

THE LOST AND THE FREE

CERTAIN basic realizations are slowly entering the intellectual life of Western civilization, coloring its thought, tempering its judgments, and revolutionizing its arts. These ideas—they are more than "ideas," being inescapable *feelings* about meaning—are as irresistible as the questions asked by the men of the Enlightenment were to seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Those questions about knowledge and how it is obtained were as necessary as breathing to the creators of the culture of modern Europe. There are some things in human life which cannot be changed or avoided. One of them is the hunger of a mind which has found a new light, a new principle of knowing. You could no more turn the attention of men away from those questions, when their minds became ripe to ask them, than you could stop the flow of covered wagons across the Western plains of the United States or make the forty-niners forget the lure of Sutter's California gold. We know little enough about human life, but we have learned that destiny-shaping currents of various sorts do move in and through us, either by chance or from some order we cannot see, and that after these tides have spent their strength, we are changed.

It is easy—far too easy—to announce that the tumult of great changes is upon us today. Anyone with a New Gospel to dispense, a Deep Reproach to voice, or a Crusade of Regenerating Action to organize can fill his manifesto with endless documentation of revolutionary change. The fact of the change is so familiar that one can now ignore it after a simple act of genuflection. This can mean only one thing: that while the signs of change are all about, we haven't the slightest idea of their real meaning. The signs we take note of are all outside of *us*.

But what are the vague feelings, the awesome premonitions, the inward apprehensions that are

today coming to be the secret truth of the intellectual life? They add up to one thing: a terrible sense of failure. This is not a matter for argument, but a psychological fact.

How shall we read this fact?

Well, you can say that the people who are subject to this feeling of failure are "sick." You can hold them up to shame by exhibiting their work in collections of "degenerate" art. Or you can have them reviewed by persons of forward-looking faith in *Isvestia* or *Life* Magazine.

But there are other things you can do with this fact. You can ask what "failure" means in human life. One of its meanings must be, for example, not succeeding. And what is it to "not succeed"? Well, a man can fall short of the conventional goals in his society. He may "fail" to graduate from some kind of school. He may "fail" in business. He may lose a coveted job, or not get one. He may in short find himself unable to do what others expect him to do, or what he expects of himself. This is conventional failure.

Another kind of failure would be to not succeed in "believing" in the goals of conventional success, which brings one sort of social censure. People call you a beatnik or something like that. The epithets in this field of criticism are not yet properly organized or graded.

All this, however, is personal. You somehow fail, or you somehow do not believe. Our inquiry will have to go to more fundamental depths.

The apprehensions and the questioning we have in mind refer to the validity of the entire human enterprise as it has been understood in the West. This state of mind is hardly touched by the promises and sanctions of rationality. You do not talk yourself out of its essential loneliness. Here there is not so much a recognition and a

confession of the evils which society has produced, but a wondering about the good it affords, or hopes to afford, and how it relates to the existential being of the individual. Only the artist has something to say about such questions, and he usually says it with such brooding desperation that he seems for many people to live in some world that is not ours at all. The truth is, he declares, that I have found no truth.

This is not the same as saying that no truth exists, or that it cannot be found. The problem is that we are all, artists included, social beings who are bred and educated in a social tradition of collective achievement of the good. The vision we share is a vision of shared excellence, and our pragmatic philosophy insists upon a credo of experienced truth. A man who has a good life will have it because others have it with him. But this *is not happening*. The structure of our social organism leads to quite other ends.

Whose voice speaks today for nature and the natural life? The man who talks to his fellows on these subjects with the greatest conviction is one who cries out in high indignation against rape, mutilation, and mutation. From Linus Pauling to Rachel Carson, the gamut is long and almost monotonous. What man has done to nature, and thus to man, recalls nothing of the vision of the Renaissance, but tells only of habits which are making the world uninhabitable.

Then, in this matter of our famous "mastery" of natural forces, the declarations which are most articulate, most expressive of the quality of being human, come again from outraged critics who speak of the present in accents bordering on horror. Take for example Lewis Mumford, whose discussion of present-day practice of architecture encompasses a wide range of the powers and skills of twentieth-century civilization. In Mr. Mumford's latest book, *The Highway and the City* (Harvest paperback, \$1.65, Harcourt, Brace & World), there is a chapter, "The Case Against 'Modern Architecture'," which has this to say:

Beneath the belief in modern architecture lay certain preconceptions about the nature of modern civilization; and these preconceptions have proved so inadequate that it is time to give them a thorough overhauling.

