

THE EMPTINESS AT THE CENTER

HOW will you formulate the problems of Modern Man: In terms of the dilemmas he faces on the national frontiers (wherever *they* are!), or by describing the emptiness at the center in the lives of individuals?

The external dilemmas are an old story, now. The populations of the major powers are made to believe that simple survival depends upon the maintenance of a vastly complicated balance of nuclear power, which is supposed to produce, in turn, a still more complicated balance of psychological tensions, from which results the exceedingly nervous passivity of all the great war machines. The British military expert, P.M.S. Blackett (who is really a physicist and a Nobel Prize-winner), describes the situation in a paragraph of his new book, *Studies of War* (Hill & Wang):

Within a few decades, most official, military, religious and moral leaders of the West came to accept as justifiable a military doctrine (massive retaliation) which previously they would have denounced as wicked, nauseatingly immoral, and inconceivable as a policy for the West. If, in response to a Soviet aggression with conventional forces, the American and British atomic bombers had been set in motion to carry out the plans for which they are trained, then the six million victims of Hitler's gas chambers would be hardly remembered: the humane and civilized West would have sunk below the level of Genghis Khan.

We did not, of course, do this, and have not yet done it, but we *might*. And it is not some pacifist propagandist, but a man who served the British as an operations strategist during World War II, who makes this characterization of what we remain prevented from doing by what an American specialist working in the same general field has called "the delicate balance of terror." No, that's not right. We are prevented from doing it by our principle of non-aggression, and it is the

Russians who are deterred by the balance of terror. That, at any rate, is the theory behind our national defense.

We shall not argue against this theory. We shall admit that there is doubtless some sense in which it has worked, and is working. What we are curious about, here, is the cost of making it work.

Not the cost in money, but the cost in humanity and human hopes. What will you tell your youngster who comes home from school and asks about the future—*his* future? Out there—somewhere out there is a kind of metaphysical No Man's Land, the terrain where Terror holds absolute sway. He will have to stay out of that country. He will have to learn that there are millions of inhuman humans (a breed we do not understand and must not look at too closely) whom we train ourselves to be ready to destroy in a matter of hours or days. No one, we explain, *likes* this, but there are reasons—well-thought-out reasons compiled by experienced moralists—which leave us no other choice. The reasons have to do with the inviolability of the individual, our love of truth and freedom, and the principles of self-government our ancestors fought to establish in the world. Our youngster nods. He tries to understand. To whom shall he turn but his father for help in this matter?

But his father cannot change the awful fact that *out there*—and not so very far out there, these days—awaits a sudden end to practically everything that the boy can understand. He cannot hope to sail around the world, after the fashion of Jules Verne. There are so many places which are now forbidden. World politics is a kind of agony of apprehension. Put the best face upon it that you can, it will never be good enough to tell your son. And suppose he should *believe* you!

Of course, not all sons will be upset by this prospect. But some will, and even if they are only a few, they are likely to be the kind of boys who might, in some other age, be important to the whole world instead of to just one nation. But now we cannot think coherently about the whole world. We are cut off from great sectors of the planet by a bottomless ditch of terror. Is "terror" a word too charged with emotion to be just? Well, there are other words. You could say that it is an abyss which cannot be crossed except by the communication of fear; or that the lines of communication which bridge the ditch do not work unless each message is licensed by some agency which tags it with the legal minimum of fear-producing content. Those who find this too biased an account are invited to find some other, put together by a more charitable analyst. Perhaps he will know some way of making the dilemmas on our national frontiers seem less disheartening. One thing is certain: the facts need no exaggeration for effect.

So now comes to an apparent end a cycle of Western history which began in the eighteenth century—with, say, Vico, who was the first to propose that by coming to self-consciousness, by gaining a sense of form and order in regard to society, mankind might begin to shape its social organism and control the future. This idea rapidly took hold, apparently the people of Europe and America were ready for it. And today, after some two hundred years, Western man has run through very nearly all the possible variations of political self-determination and has finally reached a political rigidity that may be characterized as nuclear paralysis. This is not to suggest that we have realized all the potentialities of social organization, but that by the means we have chosen, with the forms of political organization we are familiar with, there is little more that we can do.

