the individual. At the same time—and this is the confusing part—other aspects of modern life are slicing through the moorings that relate the individual to his own tradition, to his own group and to the values that lie beyond the self. It is as though a deep-sea diver were to find his movements constricted by more and more

ropes binding him to the mother ship, but at the same time to find that his air hose has been cut. All the constricting ties intact, the one life-giving tie severed!

This defines our task. We must combat those aspects of modern society that threaten the individual's integrity as a free and morally responsible being. But at the same time we must help the individual to re-establish a meaningful relationship with a larger context of purposes.

In the process of growing up the young person frees himself from utter dependence on others. As the process of maturing continues he must also free himself from the prison of utter self-preoccupation. To do so he need not surrender his individuality. But he must place it in the voluntary service of larger objectives. If something prevents this outcome, then individual autonomy will sour into alienation or egocentrism.

Unfortunately, we have virtually no tradition of helping the individual achieve such commitment. We now have a fairly strong tradition of helping him to detach himself from the embeddedness of childhood. Most teachers make a conscious effort to help a youngster outgrow the unexamined beliefs of his childhood. They jolt him out of his hand-me-down attitudes and force him to think for himself.

Just as we help him in this way to achieve independence, we must later help him to relate himself to his fellow man and to the best in his own social, moral and intellectual tradition. If we address ourselves seriously to this task, we shall soon discover that one of the reasons young people do not commit themselves to the larger social enterprise is that they are genuinely baffled as to the nature of that enterprise. They do not really understand their own free society. They do not know their own social and intellectual tradition. They do not understand the requirements and realities of a complex modern society. They do not see where they fit in. If they are to commit themselves to the best in their own society, it is not exhortation they need but instruction.

There can be qualified agreement with this account of the needs of the young, but the reader is liable to lack Mr. Gardner's confidence in the "we" who are to take on this instruction of the

younger generation. Do we know all these things so well, properly, or at all? What knowledge we have of our own age is mostly diagnostic; it lies twitching on the dissecting tables of the social psychologists and the critical essayists. And you can't send a young man to school for "commitment" to Erich Kahler's *The Tower and the Abyss*. Or can you? Perhaps something could be put together that is both true and useful; certainly, a course could be designed. What we question is that such a course now exists, anywhere in the United States. It might, perhaps, be modelled on Lyman Bryson's *The Next America* (which, we see, Mr. Gardner likes as well as we do). But we should finish quoting the passage from *Self-Renewal*:

We must also help the individual to discover how such commitments may be made without surrendering individuality. We must help him to understand and resist any impulse he may have to flee the responsibility of individual choice by mindless submission to a Cause or Movement. In short, he must recognize the hazard of having no commitments beyond the self and the hazard of commitments that imperil the self.

If we succeed in our delicate task, then we shall no longer need to agree with Yeats' grim comment on the modern world:

The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Let us make confession while in a candid mood. Our age knows a great deal about producing bad men full of passionate intensity. For this we have the exact formula, written down, widely applied, with results attested from many practical experiments. We know how to sow the Dragon's Teeth—how to produce wars and more wars—with their wake of suspicions, angers, and cruel assassinations.

But what do we know of Mr. Gardner's "delicate task" of showing individuals how to make commitments? These baffled young, the unrelated and uncomprehending students—they are our chief educational product, thus far. To what school, instruction, teacher shall we send

them? Where are the wise who know what and how to teach them?

Well, this is rhetoric, although the questions must not be ignored. But there is another inquiry which should come first—implicit in "the hazard of having no commitments beyond the self and the hazard of commitments that imperil the self." The self, to be the point of origin of these far-reaching consequences, must have substance and content. It has to be a self capable of generating commitment. So prior, it seems, to instruction in the complexities of our society, is a need for the flow of living, inspiring ideas of the self. And, as Mr. Gardner says, it is instruction, not exhortation, that is called for.

But this, you may say, is impossible. Indeed it is. Instruction in the nature of the self is certainly impossible, in some of the senses of "self-knowledge." Yet an atmosphere of the dignity of man rises from the pages of Mr. Gardner's *Self-Renewal*, and this has to do with the commitment generated in the self. So perhaps some kind of instruction is possible. At any rate, the self that is conceived to have responsibilities to some kind of society is not wholly without substance and structure. An obligation has a structure, and it expresses motivation which is not beyond definition.