Perhaps the most central of these beliefs was the belief in mechanical progress. Concealed within this notion was the assumption that human improvement would come about more rapidly, indeed almost automatically, through devoting all our energies to the expansion of scientific knowledge and to technological inventions; that traditional knowledge and experience, traditional forms and values, acted as a brake upon such expansion and invention, and that since the order embodied by the machine was the highest type of order, no brakes of any kind were desirable. Whereas all organic evolution is cumulative and purposeful, in that the past is still present in the future, and the future, as potentiality, is already present in the past, mechanical progress existed in a one-dimensional time, the present. Under the idea of mechanical progress only the present counted, and continual change was needed in order to prevent the present from becoming passé, and thus unfashionable. Progress was accordingly measured by novelty, not by continuity and human improvement. . . . this anti-traditionalism imposed a penalty on modern architecture; and that is, it was deprived by its own assumptions of either recognizing its essential continuity with the past or of building upon its own tradition. . . . We used the word modern as a "praise-word," in Robert Frost's vocabulary, and we overlooked the possibility that modern technics, which had given us instant communication, would also provide us with instantaneous mass extermination: or the fact that while its hospitals, medical services, and sanitary precautions would reduce older forms of disease, technical progress would also pollute our food, befoul the air with smog, and produce new tensions and new diseases and new anxieties, as crippling as those that have been banished. Modern psychology has introduced man to the depths of his own nature, in all its immense variety and creative potentiality; but it has also produced the bureaucratic personality, sterilized, regimented, overcontrolled, ultimately hostile to every other form of life than its own: cut off from human resources and human roots. . . .

In so far as modern architecture has succeeded in expressing modern life, it has done better in calling attention to its lapses its rigidities, its failures, than in bringing out, with the aid of the architect's creative imagination, its immense latent potentialities. The

modern architect has yet to come to grips with the multi-dimensional reality of the actual world. He has made himself at home with mechanical processes, which favor rapid commercial exploitation, with anonymous repetitive bureaucratic forms, like the high-rise apartment or office building, which lend themselves with mathematical simplicity to financial manipulation. But he has no philosophy that does justice to organic functions or human purposes, and that attempts to build a more comprehensive order in which the machine, instead of dominating our life and demanding ever heavier sacrifices in the present fashion, will become a supple instrument for humane design, to be used, modified, or on occasion rejected at will.

So long as we were able to believe in the sort of progress Mr. Mumford has under his glass, there was little possibility turning the talents of anyone experiencing a sense of "failure." But now, with our growing perception of the subtlety of human values, and the impossibility of escape for the individual from the tight interdependence of practically everyone involved in the technological society, the life of the individual is becoming a passage from personal dilemma to personal dilemma. Even if he *could* get away from it all, the ethic of service to the common good prevents him from taking flight.

Another aspect of failure is seen in the incredible amount of "refuse" our civilization must dispose of. The annual harvest of mechanical junk is bad enough, but some of this can be melted up and used over again. It is the human refuse which we pack away in jails, prisons, and mental hospitals that really appalls. To help these people, we have no concept of organic life, only a theory of organized welfare. One might go on, enlarging the account of human waste by a discussion of alcoholism, heroin addiction, the debilitation of character through the employment of men in the manufacture of devices for mass slaughter, and by of fine actors and good writers to the vulgar purposes of commercial distribution—all of which tends to make human beings sick of themselves, sick of what they are doing with their time, and exceedingly vulnerable to the appeal of gross distractions which waste their energies further.

It hardly needs pointing out that the practice of public education becomes exceedingly difficult when large numbers of the adult population are slowly becoming aware of the contradictions in their lives, yet find themselves wholly lacking in a basis of either self-criticism or general social criticism. The political emergencies of the time prohibit candid expression, lest this be taken as a sign of national weakness, and it is generally assumed that the role of education is to strengthen national morale instead of asking embarrassing questions. This alienates some teachers—the good ones—and tempts others into hypocrisy. In time, the natural flow of hope and the practice of idealism find their channels stopped up with solidly opaque emotional blocks. People look at other people and wonder, vaguely, where they are going, and why they are bothering at all. Ordinary people, not just intellectuals and artists, begin to understand *Waiting for Godot*, which speaks to their condition. Artifacts of wholeness out of the past, such as folk music, become symbols of meaning pursued with sectarian intensity.

And now we must quote more extensively from the passage by Ortega that was briefly cited last week, since it is the text for what remains to be said. The following is from the chapter, "Who Rules the World?", in *The Revolt of the Masses*:

Take stock of those around you and you will see them wandering about lost through life, like sleep-walkers in the midst of their good or evil fortune, without the slightest suspicion of what is happening to them. You will hear them talk in precise terms about themselves and their surroundings, which would seem to point to them having ideas on the matter. But start to analyze those ideas and you will find that they hardly reflect in any way the reality to which they appear to refer, and if you go deeper you will discover that there is not an attempt to adjust the ideas to this reality. Quite the contrary: through these notions the individual is trying to cut off any personal vision of reality, of his own very life. For life is at the start a chaos in which one is lost. The individual suspects this, but he is frightened at finding himself face to face with this terrible reality, and tries to cover it over with a curtain of fantasy, where everything is clear. It does not worry him that his "ideas" are not

true, he uses them as trenches for the defense of his existence, as scarecrows to frighten away reality.