There is a sense in which we are surfeited with expert knowledge of political and economic techniques that cannot be used or will no longer

work. Especially is this true in the economic area. In the abstract, we know how to do practically anything. We could feed the world with very little difficulty. We know how to organize communications and transportation problems at the technical level. If you want particular knowledge of any social institution, statistics are available for a quick profile. We are experts in every sort of manipulation of inert materials, and are even successful in the manipulation of human beings to a frightening degree. We are the creators of the "task force" and the "team." It seems no exaggeration to say that men of the West are completely master of the collective enterprise, of all the things that are accomplished by organization of the material forces of nature. We have made that aspect of the vision of the Enlightenment come true. Our science has *worked*.

It is a question, of course, whether the frustration which now confronts us in the form of nuclear paralysis is the result of an external barrier, put there by unkind accident of history, or comes as well, or instead, from some deep *malaise* of violated being within. There is the possibility that the moralists are right; that the Soviets with their damned Sputniks and their rival "know-how" are some kind of historical caricature of our own besetting sins that we will not admit. But even if this should be so, we would probably prefer a war of extermination to any kind of serious self-analysis. It is not that we are insanely self-righteous, but that, in our kind of politics, a confession of error or moral flaw always means certain defeat, with loss of power, and the stakes are now too high for this sort of risk.

What this means, in practical terms, is that the men in charge of the social enterprise, which is now also the diplomatic enterprise and the military enterprise, are totally locked in position. They are debarred by nameless feats of the unpredictable and the unfamiliar from setting the problem of national security in any way except the way it has been set in the past. It is, you could say, a

carefully worked-out project in self-defeat. It may fail, its authors say to themselves, but this kind of failure they understand. It has happened before, although never on so grand a scale as the failure they are now preparing.

We, the people, cannot really complain about this. These men are not tyrants. They were elected to office and can be removed by the same process. Actually, the time for "blame" has long since passed away. Western man has had his technological maturity and his political self-determination long enough to accept complete responsibility for what is happening to him. What is so hard for us to accept, with all these skills in our hands, and all these powers in our machines, is that the myth of Progress has finally broken down. This cannot be, we say to ourselves; and yet it is.

This brings us to the second phase of our discussion, which concerns the Norms of Modern Culture or our Models of the Good Life.

We don't have any. That is, we have only collective models or norms. We have sales targets, production schedules, export quotas, quality controls, real estate booms, Moon-probes and Venus-probes, and enough nuclear armament to kill everybody in the world at least twenty times. We have easily referable models for every kind of "excellence" except individual human excellence. Here, by default, we have only the stereotypes provided by Madison Avenue.

What happened, for us, to the "hero with a thousand faces"? When did the living soul in the human being cease to have reality for the West? A great deal of material critical of Western religion could be put together in answer to this question. An-entire civilization does not become "materialistic" without substantial cause. The externalization of the quest for meaning is probably the most important problem to be solved in the history of Western philosophy and psychology, and an understanding of the alienation of modern man, not simply from ancient traditions of the Good, but also from any attentiveness to

the inner life of the individual, is probably the key to both our historical and our psychological ills. The problem calls for new studies of history and for a combination of education and therapy in facing the conclusions that may be reached.

This will take time, but meanwhile one thing seems certain: we shall not be able to go back to any past images of the good life. We have learned to be self-definers for socio-collective purposes, and must now become self-definers for individual purposes. There is no help for us in the overt hierarchical structures of ancient community life. Our rationalism will not let us find meaning in caste and special role. We have to become our own myth-makers, and the question is, with what threads drawn from the sort of lives we live today can we weave a sense of individual destiny?

It is the frightful emptiness at the center of our being which drains away the courage for this project. The Christian mystics have a name for our depression: The Dark Night of the Soul.

While we can take no literal instruction from the ancients, there are aspects of ancient psychology which may have a bearing on this situation. Old theologies held, for example, that no individual who does not endure these terrors of personal isolation and somehow overcome them can ever gain full stature as a man. We think of "initiation" as some kind of ordeal devised by the senior members of a club or secret religious body. But if this word has any meaning worth retaining, it relates to an order or intensity of psychological experience that can no more be escaped by the maturing individual than the changing rhythms of the endocrine system can be evaded or delayed by the child entering puberty or adolescence. Unfortunately, these subtler transitions of the psyche, opening the way to further individuation, have been labeled and superficially described as though they were the contrived rituals of tribe or cult. It is true enough that nature has been endlessly imitated, sometimes with considerable skill, by the men who devised ancient patterns of culture. Plutarch's life of Numa shows the

extraordinary insight of the Etruscan philosopher in his efforts to fashion institutions that would temper the barbarism of the early Romans and introduce a principle of measure to their lives. But such paternalism, supposing a more sophisticated Numa could be found, would not work for us. It is the doom, the genius, and the salvation of modern man that he must somehow find his own way. Quite possibly we shall get some help in unexpected quarters, but our salvation can never be "arranged" for us by sagacious planners of institutions. The umbilicus of hierarchical management has long since been severed for modern man.