The young man well may ask, Who am I, and why should I assume these burdens and care about this confused aggregation of unhappy and largely defeated people which you say is the "society" I am indebted to? *Give me one good reason!*

The challenge, we fear, is unworthy, and serious attempts at answering, aimless or awry. He may be young, but he is also a man. Yet he is not talking like a man. He is talking like someone who went through school in the middle years of the twentieth century and gave nothing of himself to the whole meretricious process.

Fortunately, there are other approaches to the question. What we are attempting to show, here, is the fact that, for the men of our time who have

felt and appreciated the substance of the self, and who make it the key of their thinking, the *values* in this idea have come to be accepted as intuitively given. They are saying it is good to be a whole man because it is good to be a whole man. They are articulating the meaning of their own lives, but only in final directives. The subtle processes of self-discovery remain mysterious. There are probably good reasons for this. Nothing is worse than a vulgarization of self-knowledge. But it is time, perhaps, to seek a degree of conceptualization for human identity. The ancients could at least tell their young that the soul is a hero—unborn, perhaps; untried and unfulfilled—but nonetheless a hero, if he is to grow into anything at all. They had stories to give color and dimension to the idea of the self. But what shall *we* tell the young, before we conduct them to our modern labyrinth, and explain that in the inner recesses lurks the demon of Technology, whom they must encounter and tolerate, yet prevent from stealing their souls? Why should they care about their souls?

Well, we have no catechism of twentieth-century self-knowledge to offer, but we do have a letter from a man—a fairly young man, who writes an extraordinary letter—which reports some of his own explorations. The issue of these musings, as we read them, is that the self in action is the commitment. In this case, there was a content of inspiration—inspiration, cause, catalyst; what need to distinguish, here?—found in Pico Della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (as mediated by Ernst Cassirer). The letter follows.

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Two things about Pico stay with me—there are others, but these two seem to integrate the others. His view-of-the-world is never complete, and this, paradoxically, is the only accurate view, the only one I know that fits the phenomena. It is also the only one that does justice to the world as complex and ever-changing. We bring tradition—what we can use of it—up into the present as a

kind of spear to be thrust into the future. But it is always new and to-be-known. There is great terror, mystery, and joy in this way of stating the fact of our freedom. Pico was not only able to use all-of-it, he loved using all-of-it. Each new relationship does in fact add to our sense of the unity in all things, but at the same time—by the action, the movement, the breaking out of thought to accomplish the new relationship—it opens up layers and cascades of new mystery. We are following a stream from its source that branches into branches and whose oceans fill other oceans. Then, when the impulse is exhausted on the brink of a final oceanographic resolution, it begins raining! One laughs at this abundance of wonder—but the burst of joy so expressed is witness to a kind of understanding of the ebb and flow of life and death, that to this vast mystery only does one truly belong; and that it is all right—quite all right—to belong to such loving play. Even though one face of this loving play is death.

Pico's world is never bounded, never finished; and it is as real as he can find it. Each moment is new: here the threat of annihilation lives in the lost control in chaos—freedom too great for most of us. The freedom to do more than "jump in," but the freedom to see that one is already "in." The cascade can be ridden and a great measure of delight found in riding out the mystery, of beating the waves to ride the biggest one of the lot. In Virginia I used to ride the hurricane waves with no board, no float—nothing but my body bent into the wave and my mind finding the wave's way and fitting me to it. Sometimes alone, sometimes with friends, I rode these wild froths as high and as low as they went. But still I'll never forget the few times I found myself riding a wave with a family of porpoises. A wild communion with a form of life aware enough to know me and know I knew it, sharing a wild ride and more; sharing in the mystery, in the wild chaos, and near to tears with the beauty of it. But one has to learn how to ride waves, and swim out to meet them half-way.

In more usable form, these ideas of freedom, these essential facts of life, were passed on to me at a time when I needed to know them and when I was able to "see" them (urgency and vision are close). My friend said: "It is all yours. No one knows what it is all about. If you can take hold of the mystery, you will begin a search; if you can penetrate past the terror, you will find the source-spring of love. There is no appeal from this freedom, only acceptance of it and commitment to it, or self-limitation and a dying off of all the peaks and glories of what wait if you can take hold of it."

This is something one does in a decisive moment, and also something one comes back to, has to do again and again: a process in life aligned with life and dedicated to life. Risky, full, vulnerable, and joyous. Pico knew and he was. I think he did a good job. He seems a likely base for a tradition upon which to launch another aim at what has always been the same. Neo-Renaissance, Third Force literature—the name is not very important. But clarity when clarity is called for, is, and also an ability to fabricate koans for our time and culture, which by paradox pry open the mind—never the other's mind, but one's own. Each man has a place in him that listens for, is waiting to hear, the sounds of the genuine in other men. Not evangelism, but self-actualization: education by individual accomplishment, with a real viability in all the world's world as the handle, the bright ring.