The man with the clear head is the man who frees himself from those fantastic "ideas" and looks life in the face, realises that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost. 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. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost, is lost without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality.

Where does this take us, or leave us? Well, if Ortega is right, and if we as a culture could persuade ourselves that *he* is right, the adopting of his view would put us in a position where we could, oddly enough, do some lasting good in the world. We could become the teachers of others without threat or damage to anyone. We would have the wisdom of the smashed, of the disenchanting, of the lost men who have the only grip on reality that is possible, these days—that of knowing you are lost.

We could say to other peoples: What would you like us to do for you? How can we help you? Ask anything you like. We'll teach you how to make machines, how to become "affluent," how to abolish poverty, how to achieve modern transport and communications. We can do all this, since we know it very well, but don't—*above all*—don't imagine that we wish to be your instructors in anything else! We have made a terrible mess of things. Even our celebrated "democracy" does not work very well. Find your own way in such matters. Profit, if you can, by our mistakes. We have made many of them, and now, only by the sheer chance of a muddy darkness that has come upon us, do we know enough to avoid the self-flattery of looking for imitators!

Being human, you will doubtless earn some kind of darkness. But let it be *your own!*

These little things that we know how to do—you're welcome to them. We can't diminish our wealth by showing them to you. It's like riding a bicycle or swimming. We can't forget them. But spare yourself the intoxications of "progress."

We should like to practice the elementary decency of levelling with you. It may be a minor virtue, but it remains to us that we can say this to you *before* the nuclear explosions of a third world war. We don't want to be around to listen to the confessions that might be heard, if any pangs of conscience still be felt, after such a war.

The thing that the new nations need to recognize is that there is only one mood suited to the process of becoming a modern industrial power—fear and trembling. The other lines of development take hardly any effort at all. Any people who can read will find it easy to become rough, tough, and destructive. The thing to watch out for is the idea that dropping atom bombs will lay the basis for a sound national tradition. That is a delusion that will hang about your neck like the albatross of the Ancient Mariner. It will infect your diplomacy with self-justification, weaken your morality with hidden guilt, obsess your poets with longing for expiation, and fill your children with non-imaginary terrors in the night. . . .

If we could practice this kind of integrity, saying what we really feel, explaining our uncertainties and our doubts, the very act of exposing our hearts would be bound to release positive energies and qualities. But these aspects of Western culture will remain dammed up, hidden away, silent and forlorn, until we stop competing with other façades of pretended success.

Our world is a beaten, shorn and misled world. It has been fed a pack of lies. The political propaganda of the age is no better than a noisy, interminable commercial. Why not admit it? The *spirit* of our laws is a question, not an answer. The Constitution of the United States

frames and honors a quest, not a conclusion. It is a document which declares that there will always be better ways. It announces the right of men to look for them. There is no conceit more monumental than the assertion that the present is the last word in human development, or that until now no serious mistakes have been made.

The thing that is doing us in, making us lie to ourselves and, what is worse, betraying the minds of our children, is the politics of power. The politics of power has made us afraid to tell the truth. We sometimes find ways of telling the truth to one another—but usually, from shame, we repeat it only to psychologists and bartenders. Our educators tell the truth in little monographs. Our doctors tell the truth in learned papers. A few aroused and conscientious citizens tell the truth in public and suffer pillory for it. But we are not yet wholly cowed and silent men. There are those among us who remain free.

REVIEW

DIALOGUES ON WAR

PIERRE-HENRI SIMON'S *Portrait of an Officer* (Seeker & Warburg, London, 1961) is one of those rare books which bridge the gap between the age of heroism in battle and the new age of atomic weapons. The old sort of combat situation still exists at the fringes of the contentions of the major powers—in Indo-China, Algiers, Africa, and Cuba—but the serious war of our time will have no familiar physical aspects. The link between the old and the new, therefore, must be psychological. It is this which Pierre-Henri Simon demonstrates with great subtlety. His hero—and he is a hero—is Jean de Larsan, a professional soldier who is a product of many generations trained in the martial tradition. Beginning with World War II, Larsan has spent his entire life at war. He fervently believes in the military virtues—honor, courage, loyalty, and self-abnegation. He is at once Roland, Lancelot, and Galahad—the embodiment of the hero. Yet, as the preface shows, Larsan is also an embodied anachronism:

His tragedy lies in the fact that he is too intelligent not to be aware that these virtues are, paradoxically, exercised by the soldier in essentially immoral and inhuman circumstances. As his personal story moves from a German Oflag to the Liberation of France, and from Indo-China to Algeria today, the moral conflict gradually gains form and weight: how can dichotomy between the civilised conscience of the man and the innate and honourable professionalism of the soldier be resolved?