One thing, however, can be said of the emptiness of being which he suffers: it declares a time of new beginnings from new ground. With what shall we start? There is nothing to start with except the emptiness itself. An extraordinary paragraph in Ortega's *Revolt of the Masses* speaks to this condition:

As this is the simple truth—that to live is to feel oneself lost—he who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look around for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. *These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked.*

This passage by Ortega, which was no doubt obscure to most of his readers back in 1932, when *Revolt* first appeared, is now beginning to be more widely understood. Kurt H. Wolfe, of Brandeis University, has a paper in the Fall 1962 issue of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* which may be read as a commentary on what Ortega says and a development of its implications. Dr. Wolfe's theme is concerned with the meaning of "surrender." He says:

To say, as I did, that surrender comes out of crisis is to meet it as an idea of the shipwrecked, a revolutionary idea, the catch of men who have been cast out by history and thrown back on themselves, of men alienated from history, discontinuous, without help from tradition. Such men have come upon, have

invented, the notion of surrender in the very surrender of the conviction that they can no longer move on tradition: if they could, they would continue being able to be true to it, however critical they might be; their experience would build on it, develop it, continue it. But as it is, there is no continuity of tradition, we, who are such men, are thrown back on ourselves. Yet this "myself" of each of us is what I share with mankind; out of which all tradition, even the crumbled one, has come; and thus, this also is the time when the only hope for tradition to make a new beginning is to be in earnest about its end, rather than thinking of it as a patient who may, or may not, survive.

This seems to be a way of saying that when the machine stops, when the world cracks, when the man finds himself a total outsider, he is obliged to make a new life *out of himself*. If we read him aright, Dr. Wolfe believes that the new life is really *there*—"waiting," so to say.

Why [he asks] should I have faith in surrender, in which man becomes what he potentially is, if ordinarily he is "scattered, dispersed, variously and unevenly engaged"? Why should my faith not be based on man in his ordinary mode? Why *ought* man to be what he potentially is? The answer is my conviction that scatter, and failure and refusal to surrender, are not part of the essence of man because I cannot regard them as part of my own essence. I can act as if they were, and may indeed so act all my life or perhaps only almost all my life. But, I cannot defend them by insight—by my feeling at its most honest; and I am convinced of the reality or truth of myself when I am most honest—that is, when I most fully exercise my human reason and freedom.

Now the curious thing about such cryptic sentences is that, for the man who has personally *felt* the emptiness at the center of his being, they are not cryptic at all, but filled with meaning. They might be called "voices of silence" which, by a parity of paradox, may be heard by one who has lost his faith in life "according to the ordinary mode."

Ancient theologies have an explanation of this kind of perception, but to accept meaning from these sources is perhaps too easy. To any of the accounts of old writers about the "rebirth" of the soul, or concerned with the "detached" individual,

modern man will have to add his own contrapuntal theme based upon self-discovery. By this means he may escape the fatal process of going from one "tradition" to another, which may be little more than preparation for the paroxysm of yet another surrender.

Has this sort of psychological experience any "social" implication? Does it hold out any hope for a world wracked by the external dilemmas of "national defense"?

To this question there seems to be but one answer. It is that the insanities of national policy will not go away of themselves. They must be *displaced*, and this can happen only when a new kind of sanity begins to be born in the lives of human beings. Logical demonstrations of the folly of war, while useful, are never enough to make people alter their lives and their values. War and the methods of war have to become *irrelevant* on every count to the meaning of human life, and this will come about, it seems to us, only by a genuine filling of the emptiness which is at the center. Our hope lies in a series of creative acts for which the experience of emptiness is a necessary preparation.

REVIEW

NOTES ON "SELF-REALIZATION"

FEW of those who have an enduring interest in psychology find difficulty in identifying with Henry David Thoreau. Undertaking a pilgrimage of self-discovery, Thoreau shut out the noise of conflicting partisanships, ignored stultifying traditionalism clothed with insidious authority, and went to school to nature and to himself. Once in a while, perhaps, most human beings manage a little of this sort of experience, coming to feel that their souls are momentarily cleansed, their intelligence clarified.