Secondly, Pico demonstrates that his form of approaching the world produces better science than "science." I like this particularly because I have been fighting for some time to bring to bear on any given problem in science a freedom that is single-mindedly concerned with the problem and will take ideas from any source, if they fit the phenomena, the context of the problem. This seems obvious but it is not a part of either scientific education or research, so far, as I have known it in this country.

Pico interests me, too, because I like to think—and have reasons for thinking—that key ideas based on the fact of being human in this world have been known since the first man. My feeling is that existence itself educates, has always been educative, if we would listen, try, watch. "Existence is sufficient" is a near metaphor for what I mean. The sufficiency exists on many levels and includes non-existence, which is—as Sartre says—defined by and secondary to existence. It is sufficient to love which seems to spring from wonder and mystery . . . and from an acknowledgement of and participation in freedom.

So Pico by Cassirer has me wandering around . . . which is perhaps the best one man of one generation can pass on to another. The ring of the genuine which sympathetically vibrates the genuine in the other: the only heritage we need or can use.

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The pertinent question is why and how the thought of Pico della Mirandola is capable of exercising an inspiration and influence of this sort. For here we have a movement of the hungering human spirit which is beyond conventional classification. And here, perhaps, is our essential answer, for Pico, too, is beyond conventional classification. While in some sense a man of his age, Pico bounded the freedom of his mind and his will-to-know by no tradition or intellectual doctrine. Whatever you say of Pico's thought—however you categorize it—you are obliged to add, as Cassirer adds, that Pico moves from idea to idea always as explorer, never as one seeking allies or a resting-place. And it is in this ultimate independence of spirit that both Pico and his philosophy of Man must be recognized. He lived at the height of his time; he was master of its learning; he drank at many Pierian springs, yet he took nourishment only from sources which fed the consistency of his faith in the freedom of the human spirit. The determinisms of nature he accepted, as will any man in his right mind; but he also demanded the appropriate range of freedom

within every frame of limiting conditions, and he was exacting critic of any and all thought which failed to distinguish between these two contrasting principles of "reality." So, ultimately, Pico, despite his *quattrocento* vocabulary, speaks to the same human spirit in other men. If we call him envisions and maker of the Renaissance, this means that the Renaissance was a great and memorable time, not because it lies in a sequence of historical development, but because there were then voices who spoke from a place that is truly outside any historical development, giving their epoch the light of a timeless origin.

The primary genius of Pico lies in his Myth of the "creation" of Man. Early in his *Oration* he gives his explanation of why human beings have the place of extraordinary honor in the scheme of Nature—or, as he puts it—in the "universal chain of being." After the Great Artificer had completed the world ("As Moses and Timaeus bear witness"), there remained the nature of Man to be decided upon—which gives expression to Pico's first principle:

At last the Best of Artisans ordained that that creature to whom he had been able to give nothing proper to himself should have joint possession of whatever had been the peculiar characteristics of the different creatures. He therefore accorded to Man the function of a form not set apart, and a place in the middle of the world, and addressed him thus: "I have given thee neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment, thou mayest have and possess that abode, that form, and those functions which thou shalt desire. The nature of all other things is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by me: thou, coerced by no necessity, shalt ordain for thyself the limit of thy nature in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand I have placed thee. I have set thee at the world's center, that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. I have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal so that thou mayest with greater freedom of choice and with more honor, as though the maker and moulder of thyself, fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to

degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are animal; thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms of life, which are divine."

O supreme generosity of God the Father, O highest and most marvelous felicity of Man! to whom it is granted to have that which he chooses, to be that which he wills. Beasts as soon as they are born (so says Lucilius) bring with them from their mother's womb that which they will possess for ever; spiritual beings, either from the beginning or soon thereafter, become what they are to be for ever and ever. On Man when he came into life, the Father conferred the seeds of all good and the germs of every form of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates, those seeds will grow to maturity and bear in him their own fruit. If they be vegetative, he will be like a plant. If sensual, he will become brutish. If rational, he will issue as a heavenly being. If intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if, happy in the lot of no created thing, he withdraws into the center of his own unity, his spirit made one with God in the solitary darkness of God who is set above all things, he shall surpass them all. Who will not admire this our chameleon? Or who could more greatly admire aught else whatever? It is Man who Asclepius of Athens, arguing from his mutability of character and from his self-transforming nature, on just grounds says was symbolized by Proteus in the mysteries.