The dependence of justification of war on revealed religion is mercilessly laid bare in the *Portrait of an Officer*. "Father Legouey," for example, tries to convince Larsan that "liberal religions" are simply weak and ignorant:

"You see, the fundamental error of a certain kind of Christianity, which is utterly emasculated, is to falsify the order willed by God and to suppose that peace is the greatest good and war, in consequence, the greatest evil. Examine the consciences of those who think in this way and you will find in the last

analysis an unavowed naturalism: in what they call respect for the person, you will find idolatry for the physical life and the animal sensibility; for these people, suffering is the body's pain and death the death of the body; and in consequence war becomes the supreme sin, because it makes blood flow and men die. But we Christians, we Catholics, if we are consistent with our beliefs, must conceive life as the soul's respiration in truth; suffering, its remoteness from grace, and in consequence from the true Faith; and death, its being plunged into the eternity of Hell. Let us therefore dare to cry it in the streets: peace is the work of the devil, when it is the calm triumph of error; and war is right when it re-establishes by iron and fire the temporal conditions for the salvation of souls. People destroyed by bombs deserve fewer tears than if they are damned by false principles. Do you think that the military brutality of Charles Martel was disagreeable in the sight of God? It was in precise correspondence with the designs of His Providence and the interests of His Kingdom. . .

Larsan reflects:

It occurred to me that it must be very convenient to have beside one a director of souls who authorised both by human philosophy and the word of God those methods of action one has elected to adopt under the triple incidence of circumstance, instinct and interest. As far as I was concerned, I could have heard no more painful utterance; it seemed to me that I had put my finger on the most subtle, profound and wicked of the world's scandals: the active presence of interpreters of the spirit beside the makers of history when instead of restraining them and humiliating them with the thought of the infinite, they draw from the idea of the absolute itself considerations that encourage them to oppress humanity without remorse. . . . Yes, I know every religion has had its deviations and has degraded itself in the temporal and the latest in date is the communist religion of socialised Man, which goes even further than the rest in its doctrinaire cruelty. But Christianity! Isn't it the greatest and most desperate of paradoxes that the Church born of the Sermon on the Mount and the agony of Calvary, based on the sacrifice of the Innocent when caught between the Law of the priests and the law of Caesar, that this daughter of Christ should have given rise to so many men of good will who in their turn have heaped the faggots and polished their arms, occasioned wars and justified torture for the political advancement of a truth which was, in fact, nothing else but universal love. . . ?

This sort of agonized comparison is in the air, these days. An article by the late Carl Jung in the January *Atlantic* (based on a chapter in a forthcoming volume, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*), titled "Jung's View of Christianity," has in it passages which expose the characteristic oversimplifications of orthodox religion in relation to good and evil. Dr. Jung writes:

We stand in need of reorientation. Touching evil brings with it the grave peril of succumbing to it. We must, therefore, no longer give in to anything at all, not even to good. A so-called good to which we succumb loses its ethical character. Not that there is anything bad in it on that score, but to have surrendered may breed trouble. Every form of addiction is bad, no matter whether the narcotic be alcoholic or morphine or idealism. We must beware of thinking of good and evil as absolute opposites. The criterion of ethical action can no longer consist in the simple view that good has the force of a categorical imperative, while so-called evil can resolutely be shunned. Recognition of the reality of evil necessarily relativizes the good, and the evil likewise, converting both into halves of a paradoxical whole. In practical terms, this means that good and evil are no longer so self-evident.

"Larsan" is determined to discover the nature of good and evil, and is willing to pursue the quest to its depths—or heights. But like other representatives of our civilization, he is not quite able to break free from the bindings of familiar duties, in his case so nicely justified by the honorifics of "honor," "loyalty," and "sacrifice." Dr. Jung speaks of what might be named "the Larsan-Christian predicament":

Today we need psychology for reasons that involve our very existence. We stand perplexed and stupefied before the phenomena of Nazism and Bolshevism because we know nothing about man, or at any rate have only a lopsided and distorted picture of him. If we had self-knowledge, that would not be the case. We stand face to face with the terrible question of evil and do not even know what is before us, let alone what to pit against it. And even if we did know, we still could not understand "how it could happen here." With glorious naïveté a statesman comes out with the proud declaration that he has no "imagination for evil." Quite right: we have no imagination for evil, but evil has us in its grip. Some

do not want to know this, and others are identified with evil. That is the psychological situation in the world today: some call themselves Christian and imagine that they can trample so-called evil underfoot by merely willing to; others have succumbed to it and no longer see the good. . . . The Christian nations have come to a sorry pass; their Christianity slumbers. . . .

