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CONSCIOUSNESS AND MEANING

WE have a letter from a reader who has encountered certain difficulties in the Jan. 31 issue of MANAS, mainly in the editorial, which was titled "People as Subjects." The letter deals with and raises questions of extreme subtlety, ranging in that borderland of abstraction where the general idea becomes so universal in implication that it finally vanishes from intellectual sight. The idea may return, as our reader suggests, as *feeling*, but then the treatment of it with the tools of conceptual thinking often becomes inadequate, if not seriously misleading.

So far as we can see, the main issue in this letter turns on the meaning of consciousness. Speaking of the new mood in psychological research, our editorial had said:

> There is a looming discovery in the search for the living, choosing person behind the facades of behavior, and in the search for the subjective, perhaps even the moral, being behind the forms and motions of the world of nature—the "universe," as we say. It is the discovery that reality is *consciousness.* Gropingly, hungrily, we look for what is conscious, sentient, moving toward fulfillment, in the life around us. Consciousness is the stuff of universal communion. We look about the world, longing to encounter the signs of life which is like the life in ourselves.

This is enough, perhaps, to establish the basis for the comments which follow from our reader:

> . . . Whatever *else* human consciousness is, it seems to include language and other public or social symbols, even to converse with oneself or perceive with any definitive "subjective apprehension"; and while language may obscure and create "self-deceptions," it also is our major instrument for revealing and intuiting the greater "real" or "true." But "innate ideas" cannot be consciousness in this language sense, surely, and it seems to me important to distinguish between our animal teleological impulse (Plato's Eros) as one kind of "reality," but not an "idea" or conceptual consciousness.
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> All this leads me to view with some skepticism the blanket Idealism of a statement like ". . . reality is consciousness." I guess this marks me as more influenced by Existentialist thought than I had previously admitted to myself, in a way, but I think that a distinction between the kind of world-spirit-"consciousness" your editorial sees as the "real," and just how our symbolic processes allow us to become separated from this, and then partially reunited, is somehow central. Take your idea that we learn this "subjective apprehension" through despair and "the travail of the present," and hence discovery or re-discovery, for example. It seems to me that such an emphasis on suffering, which I agree with, sees man's animal and feeling dimensions very closely related to—but not the same as—his symbolic consciousness. But animals, and perhaps plants, suffer also, yet they do not have the structural capacities for symbolic consciousness, to "discover" in these experiences. So if we are part of a "great communion with the world," it would seem to be on our pre-conceptual levels, and I am disturbed by the use of the word "consciousness" for this. It is a "communion," perhaps a "spiritual communion" that we can become conceptually aware of, yes, but this is not what you are extolling, apparently, for this awareness then separates us out, and we become proud of our distinguishing difference—namely the conceptual quality of consciousness: that we are that part of the communion, and the only *part,* that is aware of itself as *part* of the whole. Now surely the total community is "reality") in some sense, as you have said and not just the tools and "objects" of our conceptual consciousness. But in this event, we had better distinguish carefully between the two. For without the distinction, "dialogue" becomes impossibly imprisoned by subjectivity, doesn't it? Then only "love" can transcend differences, never understanding.
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> My major problem is that while I can make this distinction and feel its importance, I bog down when I try to do it "carefully." It may be that this is the point where the "oceanic feeling" and mystical intuitive dimensions of the Ontological Real meet the limits of our Epistemological conceptual tools. . . .

The problems or questions rehearsed in this letter seem to lie in three divisions. There is first

the meaning of the word "consciousness." Then there is the question of the relation of consciousness to "reality"—which we have in effect denied, affirming rather an identity. Finally, there is the wide area of considerations growing out of the presence in man of more than one kind of consciousness, and the relation of these to human longing or aspiration.

The thing to do in an inquiry of this sort, it seems to us, is to develop the subject as well as one can, hoping to encompass, however inadequately, the main questions under discussion. We might begin by suggesting that consciousness is awareness. How do we recognize awareness in another? By that other's response to something of which it becomes aware. So the famous "irritability" of protoplasm becomes the signature of consciousness. Or, pressing further, we argue that anything which moves, and therefore moves specifically with reference to its field, is showing a species of awareness of its environment, and is in that sense conscious.