Here, at any rate, is a ground for understanding the molten unrest of human longing; the insatiable hunger of the mind to know, to join, to unite, to become, in some fashion, whatever is or might be; the dark frustrations of so many who cannot read their own feelings, and the endless misfittings of the search for "happiness." The world, no doubt, can be described in objective terms. Its finite forms have analogues in fixed signs and symbols, or in the equations of reversible relationships. But man—truly, he is a law unto himself. And man must read himself according to the order of Protean self-transformation. His meaning and his existence have an account only in the universe of origination, which nestles within the space of finite existence yet constitutes another realm of being.

So, in every age, there is a kind of cipher in which men who feel their nature and their freedom

speak the truths about themselves they cannot withhold. And that language, that continual reinterpretation of the drama and ordeal of being, makes the line of the authentic present, giving expression to the double reading of both time and eternity. Thus the arts, with their Promethean propensity to continually make forms in order to burst and transcend them. . Thus the agonistic ecstasy of the poet, who knows, and knows that he knows, but cannot ever quite say what he knows.

But the great question is this: How shall we speak of ourselves? How shall we transmit the testament of human being? In behalf of what or whom is the commitment of self to be made?

To this question each age must make its own unique reply. We have studied Plato's answer, and now Pico's. We have heard from Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman. But what shall we ourselves say, in the present, about ourselves?

## REVIEW

### "OCCIDENTAL MYTHOLOGY"

JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S book of this title—third in the series of volumes on mythological-psychological lore under the heading, *The Masks of God* (Viking Press, 1964; \$7.95),—begins with another typically provocative comparison between Eastern and Western traditions:

Throughout the Orient the idea prevails that the ultimate ground of being transcends thought, imaging, and definition. It cannot be qualified. Hence, to argue that God, Man, or Nature is good, just, merciful, or benign, is to fall short of the question.

In the Western ranges of mythological thought and imagery, on the other hand, whether in Europe or in the Levant, the ground of being is normally personified as a Creator, of whom Man is the creature, and the two are not the same; so that here the function of myth and ritual cannot be to catalyze an experience in ineffable identity. The high function of Occidental myth and ritual, consequently, is to establish a means of relationship—of God to Man and Man to God. Such means are furnished, furthermore, by institutions, the rules of which cannot be learned through any scrutiny of nature, whether inward or without. Supernaturally revealed, these have come from God himself, as the myth of each institution tells; and they are administered by his clergy, in the spirit of the myth.

However, certain exclusively Occidental complications result from the fact that, where *two such* contradictory final terms as God and Man stand against each other, the individual cannot attach his allegiance wholly to both.

It is virtually impossible for one steeped in the ethos of authoritarian religion to understand the significance of "the cycle of the hero," although, as Edith Hamilton has pointed out, the emergence of Christianity in the Greek setting would have produced an entirely different complex of attitudes. This difference is variously illustrated by Campbell.

In a discussion of "baptism," he writes:

The episode of the baptism, then, whether taken as a mythological motif or as a biographical event,

stands for the irrevocable passage of a threshold. The counterpart in the Buddha legend is the long series of visits to hermitages and ascetics, terminating with the five fasting mendicants on the bank of the river Nairanjana, after his stay with whom the future Buddha bathed in the waters of the stream and departed alone to the Tree of Illumination. Analogously, John the Baptist and his company represent the ultimate horizon of saintly realization antecedent to the victory of the Savior: the last outpost, beyond which his lonesome, individual adventure now was to proceed. And as the future Buddha having tested all the sages of his time, bathed in the river Nairanjana and departed to his tree alone, so likewise Jesus half a millennium later, leaving behind the wisdom of the Law and teaching of the Pharisees, came to the ultimate teacher of his time—and passed beyond.

In every ancient Indian scripture we find the same affirmation—all the world, and all of the worlds, represent divinity. The indifference to pain counselled in *The Bhagavad-Gita* and the Stoic tradition among the Greeks can be read, not so much as an attempt to seek insulation from life, but as preparation for further initiation. For the Greeks particularly, God "is Intelligence, Knowledge, and Right Reason." Against this sort of pantheism, as Campbell puts it, "the biblical view, whether in Jewish, Christian, or Islamic thought, stands in unrelenting, even belligerent, argument." Dr. Campbell summarizes:

Within a world that is itself divine, where God is immanent throughout, in the impulse of the flight of birds the lightning, the falling rain, the fire of the sun, there is an epiphany of divinity in all sight, all thought, and all deeds, which—for those who recognize it—is a beginning and end in itself. There is for all, and within all, a universal revelation. Whereas within a world that is not itself divine, but whose Creator is apart, the godhead is made known only by *special* revelation—as on Sinai, or in Christ, or in the words of the Koran; and righteousness then consists in placing oneself in accord, not with nature but with Sinai, with the lesson of Christ or with the Koran; and one lives not simply to play the part well that is in itself the end, like the grapevine producing grapes, but, as Christ has said, "so that the Father may reward." The goal is not here and now, but somewhere else.