COMMENTARY OUT OF CONTROL

Two books we have been reading lately deal with the loss of social control. One of them, *The Violent Gang* by Lewis Yablonsky (Macmillan, 1969, \$4.95), is an intimate study of the leaders and followers of several New York City street gangs. The author was able to gain the friendship and confidence of a number of the youngsters involved, and his book is in part a verbatim report of what he learned in these relationships. This is followed by proposals for reducing the tensions which lead to outbreaks of violence and senseless killing. *The Violent Gang* is not a long book, and it does not make difficult reading. Its general conclusion, which is especially concerned with the *violent* gang (there are other sorts), is that the rapidly changing environment of the large metropolitan city leads to a break-down of the socialization process. Instead of including these boys (and girls) in the social community, the socialization process has become inadequate and shuts them out. A late stage in this development is described by Dr. Yablonsky:

Two paranoid patterns, delusions of grandeur and persecution, become articulated out of self-defense in reaction to the world around them. These patterns become functional in shifting the responsibility from themselves to others and take the pressure off an already weak and suffering self. Delusions of grandeur, "gang leadership," "control of large divisions," "being part of a vast youth gang army," and a violent rep give the depressed youth some illusionary ego strength. . . . His prejudice toward the community hardens and he selectively perceives the outside world's behavior to fit his personal needs. . . . The violent gang of both reality and unreality becomes, for this type of youth, a convenient pseudo-community, one that is functional in at least temporarily alleviating his personal inadequacies and problems. The structure of the violent gang, with its flexibility of size, power roles, and delusory possibilities, make it a most convenient and socially acceptable escape-hatch for the sociopathic youth. . . .

The fact of the real community's response and retaliation only serves to strengthen the individual's

suspicions and distorted interpretations. He utilizes this as further evidence of the unfair discrimination to which he is being subjected. He comes out into the open with overt action against his supposed enemies and manages to bring down actual social retaliation upon himself. This new phase makes the paranoid pseudo-community more objective and real to him. . . . He begins after a while to live in "it" almost to the exclusion of other social alternatives.

This is the problem of the violent gang. From the viewpoint of the social community, it represents the loss of social control. The cause is the incapacity of the existing socializing institutions to support and guide normal growth processes in a large segment of urban youth. As a defensive response, these youth create a delusional pseudo-community and attempt to live by its brutish and paranoid rules.

The boys in the violent gangs are members of a subculture at the bottom of the social structure—in fact, they fail to relate to the social structure at all. At the other end of the spectrum, in both education and opportunity, are the richly talented individuals who figure in the second book we have in mind—*The War Game*, by Irving Louis Horowitz (Ballantine paperback, 75 cents). These intellectually brilliant men, called by Horowitz the New Civilian Militarists, have in common with the violent gang their participation in a pseudo-community—in this case a "working model" of international relationships based upon "a utilitarian view of human behavior." Mr. Horowitz observes:

Now, the strategists either must assume that we ought to have started hostilities, if technological or military considerations hold exclusive sway, or it must accept the consequences of a morally valid perspective in policy making and decision taking. Problems of attainability cannot be segregated from problems of desirability—yet this seems to be just what the game theory must do to be operative. . . . While the New Civilian Militarists maintain an aura of detachment about the larger social issues, it is quite plain that the forecasts they make are predicated on pessimistic and even fatalistic premises. Their efforts suffer from the danger of self-fulfilling prophecy. . . . Given an absence of institutionalized peacemaking, the prophecies of the New Civilian Militarists may be

realized, not because they are based on scientifically accurate predictions, but simply as a consequence of the general acceptance of the definitions of the game theorists.

There are of course many differences between the pseudocommunity of the depressed and paranoid-tending youth of the city streets, and the sophisticated models of the war-gamesters. The distortions of the delinquent boys are produced by emotional desperation, while the *a priori* rejection by the civilian strategists of "the possibility of working out alternative models of peaceful relationships" is a deliberate professional choice. We hesitate to say which is the more appalling instance of the break-down of social control.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

BEYOND AGNOSTICISM—TRANSITION

WE recall reading, years ago, of Bertrand Russell's dismay when he learned that his young son could not be dissuaded from the notion that he had existed *somewhere* before he was born into the Russell household. This, to his father, was simply evidence of the delusions which give rise to religious faiths. But such an experience, in dealing with children's first "metaphysical" wonderings, is so common as to suggest that transcendental thinking is inevitable and natural for man.