A struggle toward self-realization can be an approach to genuine identity, or it can bring an increase of delusions and ego-involved syndromes of behavior. A pamphlet issued by the Psychosynthesis Research Foundation suggests that the "Self" may best be regarded as having a higher, a middle and a lower aspect. The writer, Dr. Roberto Assagioli, contends that stress and strife are inevitable for any individual who "feels the stirring of superconscious potentialities." In this case there is bound to be "ensuing maladjustment and conflicts with the 'middle' and 'lower' aspects of the personality." Carl Jung has written on this sort of crisis:

To be "normal" is a splendid ideal for the unsuccessful, for all those who have not yet found an adaptation. But for people who have far more ability than the average, for whom it was never hard to gain successes and to accomplish their share of the world's work—for them restriction to the normal signifies the bed of Procrustes, unbearable boredom, infernal sterility and hopelessness. As a consequence there are as many people who become neurotic because they are only normal, as there are people who are neurotic because they cannot become normal.

The therapist who encounters a patient in the throes of a "crisis" induced by these factors ought to recognize, first, that the crisis itself is necessary to this phase of human development—just as was Arjuna's reluctant appearance on the battlefield where the fate of his kingdom was to be decided. For man is torn between being a subject of

Procrustes and a descendent of Prometheus; Dr. Assagioli detects two basic reactions in the man who is striving to break out of the confinement of old self-definitions and indicates why the therapist has a legitimate function:

A therapist who is himself spiritually inclined, or has at least an understanding of and a sympathetic attitude towards the higher achievements and realities, can be of great help to the individual when, as is often the case, the latter is still in the first stage, that of dissatisfaction, restlessness and unconscious groping. If he has lost interest in life, if everyday existence holds no attractions for him and he has not yet had a glimpse of the higher reality, if he is looking for relief in wrong directions, wandering up and down blind alleys, then the revelation of the true cause of his trouble and the indication of the real un hoped-for solution, of the happy outcome of the crisis, can greatly help to bring about the inner awakening which in itself constitutes the principal part of the cure.

The second stage, that of emotional excitement or elation—when the individual is carried away by an excessive enthusiasm and cherishes the illusion of having arrived at a permanent attainment—calls for a gentle warning that his blessed state is, of necessity, but temporary; and he should be given a description of the vicissitudes of the way ahead of him. This will prepare him for the onset of the inevitable reaction in the third stage, and enable him to avoid much suffering because it is foreseen, as are subsequent doubts and discouragement. When a patient under treatment during this reaction has not had the benefit of a warning of this sort, the therapist can give much help by assuring him that his present condition is *temporary* and not in any sense permanent or hopeless as he seems compelled to believe. The therapist should insistently declare that the rewarding outcome of the crisis justifies the anguish—however intense—he is experiencing. Much relief and encouragement can be afforded him by quoting examples of those who have been in a similar plight and have come out of it.

But the struggle for self-realization can be confining and egocentric, rather than egoic. This consideration is discussed in *Psychologia* (June, 1962) by Thomas Hora:

Selfishness, indifference and inconsiderateness are revealed as consequences of insufficient cognition prevailing in common man. Self-centered man

calculates, plots and schemes his own self-confirmation. In the process he unfailingly hurts and harms himself and others. It seems that most human suffering reveals the presence of self-centeredness and calculative thinking.

If, however, the self is thus revealed as unreal and empty the question arises as to what is really Real. If all that is unreal is essentially sensory and conceptual, then true Reality must be that which is *beyond the sensory and the conceptual*. Which means that there must be a mode of consciousness which transcends the sensory and the conceptual. It must be then supra-sensory and transcending. Man awakens to its realization in proportion to his understanding of the limitations of the sensory and conceptual spheres of preoccupation. At this point self-consciousness yields to *transcending-consciousness*.

Enlightened man transcends his self in "seeing the truth of what is." In this process of losing himself he finds that which is Real. He heals, that is, he becomes whole (holy) in his "atonement" with Reality. The seer becomes the seeing and the seeing becomes the seen. Love is thus *re-cognized* (rediscovered) to be a mode of cognition. *Love is found to be that Intelligence which forever reveals itself as Understanding*.

In the experience of understanding the true nature of Reality is revealed. In it there is neither "self" nor "other"; there is only the all-transcending timeless process manifesting itself in that "field of phenomena" which man is the medium of.