There is the obvious question of whether we have any right to use the word "consciousness" in this fashion. For all such meanings of "conscious," we commonly use the word *un*conscious in relation to human behavior. "Unconsciously, he hummed a tune." All sorts of things go on in our lives, many of them directly instigated by ourselves, without our knowing it. Can these be said to result from *consciousness?*

We are proposing that they can; and that when a full-throated song bursts out of a tiny bird in the springtime, consciousness is at work, even though the bird does not say to himself, "My, how happy I am! How well I sing!"

We are proposing a distinction, a differentiation, between the consciousness of the general being of the world and the special case of self-consciousness in man. We are saying that there is self, and self-aware self; consciousness, and self-consciousness. We are not distinguishing in any important way between life and consciousness, save for the overtones of wider meaning which these words possess. Man, in these terms, is life aware of itself.

We shall never be able to get rid of the impression that our consciousness is our very self, and not some kind of an "attribute" of the self. It may be one of the presumptions of our "alienation" from the non-human world that we have assumed it to be without consciousness of a sort—a sort that is not qualified by self-awareness, as ours is.

This is a metaphysical view which involves the assumption that psychological forces make up the dynamics of world and life processes. It accepts the dilemmas and contradictions of solipsism and turns them into processes of creation and evolution. The world is the not-self which the self has not yet identified with or comprehended. Matter and its states, changes, and processes are the shadow of the partial perceptions of partial or limited consciousness—agreeable to the Oriental doctrine of Maya, or the Leibnizian doctrine of the monads. Science is the rational ordering of these effects.

We get from science frequent intuitions of this meaning of science. One could argue that the entire issue of the positivists in the philosophy of science is this conclusion. They know that the thing-in-itself escapes them; that they conclude, also, that it therefore does not exist only displays at the end the idea of "reality" which they began with. But see what a somewhat reformed positivist, Pierre Duhem, has had to say:

> Physical theory never gives us the explanation of experimental laws; it never reveals realities hiding under sensible appearances; but the more complete it becomes, the more we apprehend that the logical order in which theory orders experimental laws is the reflection of an ontological order, the more we suspect that the relations it establishes among the data of perception correspond to real relations among things, and the more we feel that theory tends to be a natural classification. . . . the physicist is compelled to recognize that it would be unreasonable to work for the progress of physical theory if this theory were not the increasingly better defined and more precise reflection of a metaphysics, the belief in an order

> transcending physics is the sole justification of physical theory. *(Science,* April 23, 1954.)

We have now to recommend a delightful book, *The Great Chain of Life,* by Joseph Wood Krutch (Houghton Mifflin, 1957). It is not that we wish to prove a case with the "evidence" assembled by Mr. Krutch, nor fortify a contention with his persuasive prose. Suggestions of the sort we have in mind are never nailed down without an accompanying crucifixion of the intent. Mr. Krutch generates a mood of wonder and invokes a rich sense of possibility. However, the questions which close one of his chapters will show why we ask that this book be read:

> Is it not possible, then, that Aristotle was right, that contemplation is not only the true end of man but the end that has been pursued ever since vertebrates took the road leading to a keener and keener consciousness? Have we been trying to understand the meaning of evolution by beginning at the wrong end? It is possible that, for instance, the real, the only true "purpose" served by conscious concern over the young is the fact that out of it comes parental love itself? Has what evolution worked toward been not "survival" but "awareness"? Is the ultimate answer to the question "Why is a bungling mammal higher than an efficient wasp" simply that it is higher because it can experience parental love? Was it this, rather than mere survival, that nature was after all along?

The next step in our argument could begin with a sentence from another of Mr. Krutch's chapters. "Evolution implies development, not the appearance of something totally new." It was the contention of the Emergent Evolution school that the qualities of mind which characterize human beings were somehow "added" as a kind of bonus of evolution, which began, on this theory, with purely "material" ingredients, either in the star dust of spiral nebulae, or in the primordial protoplasm of the earliest stages of living things—depending upon where you decide to start telling the story. The problem of the Emergent Evolutionists was to infect a purely mechanistic account of the development of organic complexity with the phenomena of mind, and then to offer some kind of explanation for the resulting feeling in man of the capacity for choice or "free will." Readers interested in a review and criticism of this intellectual *tour de force* would do well to refer to William McDougall's *Modern Materialism and Emergent Evolution* (Methuen, 1929), which examines the ideas of the leaders of the school—Lloyd Morgan, Durant Drake, C. A. Strong, Edmund Noble, R. W. Sellars, and others. A passage on Sellars will perhaps serve as summary and illustration of McDougall's analysis:

> All the other exponents of Emergent Evolution . . . like other conjurors, . . . know that if you are to produce mind from a hat (or from any other physical arrangement) you must first put it there or have it up your sleeve; or else you must be content to produce a mere semblance of Mind; and they take the necessary precautions. But Sellars merely exhibits his set-up and, without attempting to perform the operation or show in detail how it may be done, says: "Now, you see, it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that Mind will emerge." It is true that he softens the emergence of cognition by allowing the prior emergence of psychic events that are not awareness of anything; and he softens the emergence of purposive striving by asserting that the emergence of events that are purposive is preceded by the emergence of events that are no longer mechanical or mechanistic. In both cases he is postulating events of a kind for which we have no warrant. Further, Sellars does not grapple in any way with the facts of heredity and morphogenesis. These are events which occur below the level of his emergence of cognition and purpose, yet they have the marks of being in some lowly sense teleological.

A general judgment of theories of Emergent Evolution, offered even earlier, in 1926 (in *The Mind),* by W. R. Mathews, seems apt and just:

> Emergent Evolution appears to be the result of an attempt to find some middle path between mechanism and teleology. . . . But it may well be questioned whether this hybrid concept is not destined, like many hybrids, to be sterile. . . . I venture to suggest that it will be found ultimately that the theory of emergent evolution was a convenient halting-place in the passage to a more explicitly teleological conception of nature.

Well, in our terms, a "more explicitly teleological conception of nature" amounts to postulating some kind of Hegelian *Absoluter Geist* which is forever seeking more complete self-

knowledge by involving itself in a multiplicity of individual forms. Consciousness, in other words, loses itself in matter, then arises out of it by the elaboration of structures or organs, first, of perception, then of self-consciousness and apperception. Or in the archaic vision of the *Rig-Veda:* "Desire first arose in It, which was the primal germ of mind, and sages, searching with introspection, found it to be the link between being and non-being."

Our correspondent speaks of "pre-conceptual levels" as the basis of a possible "great communion with the world." It seems necessary to add to this the further idea of "post-conceptual levels," in the sense of a return to the original "feeling" of common being, but with the addition of reflective self-consciousness—a self-consciousness, moreover, which has been through the whole gamut of an ascending scale of conceptual confinements of "reality" and finally reached the unqualified awareness of the Self in which subject and object merge. The comparison is similar to that of the innocence of the child and the innocence of the sage. The child knows nothing of evil, while the sage knows it and has in a sense "forgotten" it.

Something of the meaning we are seeking here was presented in the quotation from Dr. Harold S. Searles in last week's MANAS: "The mature human being knows that he is irrevocably, irreversibly a member of the human species, and can rejoice as well as despair in this knowledge. It seems inevitable that the human being will experience varied and conflictual feelings about his nonhuman environment, for mankind's position in regard to this environment is existentially a conflictual position. He is grounded in nature, and yet is unbridgeably apart from it." Passages cited recently from Clark Moustakas' new book, *Loneliness* (Prentice-Hall, 1961), are evidence of this unbridgeable "apartness," and represent another approach to the paradoxes of human consciousness.

But there are those who would take issue with the assertion of absolute unbridgeability. The entire literature of mystical union is concerned with this question. We have no wish to invoke the theological vocabulary, preferring more secular versions of inward resolution, but that literature stands as a witness to the almost timeless age of the effort of human beings to find their way "home." Our choice of a description of a climactic moment of subject-object union is found in a passage in Richard Byrd's *Alone,* a book about his adventures in exploring the South Pole. Alone at an isolated outpost, wracked by pain, cold to freezing and haunted by knowledge that his stove would poison him with carbon monoxide if he burned it to get a little heat, he nonetheless reports in his diary a "peak experience" which came to him while looking up at the skies:

> The universe is not dead. Therefore, there is an Intelligence there, and it is all-pervading. At least one purpose, possibly the major purpose, of that Intelligence is the achievement of universal harmony. . . .
>
> The human race, then, is not alone in the universe. Though I am cut off from human beings, I am not alone. . . . It was enough to catch that rhythm, momentarily to be myself a part of it. In that instant I could feel no doubt of man's oneness with the universe. The conviction came that that rhythm was too orderly, too harmonious, too perfect to be a product of blind chance—that, therefore, there must be purpose in the whole and that man was a part of that whole and not an accidental offshoot. It was a feeling that transcended reason; that went to the heart of man's despair and found it groundless. The universe was a cosmos, not a chaos; man was as rightfully a part of that cosmos as were the day and night.