F. H. Bradley, a distinguished idealist, made a classic statement of "the case for metaphysics" in his book *Appearance and Reality*:

By various causes, even the average man is compelled to wonder and to reflect. To him the world, and his share in it, is a natural object of thought, and seems likely to remain one. And so, when poetry, art, and religion have ceased wholly to interest, or when they show no longer any tendency to struggle with ultimate problems and to come to an understanding with them; when the sense of mystery and enchantment no longer draws the mind; when, in short, twilight has no charm—then metaphysics will be worthless. For the question (as things are now) is not whether we are to reflect and ponder on ultimate truth—for perhaps most of us do that, and are not likely to cease. The question is merely as to the way in which this should be done. And the claim of metaphysics is surely not unreasonable. Metaphysics takes its stand on this side of human nature, this desire to think about and comprehend reality.

The man who is ready to prove that metaphysical knowledge is wholly impossible is a brother metaphysician with a rival theory of first principles. To say that reality is such that our knowledge cannot reach it, is a claim to know reality; to urge that our knowledge is of a kind which must fail to transcend appearance, itself implies that transcendence.

There may be said to be three broad areas of metaphysical inquiry about which the human mind is never altogether unconcerned: (1) What is the

origin of man, and, in the light of that origin, what is his actual relationship to other beings and finally to the whole of life? What is "the Highest," and how may he come to know It? (2) What are the laws and processes of interaction between the Whole, or the universe, and the part, man? Is "justice" a cosmic fact? (3) Is the man immortal as an individual, and if so, what should be his guide in selecting and weighing life's experiences? What goal may be reached?

Every religion or philosophy, in the last analysis, is based upon proposed answers to questions in these areas of inquiry. More important, the thought and action of each individual are profoundly influenced by his opinions on these abstruse subjects, whether consciously adopted or unconsciously absorbed from church background or general environment. This is not, of course, to say that every thoughtful man employs the conceptual terms of philosophy, nor that he is to be identified by his ability to state fundamental questions as formal issues in metaphysics. For the personal consciousness of the individual man, the essential elements of human experience are simply happiness and suffering. Yet when he seeks to *understand* these states, which he alternately passes through, when he strives to find some measure of control over them, he needs perspective and orientation—basic orientation. Thus he arrives at the portal of the great, impersonal questions, and is driven to find answers complete enough to provide at least a temporary working basis for thought and decision.

Implicit in this line of reasoning is the idea that the path to the good life is the path of philosophy. If the aim of evolution is the acquirement of full individuality—"autonomy" or "self-actualization"—and if that individuality grows only to the extent that one perceives the *significance* of his interrelationships with other beings, man's destiny necessarily involves the disciplines of philosophy. On this view, too, the aim is not so much to prevent oneself from thinking or doing evil, as commonly classified by

religion, but to understand the elements of evil and of good, and to see in both good and evil the ties which bind the life of one man to that of all others.

We are presented, in all of the major religious traditions, with certain doctrines which allegedly represent Truth. The *philosophical* approach to such doctrines is neither one of acceptance nor rejection. A philosopher cannot let his "will to believe" carry him away, while at the same time he must resist the tendency to let his agnostic, skeptical tendencies dominate. What positive approach, then, is possible? He may begin with the hypothesis that every important religious utterance, whether symbolic or directly ethical, contains a significant psychological truth, the "truth" which at root has appealed to so many devotees of fixed faiths. It is this approach which appeals most naturally to contemporary students of comparative religions. The great scriptures of Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity, for example, may be read constructively from a point of view entirely beyond matters of scholarly interpretation, simply by seeking insights of contemporary significance, for ourselves, in what has been said by a great teacher.

When we read Schopenhauer's assertion that "we are all aware of our share in the inexhaustible spring of eternity," we may sense something more than poetic utterance. Yet whence does this feeling come? For those who believe that the source of being is "God," the sense of permanence presumably derives from the fact that all creatures existed in "the mind of God" before emerging as separate entities. The philosophers, unless they represent an official theology, have always tended to describe the original source of beinghood as some sort of unconditioned Principle—which, because it is out of all relation to time, place, and circumstance, represents that which is "permanent." Whenever a philosopher begins to formulate a metaphysical assumption, independent of any dogma on the subject of "beginnings," he seems to propose the Universality of Spirit, or a

Divine Principle, as the common source of all beings of whatever degree, and the eternally sustaining root of all individuality. The familiar symbol "God" is thus too anthropomorphic, too much an oversimplification to help in this search for a "root." "The Root is Man," but man in what aspect? A passage by the English metaphysician, John McTaggart, is apropos:

I should agree that God (if you think best to call it God) stands to the selves as the regiment does to the soldiers. But I should not call either God or the regiment a personality. I should not hold that God has any intrinsic value—the only intrinsic value is in the selves, though they only have it because they are united in the Divine Unity. The self answers to the description of the fundamental differentiation of the absolute. Nothing else which we know or can imagine does so. The idea of the self has certain characteristics which can be explained if the self is taken as one of the fundamental differentiations, but of which no explanation has been offered on any other theory, except that of rejecting the idea of the self altogether, and sinking into complete scepticism. The self is so paradoxical that we can find no explanation for it, except its absolute reality.