It becomes necessary at this point to illustrate the fact that Campbell is not building a partisan case for the superiority of Eastern thought, but simply indicating the profoundly complicated psychological effects of religious indoctrination. After a discussion of the Buddhist empire of Asoka, he continues:

Ashoka's recognition of suffering had been of the order (though not the intensity) of that of the Buddha himself when he stated, as the First of his Four Noble Truths, "All life is sorrowful." Hence, in the royal edicts the essence of the teaching was honestly retained, and non-violence and compassion were sincerely fostered. But in the Occident, the religion of Christ became with Constantine the handmaid (or, better, fairy godmother) of politics, and authority for the dominance of a certain social order was alleged to have been derived from one who was supposed to have said: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight." Hence, to the world-dividing question, "Are you interested in society or in Truth?" the Occidental monarch, answering honestly, would have had to have said, "In the former," whereas the Indian could have said, "In Truth."

And yet, ironically, whereas in the West the religion of the Savior has suffered throughout its history the degradation of an identification with politics, our Western political practices have been mollified to a significant degree through its influence.

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We are particularly taken with Dr. Campbell's conclusion of *Occidental Mythology*, which probably indicates the line of development to follow in his fourth volume (*Creative Mythology*). Here he writes:

The fourth function of mythology is to initiate the individual into the order of realities of his own psyche, guiding him toward his own spiritual enrichment and realization. Formerly—but in archaic cultures still—the way was to subordinate all individual judgment, will, and capacities absolutely to the social order. It will be our charge in the volume next to come, *Creative Mythology*, to follow systematically from the period of the Table Round (where there was no one sitting at the head, but each was a champion paramount) to the present hour of the detonation of the atom, the long process of the Opening of the Eye of European man to a state that is

no state but a becoming: and the vanishment thereby of all the earlier masks of God, which now are known to have been of developing man himself.

Some, perhaps, will desire to bow still to a mask, out of fear of nature. But if there is no divinity in nature, the nature that God created, how should there be in the idea of God, which the nature of man created?

"By my love and hope, I conjure thee," called Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "cast not away the hero in thy soul!"



## *COMMENTARY*

### THE SOURCE OF COMMITMENT

THE problem set in this week's lead article seems to call for some clarification and further emphasis.

It is this: That in order to generate the vision and sustaining strength which are involved in any sort of genuine "commitment," there must be an idea of the self which calls out such resources from individual human beings. Thus there is the question: How shall we formulate such an idea of the Self?

First we must take to heart certain necessary and obvious warnings. Over-simplified or dogmatic notions will be of no value for this purpose. One of the great tasks of the past cycle of iconoclasm and scientific skepticism has been to help men of the West to free their minds from limiting or degrading ideas of the self. But, on the other hand, no idea of the self brings other evils. We have now to make a new beginning—a conscious beginning—in the creation of a philosophy of human identity; and we have to work out ways of helping one another to do this, while recognizing that each man's thinking on this crucial question must be authentically his own. If it is not his own, it can be no better than the hearsay notions of the old religions we have so thoroughly outgrown in so many other ways.

What we are after is an order of abstract ideas which men may be capable of transforming into felt conceptions of inner being. What we are after is a level of symbolism appropriate to the field of experience and mental endowments of the people of our time.

This is a way of saying that all men have need to become practical philosophers—not simply in their own behalf, but in behalf of themselves and everyone else. It is the deep and crying need of the time. And simply to recognize this need and make attempts, however wavering, to fulfill it, is a long step in the right direction.