Self-centered consciousness does not discern the Ground of Being. Interpersonal consciousness is focused on the interaction of the self and the other. It equally fails to see that background without which foreground could not appear. The interpersonal focus ignores the truth of what really is because it is concerned with the relationship of the self to the other. It does not realize that the self is the same as the other, since the other is but an other self. In the realm of understanding there is neither "self" nor "other," there is only that which really is. *Love is self-less*. It is that *background of harmony* which is obscured but also revealed by the foreground of the discordant self.

Perhaps one way of putting the problem would be to say that the man who seeks a transformation of self ought to try to *encounter* directly obscure aspects of his being. One of Carl

Roger's characteristically spontaneous expressions, recorded during his conversation with Martin Buber (*Psychologia*, December, 1960), touches on this need:

It seems to me that one of the most important types of meeting or relationship is the person's relationship to himself. In therapy again, which I have to draw on because that's my background of experience, there are some very vivid moments in which the individual is meeting some aspect of himself, a feeling which he has never recognized before, something of a meaning in himself that he has never known before. It could be any kind of thing. It may be his intense feeling of aloneness, or the terrible hurt he has felt, or something quite positive like his courage, and so on. But at any rate, in these moments, it seems to me that there is something that partakes of the same quality that I understand in a real meeting relationship. He is in his feeling and the feeling is in him. It is something that suffuses him. He has never experienced it before. In a very real sense, I think it could be described as a real meeting with an aspect of himself that he has never met before. . . I'll push this one step further. I guess I have the feeling that it is when the person has met himself in that sense, probably in a good many aspects, that then and perhaps only then, is he really capable of meeting another in an I-Thou relationship.

COMMENTARY **RELIGION FOR HEROES**

THIS week's *Frontiers* article closes with an important question: "Why should not love and science," asks David Newhall, "inspire in contemporary man as much conviction of the meaningfulness of life as earlier religious doctrines inspired in persons in whom they commanded immediacy of assent?"

Well, what were the "earlier religious doctrines" concerned with? To start out, they made definitive declarations concerning the nature and destiny of both the world and man. They proposed some conception of the Highest Good and offered a course of action for its realization by human beings. They gave an account of good and evil. They distinguished between two orders of awareness—that of the world and that of eternity. These teachings, as doctrines, were said to correspond to the powers of subjective perception which belong to all human beings, by means of which the doctrines might be converted into the stuff of self-knowledge.

But why, given this correspondence between religio-philosophical explanation and the human hunger to know, did the ancient religions not work better? Or why, at any rate, do we not try to make them work, now?

One answer is that any generalization about meaning which reaches far beyond—not beyond immediate assent, which is always possible but beyond the possibility of immediate confirmation, tends to be rubricized and then to become an instrument of social authority. It is at this point that truth, were any there to begin with, must leave the form of doctrine and find a revolutionary, an iconoclastic embodiment. There is only one sacred reality in human beings, the power to know. When the organized community turns the longing to know against itself, by the promulgation of dogma, the inner man has only one defense: he too breaks the faith. When he is manipulated through his longing to know, he

responds by declaring that there is nothing to know. So were born all the legions of atheists and agnostics.

Now, today, we begin again, starting out with the reduced religion of the betrayed, saying to ourselves: I have a heart capable of love and a mind capable of knowledge; what more is needed?

This, we must note, is a religion for heroes, for the new stoic breed of modern man. It is a religion which declares high human capacities and the will to search. Its bible is a treatise on method, but it has no sample theorems, no "answers" that may be looked up in the back of the book.

Yet haunting the encouragement we give to one another to practice this brave religion is the rumor of lost mysteries, of answers once possessed. Perhaps a science made generous by love will learn how to look at those "earlier religious doctrines" with minds that cannot suffer betrayal because they are unable to see, much less "accept," a secondhand truth.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

GENIUS

Atlantic

supplement on "Children"—altogether a

Alastair Reid, who contributes a poem, also writes

in the later years, he explains, is not really the

of amazement." But this, like memory itself,
be recovered; it is never lost by the most fulfilled

Some of the afterthought we apply to the world
they should be interested in, the ways in which they
seems to assume that children are our idea, not theirs.

the things they are expected to be interested in; and
them make off with whatever improbable treasure

I suppose the difficulty lies in deciding exactly
replicas of ourselves, or as raw material, or as
entertainers, or trainees, or even as income-tax
from an unlikely planet, frail, cogent messengers
sight of, little people who are likely not only to amuse
that they, as much as we, have a right to their own
children with the versions we retain of our own
good for us, as we think we were then, will be good
entitled to their
reach them, as we sometimes do, it is generally on a
them so natural.

approach the subject of creativity in children as if

horticulture. But the truly gifted child always sets

more aware of their " youngsters, but whatever the explanation, they

the instructor who teaches by way of a system.