We are dealing, now, with areas of spontaneous inquiry which are prior to any particular religious formulation. If such an approach seems to invalidate specific theological claims, it also has the virtue of rendering the mind hospitable to all endeavors in "the search for permanence" —whatever the name of the savior or teacher who happens to be under consideration.

At the outset, then, we must conclude that "education in religion" cannot elicit breadth of awareness for the student if it takes place within limiting context of any one religion —whether Christianity or some other. Behind all religions are the great fundamental, eternal, mystical questions, and to become aware of their existence seems the first step.

An excellent beginning, for the student immersed in Christian tradition, would be study of the sayings of the Buddha, as represented in the *Dhammapada*.

FRONTIERS

Communication of Social Ethics

WE have a letter from a reader, Harry Zitzler, of Chicago, which is of particular interest to the editors since it more or less duplicates their own reactions of the work of E. F. Schumacher, economic adviser to the National Coal Board of England. We reproduce the letter in full:

I was most interested in your additional material on E. F. Schumacher. After reading your original extract from his pamphlet, *Modern Industry in the Light of the Gospel*, I sent in for the pamphlet, and was so impressed by its quiet eloquence in condemning the evils of our economic system that I sent off for some copies to send to a few of my conservative friends. I had the impression that Schumacher is a religious thinker and identified him as such to my friends (and, indeed, commented on his pamphlet as an indication of the rising concern upon the part of theologians with social evils and injustice!). It came as quite a surprise to learn (in your April 17 issue) that the author is an economist. Now I shall have to so inform my friends, and want to do so by means of the excellent material you have gathered on and by the man.

The discussion you print raised one major question in my mind: if economics is not autonomous but rests upon philosophical principles, what is the basis of those principles? In philosophy, there is no elaborate framework of proof as there is in the social sciences. How do we "prove" that one value is better than another? I raise this question not only because the social scientists raise it against the philosophers (although they continue to opt in favor of the going system of values) but because I find the methods of philosophical investigation so much less rigorous and compelling than the methods of scientific investigation. I happen to agree with Schumacher's indictment of "materialistic economics" but I am at a loss to *prove* the economic system for which he opts any better than the one he condemns. I have certain convictions and *feel* it is better. But feeling is not proof or, at best, is only one element of proof. How do we ground our social convictions? Can they be grounded in any way comparable to the way in which the scientists ground their theories?

I raise the question epistemologically, but my real concern is sociological and derives from my inability to convince my conservative friends that the

existing economic system may not be the best of all possible systems. The impasse in communication between people of different values is simply appalling. It would be quite an accomplishment if somebody could solve *this* problem!

There are really two problems here. The "we" of the question, "How do *we* ground our social convictions?", has two meanings. There is the "we" which represents the thinking of individuals about what they personally believe, and that other "we" which represents the organized social community. Individual thinking about rights, obligations, and human good is usually intuitively grounded. There is of course a continual feed-back of ideas flowing in both directions between the society and the individual, but the essential thinking that men do in this general area reflects their spontaneous feelings about other people. Various moral enigmas are wrapped up in this question. If you are able to believe that the attitudes of individuals are chiefly or entirely the offspring of their environment, then you take that as an explanation for the resulting social ethics. If you are unwilling to subscribe to an unqualified doctrine of social conditioning; if you are led by observation to think that, whatever the effects of the environment, some other factor of causation, as yet unexplained, plays a part, then you will be wary of theories of social reconstruction which depend upon carefully designed conditionings for their effect.

Persuasion in relation to matters of social ethics, the responsibility of the strong to the weak, or the few to the many, seems to rest more upon a cultural temper than upon logical demonstrations. The creation of such a temper is obviously an undertaking of great subtlety. One thinks, for example, of the influence of a man like Gautama Buddha, or, in modern times, the spread of the ideas of Edward Bellamy or Henry George. We might take Bellamy as an example of a man who exercised far-reaching influence. While his "Nationalist" movement did not succeed in establishing the kind of socialism Bellamy advocated, its program of "first steps" has been

termed "a catalogue of social legislation of the past half-century." These reforms included municipal ownership of utilities, direct election of senators, the merit system in civil service, a longer school year for children, better child labor laws, juster wages and hours for workmen, elimination of industrial abuses, public ownership of irrigation systems, and soil conservation. In his biographical study, *Edward Bellamy*, Arthur Morgan remarks:

The surprisingly large part of its "first steps" that has already been achieved includes much of the advanced "New Deal" legislation which has been accepted by both political parties. Some of the men directly responsible for that legislation are in direct line of descent from the First National Club of Boston, or received their first social stimulus from *Looking Backward*. Other elements of social legislation now looming on the horizon were substantially parts of the Nationalist program.