For this endeavor is not characterized by finality and fixed solutions. The self, we might say, is both absolute and relative: absolute in the sense that the core of consciousness or identity in each one begins from an irreducible state Of self-consciousness; and relative in that the quality and richness of self-awareness vary from individual to individual. The idea of the self, therefore, must remain an *open* idea; thinking about the self is thinking about potentiality and *growing* perceptions of both universal and particular meanings. The stimulus to this kind of thinking, if it is to be widely effective, will be a cultural atmosphere to which many contribute, and which is continually supplemented by the searching of many minds. We need, in short, to turn our age into an age of philosophy.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### ADULT EDUCATION—FACT AND THEORY

THE first (Feb.28) of a series of five articles in the *Christian Science Monitor* carries the title "Explosion in Education—Adult Surge." It begins with some impressive statistics: According to the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago a total of 17,600,000 American adults are presently either attending classes or taking correspondence courses. Approximately 2,650,000 are enrolled for a full-scale, full-time program. Some 5,500,000 are presently continuing formal learning, due to shorter working hours or early retirement. The Opinion Research Center predicts that these statistics will be radically altered upward in the next ten years, and, most interesting of all, there is little present indication that television strikes the fancy of these seventeen million as a medium of learning in the future.

These projected trends constitute an encouraging augury for the men dedicated to improving facilities for adult education in the United States. Perhaps, after all, it will not be necessary to follow the old Athenian custom of paying citizens to become more intelligent, and perhaps an "Office of Adult Education" will come to play an important role in national life.

But those who consider a large part of education to be an increasingly informed dialogue on issues which commonly evoke only unintelligent argument must admit that not everything which glitters, here, is gold. As the *Monitor* story says: "The largest number of adult learners are found in job-related classes. The fast changes in technology have sent many back to blackboards and notebooks to catch up. Some industries pay employees' tuition or offer in-service courses. About 9 million people were reported in classes related to their vocations." Education designed to "keep up with the Russians" or to advance one's earning power may

have little to do with the process of "self-actualization," which is the greatest need and should be the greatest hunger. Matters of political, economic, religious, and ethical philosophy have a great deal to do with showing that continuing education must be a series of discoveries about one's self—a chance to form or re-form one's opinions and convictions. A responsible, educated citizenry becomes such by refining conceptions of value. However, the Chicago Opinion Research Center does mention that of the 5,500,000, "a big group is composed of those studying religion and ethics."

Religion and ethics, it must be added, are not compartments separate from life, and it is the relationship between values and work, values and politics, and values and education, which is crucial. The men dedicated to the cause of adult education occasionally give clear evidence of perceiving this to be the case. Some paragraphs on the value of adult education discussion groups (prepared in 1963 by the Royal Bank of Canada) are appropriate here. The title is "Adult Learning Is Necessary." Robert Hutchins' lifelong conviction that the essence of education is the continuing dialogue finds expression in this account of another Ford Foundation-inspired project:

The Fund for Adult Education, which gives its support to agencies of adult learning in both the United States and Canada, says it "believes that the most satisfactory means for the liberal education of adults is individual study combined with the small discussion group. In such a climate each person may learn to think for and express himself, and because no authoritarian methods are applied, a good discussion group represents democracy at work."

A discussion group is not a place where the conversation goes round in circles, revolving upon trivialities, but a place to stimulate thought. Ideas which might be fragile in the mind of an individual take on robustness and suppleness when brought out into the open and given exercise.

Study-discussion programmes are aimed at improving the ability of participants to make independent judgments on critical issues, to develop

their intellectual faculties and aesthetic sensibilities, and to encourage sustained intellectual curiosity.

What is this liberal education sought by men and women who read great books and join discussion groups? It is not directed toward specific improvements in techniques or raises in salary or gratification of physical yearnings. It is a continuous growth of the mind, shedding a few beams of light on our lives and on life itself.

Liberal education does not mean possession of the mere materials of knowledge, but the gaining of wisdom and understanding. It goes beyond the protected harbour of formal schooling so as to provide a man with navigational equipment for the wide sea of life. It enables him to use what he knows with judgment and discrimination.

Such study will not guarantee happiness, but at the least it will improve your bargaining position with Fate. And, at the end of life you may be able to say with Richter, the German novelist known as "Jean Paul": "I have made as much out of myself as could be made of the stuff."

Emphases of this sort in the field of Adult Education tend to vivify interest in philosophy. And it seems to us that precisely here we can establish the need for reciprocity between the continuing education of adults and the education of the young. John Gardner's recent discussion of values in his *Self-Renewal* closes with a criticism of a common tendency to criticize youth for failing to appreciate the "ancestral values." Mr. Gardner writes:

It is hardly surprising that many young people think of the moral order as something invented by parents, deans and commencement speakers for the sole purpose of boring the young

The notion of the dying reservoir is particularly inappropriate because it suggests that the problem is to preserve something that can never be added to. In this way it induces defensiveness and ignores all possibility of creativity. Men thinking in terms of the almost empty reservoir will be much too preoccupied with preservation to build creatively for an unknown future.