Again, Byrd wrote:

> The human race, my intuition tells me, is not outside the cosmic process, and is not an accident. It is as much a part of the universe as the trees, the mountains, the aurora, the stars. My reason approves of this; and the findings of science, as I see them, point in the same direction. And, since man is a part of the cosmos and subject to its laws, I see no reason to doubt that these same natural laws operate in the psychological as well as in the physical sphere and

that their operation is manifest in the workings of consciousness.

Therefore, it seems to me that convictions of right and wrong, being, as they are, products of the consciousness, must also be formed in accordance with these laws. I look upon the conscience as the mechanism which makes us directly aware of them and their significance and serves as a link with the universal intelligence which gives them form and harmoniousness.

We would not suggest that there is anything conclusive, here, for anyone but Admiral Byrd, but would, on the other hand, propose that if this experience were to be put with others which have been reported as under similar inspiration, there would be a clear family resemblance among them all. Following are some passages from an article contributed by John Collier to MANAS nine years ago (April 1, 1953 issue):

. . . in the early spring of 1901, I found myself reading Wordsworth, particularly the Ode on Intimations of Immortality, and Tintern Abbey. This stimulus brought swiftly and overwhelmingly into my consciousness, not spiritual presences but nature, alive and interacting with human aliveness.

To the Wordsworth stimulus was added, after three of four months, the Whitman stimulus; and my first actually "hallucinatory" experience was on a hilltop when the whole forest physically seemed to be engaged in a dance.

A few months later the time came for our family to move away from the old home; as toward a twilight, I stood for the last time on the street beside the old place, again an "hallucination" came. All of the trees gesticulated or bowed in farewell, because every tree was doomed to be cut down within three or four years.

Thereafter the experience never became visual or auditory more than two or three times, but the passion, as it were, of awareness of the livingness of nature continued and never gave way even through the years of absorption into mechanistic philosophy and laboratory biology. I thought of it, however, as an individual experience. I never knew that it was collectively shared.

It was not until almost twenty years later that I encountered the experience of animism and of the organized vitalistic interaction between human cultures and nature, at Taos Pueblo, and then in other Indian groups.

. . . one of these [quasi-hallucinatory experiences] came at about my nineteenth year after a night of tremendous storm on the Tusquitte Mountain range. It came at the ensuing sunset; and I have never found words, and cannot find them now to describe the physical "hallucination" which did come. It was of the nature of a stupendous gesture of the whole mountain landscape, itself symbolical of the cosmos—a gesture commanding my own spirit onward along a track on which the whole universe was moving or rather striving toward some event or deed or accomplishment that was not ensured but in some way contingent on my own striving; and the time-span seemed to be that of eons, although the experience lasted only perhaps one minute.

Fortunately, our culture has now reached a maturity in which the tendency to try to "explain" such experiences is changing into a willingness to regard them simply as rare and welcome invitations to wonder. Mr. Collier's use of the word "hallucinatory" or "quasi-hallucinatory" is a bow to past intellectual conventions, and by no means an identification of their significance. Why should not the sense of *rapport* find particular embodiment in the psychological imagery of the reflective and self-conscious party to the communion? Mr. Collier feels that he had a dialogue with nature, and if the work of his life is any measure of this secret speech, there were great riches in what was said between them.

What, then, of metaphysics? At its best, metaphysics is a way of formulating in intellectual terms the experiences of the heart. It is, said Bergson, "the science which claims to dispense with symbols." Used properly, metaphysics is a means of purifying or generalizing by abstraction the finite particularities of symbolic modes of communication, and pressing the light of impersonal ideas to the limit of conceptual expression. So, in the final analysis, what we tried to say in the sentences questioned by our correspondent is that behind the symbols of communion lies the reality of consciousness, bare subjectivity, and it is this, always, which seeks itself in itself—Ain Soph talking to Ain Soph, Alone with the Alone, the One interviewing and dissolving into the One.