Now how, it may be asked, did these changes come about? While the initial impetus may have derived from Bellamy, from his followers, and from other reformers of like mind, the actual revision of the pattern of social and economical relationships resulted from countless small increments of influence which are practically untraceable except by big generalization. Seba Eldridge, of the University of Kansas, years ago completed a study of socialization in the United States (*Development of Collective Enterprise, Dynamics of an Emergent Economy*, University of Kansas Press, 1943), and in his summing up of the findings of this research he remarked:

Developments have been designated by such terms as public undertakings, public services, mutual companies, or, more simply still, as extensions of public health, educational, recreational, or welfare services, as the case may be. Such terms as socialism or the cooperative commonwealth have been eschewed, perhaps because they took in too much territory. Leaders have usually been innocent of anything that could be called an "ideology," save for such hand-to-mouth doctrines as served to justify their several programs. Doubtless most of them would be dreadfully shocked had they been informed that they were undermining the existing social order, and far more effectively than avowed "radicals."

How far have we come in dealing with the questions raised by our correspondent? Well, first, we have attempted to show that the *motivation* for change is the most obscure aspect of the problem. This has to do with the nature of human individuals and their ethical regard for others. We are not prepared to offer any generalizations, here, except to say that there are always some individuals who turn out to be unusually sensitive to the needs and sufferings of others, and who are more or less successful in establishing goals and working toward them—sometimes, we say in retrospect, with wisdom, and sometimes not. It might be added that this seems to be the area with the greatest need for investigation, mainly, we suspect, because so little is known about human need beyond the primitive requirements of food, shelter, and clothing. This is the region that requires orientation from some basic philosophy of "the meaning and purpose of life"—from which, as Schumacher maintains, the assumptions of economics are always derived. Since the modern world has no coherent body of thought on these matters, its economic thinking is dogmatic and uncritical.

This lack of theory produces the psychological circumstances or psychological matrix in which only some kind of "rule of thumb" progress can take place—the kind of progress (assuming it to be "progress") that Mr. Eldridge describes.

What then is the political matrix that may be expected, or the best that can be hoped for, under such circumstances? The view proposed here is that we have not improved at all on the matrix that came into being at the founding of this Republic. In justification for this we offer the comment of Benjamin Franklin on the final draft of the Constitution of the United States. He said:

I agree to this constitution with all its faults, if they are such, because I think a general Government is necessary for us and there is no form of Government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered, and believe further that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years,

and can only end in Despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall have become so corrupt as to need despotic Government, being incapable of any other. I doubt too whether any other we can obtain may be able to make a better constitution. For when you assemble a number of men to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men all their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests and their selfish views. From such an Assembly can a perfect product be expected . . .? Thus I consent, Sir, to this constitution because I expect no better, and because I am not sure that it is not the best.

Given the lack of consensus on a general philosophy of human meaning and purpose, how could you improve this political matrix? Its extraordinary virtue lies in admission of the lack of consensus, and in leaving freedom of action to the future, in view of the indeterminate character of the views on these questions.

But can the nature of man be given a scientific description? Well, the doctrines which compete for assent have not been kept secret. In politics you can go from Hobbes to Bakunin. In psychology you can go from John B. Watson to A. H. Maslow. You may feel, after researching such matters, that you have a scientific answer, but then what will you do with it? The most recent claim of this sort came from the "scientific socialists," and see what kind of sectarian hash the political process and the struggle for power made of both the "science" and the "socialism" of the Marxists!

Probably the most impressive demonstration of any economic theory or doctrine would be to conceive and put into operation some kind of "model" economic enterprise that embodies the principles which are advocated. Co-ops and commonwealth companies afford a wide range of situations for the application of ethical principles. One of the things that may be said in favor of the so-called "free enterprise" or "capitalist" economy is that rather extraordinary economic experiments may be pursued within its boundaries. The French Communities of Work are a good illustration of these possibilities (see Claire Hutchet Bishop's

book, *All Things Common*). Then, a variety of new management programs are being worked out by inventive entrepreneurs, with a corresponding literature in the fields of social science and social psychology. While none of these experiments may correspond directly to the kind of thinking our correspondent endorses, the people already working in these areas as pioneers are at least open-minded and capable of rethinking their assumptions about economic ends. What we are trying to suggest is that the people who have things going, things which are manifestly good, are about the only people who will persuade the "conservatives" that constructive, intelligently directed change is not only possible, but in some cases nearly accomplished fact. Such change, which takes place by small increments, as a species of organic growth, is the only kind of change that avoids the waste and disaster of "total revolution." The right sort of change grows naturally in a milieu of progressive enlightenment. It is not so much "science," as a temper of the human spirit, that produces this milieu.