Instead of giving young people the impression that their task is to stand a dreary watch over the ancient values, we should be telling them the grim but bracing truth that it is their task to re-create those

values continuously in their own behavior, facing the dilemmas and catastrophes of their own time. Instead of implying that the ideals we cherish are safely embalmed in the memory of old battles and ancestral deeds we should be telling them that each generation refights the crucial battles and either brings new vitality to the ideals or allows them to decay.

To discover a philosophy of both individual awakening and cultural renewal is a requisite for the adult who seeks the sort of learning which is dynamic rather than static. Religion, for example, is not beyond the realm of philosophy, but adjacent to it. Karl Jaspers states the case for philosophy as a guide to values in this way:

The university as such is no longer Christian, much less sectarian. Its import would not be lost but would be broadened, rather, if its theological faculty had several departments, with believers teaching the Biblical—Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—and the Buddhist forms of faith.

Faith can guide human cognition in one of two ways: either in a particular historic way, as theologically communicated by the religions—or, in view of those other, alien, constrained possibilities, by way of original philosophizing. The polarity of religion and philosophy is part of the university.

A philosophy which is complementary, not necessarily hostile, to religion is at the same time the possible basis of life for a majority of students. Today we must reckon with the great mass of a denominationally non-believing youth. For this youth—whether or not we deplore the fact—philosophy is the only illumination of its possible faith, the way of thinking which can make this youth aware of the ties it recognizes without qualification.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Need to be Understood

TWO hundred years ago, the big points of contention were supposed to be settled by reference to "Nature and natural law." These were the authorities in the highest court of appeal, as Carl Becker (quoted in last week's MANAS) showed by recalling the pamphlet and other controversial literature of the period. In the eighteenth century, the test of the ideas, customs, and institutions of men lay in the measure of their accord with those laws which "nature reveals at all times, to all men." The task was to read the lessons of the Book of Nature and then make them support the view being advocated. The measure of Reality was in the great natural world "out there." Hume, Voltaire, Rousseau, Volney—as Becker says, "in each of them nature takes without question the position customarily reserved for the guest of honor."

Today, such arguments leave us comparatively cold. Arguments from cosmology no longer move the feelings. To hear them is like seeing some old movie; you wonder why they were so effective for past generations. Today, the good writing seems mostly concerned with the problem of breaking through the barriers established by obsolete ideological systems, of overcoming the stereotypes created by partisan symbols. The ground of primary reality, from being "out there," has moved to the psychological universe of man's subjective nature. As Dr. Jerome Frank has put it: "In contrast to all other living things, humans are motivated chiefly not by biological needs but by values, by ideas of right and wrong. This leads us to attach supreme importance to abstractions like freedom, Communism, God, and we are ready to kill and die for them. In this lies man's greatest danger and his greatest hope."

The people who see the validity of this kind of critical thinking—and there are many writers among them—can no longer contribute to the

ideological polemics of the day. They become unable to participate in a We/They sort of controversy. Instead, they become sensitive to the cruelties and inhumanities of stereotyped classification of other peoples, and direct their energies to getting behind political labels to the people themselves. These people, say the books and stories of our time, are made of the same basic stuff that all men are made of; they are like ourselves, and they need to be understood. Among recent novels of this sort is *The Northern Palmyra Affair*, by Harrison B. Salisbury, for years a New York *Times* correspondent in Soviet Russia. This is a story of the basic humanism of the Soviet people as it emerges in a life-and-death struggle with the mechanical power of the political bureaucracy. The book says what a great many people of the West are longing to hear about the Russians. Beneath the cries of increasingly neurotic nationalism is this hunger to understand, and to be understood, in primary human terms. How such longings can be implemented for the common good—and how they may be shaped into instruments of practical resolution of international conflict—remains an almost complete mystery, but there can be no doubt about the fact of this growing emotional force for human brotherhood, nor of the contribution of contemporary popular novelists to its spread.

*A Free Agent* (Simon & Schuster and Permabook) by Frederic Wakeman is a good illustration of this trend. Except for some of its dialogue, this book recalls little of Wakeman's earlier volumes, *Shore Leave* and *The Hucksters*—which were just about the cleverest novelistic exploitations of two typical American subcultures—the "armed forces" and the advertising business—ever put into print strictly for entertainment. The present book is for entertainment, too, but Wakeman now turns his climax into a "message" concerning the need of humans to be understood; and, being a skillful writer, he does it very well. The story is about an American "secret agent" who falls in love with a Greek girl. He marries her (impulsively, without

"official" permission), and then finds she has a "Communist" background. Returning home from a mission to one of the new African "States" where he barely escapes torture and death by Communist conspirators, he is told by his superiors that his wife is in custody in the United States. Thinking she betrayed him to the Communists in Africa, he sees her for a moment, confronts her with what he believes she has done, then leaves. But after he hears the tape-recording of her counter-espionage interrogation, he realizes his horrible mistake. It is in this tape that one feels the full force of the human values—in Wakeman's character, and in himself—which are to be understood, making the climax of the story.