Eiseley's has a

otherness" in relation

Eiseley writes:

screen may prevent the emergence of a higher form of
soundless area of the brain, which parallels the
from creation that exists only as a potentiality. Here
experiences may open or keep permanently closed the
expression becomes frightfully obscured by the
and development of the individual.

universe—stars, elements, life, man—is a process of
void of non-being. The creative element in the mind
statues, move the heart with the symbols of great
emerges in as mysterious a fashion as those
existence in great cyclotrons, only to vanish again
limited lifetimes is dwarfed by the unseen potential of
smaller universe of the individual human brain has its
cometary passages, or flares suddenly like a
of energy it has released roll on through unnumbered

Does genius emerge from the genes alone?
contain at least part of the secret? Or is the number
ordinary men carry it irretrievably locked within our

If genius is a purely biological phenomenon one
should increase with the size of populations. Yet it is
night in fairy rings and then vanish, there is some

delicate soil which nurtures genius—the cultural circumstance and the play of minds must meet. It is not a matter of population statistics alone, else there would not have been so surprising an efflorescence of genius in fourth- and fifth-century Greece—a thing we still marvel at in our vastly expanded world.

Lawrence Kubie, a practicing psychiatrist, has proposed that "the creative person is one who in some manner, which today is still accidental, has retained his capacity to use his pre-conscious functions more freely than is true of others who may potentially be equally gifted." Dr. Eiseley does not doubt that "the freedom to create is somehow linked with facility of access to those obscure regions below the conscious mind." We might prefer, with the transcendentalist, to speak of these "obscure regions" as being above, rather than below, the conscious mind. In any case, the ephemeral perspectives of such poets as Alastair Reid undoubtedly establish a better communication with the world of creativity than dutifully-planned programs for the gifted child. Two sentences from Anne Hoppock's *All Children Have Gifts* are apropos:

As for the one child out of many who will grow up to join the world's truly great, how do we plan a curriculum and a group for him? Who can undertake to prescribe a course of study for a child Einstein, especially if the program is to be appropriate for a group including a young Mozart or a boy Jefferson? . . . We cannot prescribe for him; we can only hope to learn from him the ways to help him.

We can be fairly sure, however, that our culture reduces the number of promising children who will be able to bring their talents to light. As Rene Dubos observes in *The Torch of Life*:

Little is known of the extent of human potentialities, because the trend of civilization has been to control and modify the external environment for the sake of comfort, the ideal goal being total elimination of effort and suffering. We do little, if anything, to train the body and soul to resist strains and stresses; but we devote an enormous amount of skill and foresight to conditioning our dwellings against heat and cold, avoiding contact with germs, making food available at all hours of the day, multiplying laborsaving devices, dulling even the slightest pain with drugs, and minimizing the effort

of learning. The enormous success of these practices in making life more pleasant and more effective, has, unfortunately, led to the neglect of another approach for dealing with the external world, namely, the cultivation of the resources in human nature. . . .

FRONTIERS

"RELIGION collapses unless its main positions North Whitehead in his chapter on "Science and *Science and the Modern World* 190-191, Mentor edition). The chapter is full of particularly provocative and haunting at the intent is to clarify the meaning of "immediacy of orthodoxy, suggest some important positions to express a mitigated optimism about the future of

What does Whitehead mean by "immediacy of "unthinking impulsive agreement." The assent assent does not exclude an effort to clarify and we would not know what we are assenting to, and degree of clarification and understanding, must "ring true." Clarification need not be intelligible position. The depths may remain dark assent" is a safer phrase than "self-evident" couldn't be wrong. However, the appeal of the justification. It carries such weight with us that that do not command immediacy of assent. equivalent to William James' sentiment of

Well, do the main positions of orthodox answer is obvious. In some places it is difficult to

you can get the words without much trouble, but extraordinarily elusive. As one sensitive who should know either say something that is that the old phraseology is at variance with the either miss or repudiate the meanings.

considering a revision of the Apostle's Creed, a genuine affirmation of faith rather than a hollow allowed is an open question.