The girl tells her life-story for the interrogators:

Although politics begin in the cradle, my beliefs did not take conscious shape until I was seven. The . . . oh, how can a Greek explain herself to an American? Did you know your tragedy *Death of a Salesman* was a comedy in Athens? Audiences laughed, though with exasperation, at your Willy Loman. He has a car, his own house, even that certain sign of wealth, a refrigerator. Food in plenty. What on earth was his problem? It was not a Greek tragedy. . . .

Her uncle was murdered by the political dictator, Metaxas, and when the latter died school children were forced to kneel for hours in the rain, while his cortege passed by. "Hundreds caught pneumonia; many died." Then came the Germans:

. . . during the occupation all our love was lavished on our Resistance Fighters, the EAM. At school the children screamed joyously at each new triumph: EAM had blown up a German ship in the harbor; EAM had derailed a train full of German soldiers. Oh, we adored EAM, especially me, as both my brother and father were among the heroes, daily risking their lives.

Four years of this, then suddenly the Germans left. What confusion at the next news. The EAM was fighting the government; the government was murdering our heroes. We were ruled by torment. Thousands of innocent people having nothing to do with the Civil War were imprisoned, tortured and

killed without legal evidence. If your neighbor disliked you, his word would kill you.

At first no one understood, not even the Resistance Heroes themselves, that EAM was controlled at the top by the Communists; but one thing was sure, the people hated the government in power.

The police sought her brother and father. They tortured her mother and imprisoned the girl. After a last-minute revocation of the death-sentence, she was asked to sign a paper asserting she was not a Communist and that she hated all Communists. "Of course," she said, "I refused to sign."

She was then asked, "Why 'of course,' Mrs. Marklay?"

She replied: "Moral principle, sir. Would you swear that you hated your own father and brother?" She continued:

Please do not consider me a noble exception. No one of the hundreds on my island prison would sign that paper. I'm just a typical Greek with a typical Greek story. A most un-American story, because in it there is a certain word . . . and every time you Americans hear that certain word, your kind eyes fill with fear; it hardens your generous hearts. . . . That certain word makes you forget your own great words; you permit the word to condemn in itself, it rouses your hatred before you have earned the right, as Leonardo says, either to hate or to love.

Perhaps the fear of that word will one day destroy first, your institutions, then you, then all of us. . . .

I have an American husband. If I had been in prison merely for prostitution, theft, or murder, I could confess my past to him and know that his love would forgive me for my simple crime. But to say that I had been convicted of a certain word! Oh, that would be too much for an American husband to bear. Could I tell him that during my prison days I was completely a Communist sympathizer, especially after I heard that my father had been killed for being one?

To Americans, all Communists are worse than poisonous snakes, no matter what the political conditions that drove them to their belief. I wanted to keep my husband, so I held my tongue. . . .

After four years on the island they gave me my freedom. They let me go because they thought I might lead them to my brother, who had become a Communist hero, a hunted, wanted man.

But her brother escaped to another country, and at last she was left alone. Then she learned that the Communist leaders wanted the EAM sympathizers to be kept in prison, as good propaganda. She went on:

Callousness on the Left does not excuse corruption on the Right. Nor blindness in the Center. I have heard sadists snarling the Golden Rule, and I have listened to Fascists mouthing the slogans of democracy. One of the reasons I wanted to visit America was to find out for myself if any of the nobility of Jeffersonian theory manages to cling to the modern practice of it. Now I suppose I shall never know, for I shall never sign your statement. . . . I can't trust governments. Their great common theme is betrayal. Always in some worthy cause, of course. Always legally, it goes without saying.

If the law says sign this paper, then not signing becomes a crime, no matter what the paper says. If the law says, betray your father, your brother, your moral principles, what matter. Just sign the paper. It's the law.

I am sorry that my name is on your record alongside that certain word. I am sorry I cannot answer your questions

. . . Do you think I would betray the country of my husband? about that word. However, I should like to ask you a question.

Mr. Wakeman is of course free to set up his plot in a way that makes his point with the utmost clarity. You can do that in a story. Life situations are seldom so unequivocal. But that is one of the services of a good story, and one can hardly begrudge him this freedom.