assent is inversely proportional to clarity of less clarity, the more assent. Of course, on this inverse relation between assent and relevance to nuclear era, so that such assent as there is largely sterile. "Religion," writes Whitehead, "is wherewith to embellish a comfortable life." After obscurantism and irrelevance is the price, this is a religion respectable, in spite of the jibes of rebels

So we agree with Whitehead that Christianity in spite of its respectability—some critics would much effort to reveal the debacle. It only takes a mean?"; and if, as is unlikely, a clear answer is believe

By this means you are likely to find Pyrrhonic victor standing in the midst sociological level it is only necessary to look at

the defense budget of the nation that prints "In God We Trust" on most of its coins and currency.

Two hundred years ago (1759 to be precise) David Hume allowed his spokesman Philo to express this Pyrrhonic triumph in the following way:

All religious systems are subject to great and insuperable difficulties. Each disputant triumphs in his turn, while he carries on an offensive war, and exposes the absurdities, barbarities, and pernicious tenets of his antagonist. But all of them, on the whole, prepare a complete triumph for the sceptic, who tells them, that no system ought ever to be embraced with regard to such subjects: for this plain reason, that no absurdity ought ever to be assented to with regard to such subjects: for this plain reason, that no absurdity ought ever to be assented to with regard to any subject. A total suspense of judgment is here our only reasonable resource. (Part XIII, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.)

The trouble is that Philo's total suspense of judgment is not a satisfactory alternative position. His scepticism glorifies the collapse but leaves us to live among the ruins, as if the debris were somehow nourishing. Philo is a great architect of doubt but doubt is not a livable abode. We cannot survive on antiseptics. Some thinkers have felt so strongly about this that they have embraced the absurd, but analysis of the complexities of this response to doubt is not the topic before us. Suffice it to say that we would have to run the gamut from Tertullian's state of mind to Samuel Beckett's.

Our question is: If orthodox religious positions do not command immediacy of assent, if some of them positively repel us, what positions, religious or otherwise, do; command our assent? We are not at a loss in search of such positions unless we make a position out of despair and refuse to look further. Consider two positions. Each has its roots in the past and thus does not require a complete rupture with tradition. Together they may be of sufficient importance to stabilize our lives and enable us to find our way out of the ruins.

In *The Modern Temper* (1929) Joseph Wood Krutch writes about the death of a value. He is talking about love. He traces the career of love from a supremely valuable mystical experience in which human life fulfills itself, to the death of this value as love loses its mystical meaning and becomes associated with a biological act. Under the progressive impact of Darwinian and Freudian ideas (not that these ideas were always correctly handled), love lost its preeminence. The Victorian phrase, "Love is best," lost its meaning as life became too rough for love. So love died. Krutch's discussion is a penetrating documentation of the loss of immediacy of assent to the value of love.

But love didn't stay dead. Krutch continues his documentation in subsequent writings. Coming forward to *Human Nature and the Human Condition* (1959), he is again discussing love. He indicates its return, if not to the center of the stage, at least to an important place in our thought. He no longer finds a single concept like the "virtuous love" of the Victorians. This could hardly be expected. There is love as sexual attraction. There is TLC, the Tender Loving Care of the "home magazines." There is the love discussed more and more in the literary quarterlies, which is "something metaphysical and all but theological." This is not sex and it is not what "children need." It is another kind of love without which sex and TLC and caritas "are all as sounding brass." Krutch does not say that contemporary man has suddenly turned from sex and given immediacy of assent to this sort of love. In fact he says that contemporary man is usually incapable of it. This kind of love is "nevertheless something very real." He offers us two clues. First,

It is what the Ancient Mariner experienced when the ice went out of his soul because he had recognized that the water-snakes were beautiful and had "blessed them unaware." Its most obvious effects are the wonder and joy of the lover himself. He looks at the world he did not make and finds it somehow good. (*Human Nature and the Human Condition*, p.

106. See also the relevant verses in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.)

The second clue is the suggestion that this love is the opposite of the current concept of alienation. Alienation as developed in contemporary thought is more than a hostile and sterilizing social relation. It derives from inability to find anything in oneself or in the universe capable of inspiring love. Alienation is thus loveless existence, and it spoils everything (see p. 107).

Where in all this do we find any affirmation that commands widespread immediacy of assent? It is hard to be sure just what Krutch would say. At any rate, as of 1959 he is testifying to the resurrection of love in contemporary thought. He is a sensitive observer of the human scene. If his comments reflect something more than the warm climate of Arizona (where he wrote) melting the ice of the modern temper in the veins of an aging man, he is suggesting that love in one of its ancient forms once more commands immediacy of assent. Admittedly Krutch is vastly more articulate than contemporary man of whom he speaks, and so are the literary quarterlies. Articulatness, however, is not the criterion. There must be some understanding, but meaningful entry is the important thing.

Perhaps an even more cautious formulation would be better. Let us say that we give immediacy of assent to the position that alienation is bad. We know better what we are trying to get away from than what we are groping toward. We are not "by love possessed," but we begin to wish we were. We have not recovered Augustine's vision of the universe as an "order of love," and we never will, but we know that *alienation is a malady and that the cure lies in the direction of love*.

This is the first of the two positions mentioned above. It has its roots in the religions of the past. It commands immediacy of assent in the present because love has been freed of all its theological trappings, institutional affiliations, and

authoritative spokesmen. Love can enter into human experience without being engulfed, patronized, exploited, and monopolized by no longer acceptable supporters. It was not really love that died. Love was well-nigh suffocated by her friends. These friends have died. With them gone (dead if not buried), love is gaining immediacy of assent by the maturing modern temper which at first abandoned her but was always restless without her. This development is of sufficient importance to justify a new label. Possibly this is an aspect of the post-modern temper.

The second position to which we give immediacy of assent is less likely to be challenged than the first. The position is that *science is good*. It too requires some clarification before commanding assent. There must be some understanding of the limits of science, the abuses of science, the confusion of science with scientism, the confusion of science with technology, and the confusion of science with scientists. Given a reasonable amount of clarification along these lines, so that we get clear about science as a method and science as a body of knowledge acquired through the use of this method, then we judge science to be good. This affirmation has had its ups and downs, but mainly, since Galileo, it has been up. Indeed it has been the moving spirit of the Western world, and in the East it is a growing conviction. The East, to be sure, hopes to avoid our scientism and be wiser than we have been in the development of its technology.

To feel in our bones (I am sorry if this figure of speech suggests Strontium 90—it only goes to show that the distinction between science and technology is important) that science is good is not to say any particular item of scientific knowledge commands immediacy of assent. Experimentation is the agency of assent for any particular scrap of scientific knowledge. We affirm the value of the knowledge it yields. We find people who are not interested in science and

people who are more interested in something else. We do not find much conscious, deliberate repudiation of scientific method or scientific knowledge. This, when it happens, is either bigotry or misunderstanding.

What is the future of these positions, and what is our future with them as guides? Ironically, just as the love affirmation is regaining its power precisely because it has been freed of strangling theological overgrowth and outmoded ecclesiastical implementation, the belief in the value of science is threatened precisely because science seems to be taking on crippling institutional affiliations. The damaging institutions in this case are sovereign nations whose partisan concerns are alien to the spirit of science and whose demands upon science may become fully as frustrating to the proper business of science as the demands of the church ever were to the proper expression of love. Once the church placed itself between man and his highest aspirations, claiming all the while to be the vehicle for their realization. No doubt there have been some moments in history when this claim was justified. Now nations are placing themselves in this position. This prospect casts a shadow over whatever optimism is possible. Love and science may lose out in the face of hatred and ignorance and power out of control, and most of mankind may be destroyed.

Nevertheless, all things considered, our chances seem about as good as they were. We have created some devilish threats to our own welfare, but we also have at our disposal some mighty resources for dealing with them. Love and science could make a good team. No one really knows whether they are sufficient to pull us through, or whether our sense of their value is dynamic enough to elicit from us the necessary practical actions. Some people will always say that there is no hope without the aid of supernatural powers. They cannot be refuted. However it may be pointed out that these powers, if they are real, or faith in them, which most

certainly has been real, have never guaranteed or provided an easy life for man. The pain, the suffering, the injustice were always there. The very fact that man has for so long looked to another realm for his fulfillment is testimony that he has seldom felt good about his prospects here. Orthodox religion has never guaranteed anything but a meaningful life. The proper comparison is not between the vision of an other-worldly heaven and the facts of life now. It is between the facts of life then and the facts of life now. Remembering this, we can say that our prospects here are perhaps better than they have been in the past. Why should not love and science inspire in contemporary man as much conviction of the meaningfulness of life as earlier religious doctrines inspired in persons in whom they commanded immediacy of assent?

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