REVIEW
ALIAS ORPHEUS

HAVE you by this time discovered Elizabeth Sewell, that wide-ranging, deep-plunging British philosopher whose special domain is "the logic of imagination"? If you haven't, you've missed a rewarding contemporary thinker. Miss Sewell approaches the Great Questions in a way distinctively her own—at once poised and passionate, engaged and analytic. She provides a clear demonstration, from book to book, of why no intellectually alert person can choose up sides for good and all in the name-calling game of Scientist versus Humanist. The only way her books can properly be classified is as "Unclassifiable"; they fly out of the most decorous pigeon holes; and if librarians have problems in finding the right shelves for them, that's just as it should be. No slight intended to the librarians. If they're Sewell readers themselves, they understand.

If you're not yet a Sewell reader, these claims may sound excessive. They may seem to declare us devoid of even that modicum of critical restraint hoped for in reviewers, and to place us irretrievably beyond the pale. If so, let our defense, like Miss Sewell's, be demonstration.

The first notable item in the Sewell canon was *The Structure of Poetry* (1951). This was not only a rich tribute to but a bright instance of "the logic of imagination" at work. It centered on the poems and prose of Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Valéry. Step by step, it built up "a way of thinking about poetry." Here, as in Miss Sewell's work generally, *poetry* stands for more than poems. It includes any verbal product shaped by imagination into a rhythmically ordered vision. According to this conception, certain prose works (say, *The Anatomy of Melancholy, Alice in Wonderland, Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres,* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra)* qualify as poetry.

In 1952 came a pair of books. *Paul Valéry: The Mind in the Mirror* and *The Field of Nonsense.* The study of Valéry was an exercise in empathic analysis. Here, Miss Sewell helped to bring Valéry into a culturally assimilable perspective. She showed him as the great self-regarder of modern letters. She evaluated him not only as one of the few masters of verse technique in our time, but as a significant moral philosopher: a more profound Gide, a more ingenious Pascal. She found Valéry's mind, from first to last, a "peculiarly far-reaching one, capable of being interested in almost anything . . . He was interested in everything because he was interested only in one—'As soon as the mind is involved, everything is involved'."

In *The Field of Nonsense* Miss Sewell approached "the logic of imagination" from still another side. She assumed at the outset that "Nonsense is not merely the denial of sense, a random reversal of ordinary experience and an escape from the limitations of everyday life into a haphazard infinity, but is on the contrary a carefully limited world, controlled and directed by reason, a construction subject to its own laws." She based her case (and for some of us won it) on the achievements of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear.

In 1951 appeared Miss Sewell's first novel, *The Dividing of Time,* and in 1955 her second, *The Singular Hope.* Each novel explores the ravages, public and personal, of loneliness in a mass society. Each abounds in wit, moral insight, convincing characterization, a sense of bureaucratic unrealities—in fact, everything a novel needs except what, alas, it needs most: narrative development. In terms of her work as a whole Miss Sewell could say what, in a different sense, Kipling said of his: "You mustn't take my stories for a guide." Her novels, that is, shouldn't be judged as stories, for they don't exist as stories. They, too, are poetry.

Now we have the book which this reviewer recommends as Miss Sewell's best to date: *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History* (Yale University Press, $7.50). It takes its title and point of departure from the myth of Orpheus. So marvelous a lyre-player and singer was Orpheus that he made rocks and trees move and subdued the beasts by his voice. He married Eurydice, a Dryad. One day Eurydice, while running from Aristaeus who was forcing his attentions upon her, trod on a snake, was bitten, and died. When Orpheus descended into Hades to recover her, he gained

admittance by his music, and by his music induced Persephone to let Eurydice return with him. Persephone, however, exacted a condition: Orpheus was not to look back at Eurydice as she followed him. When they approached the world of the living, Orpheus forgot the condition and looked back. Eurydice vanished immediately and forever. Later, Orpheus was torn to pieces by Maenads, the women followers of Dionysus. His head floated down the river, still singing, until it came to rest in a cave on the island of Lesbos. There it sang and prophesied day and night till Apollo himself bade it be silent.

Taking Orpheus as the embodiment of poetic power, Miss Sewell interprets the myth accordingly:

> This story seems to say that poetry has power not merely over words and hence over thoughts, but also in some way over natural objects and their behavior, be they animate or inanimate, and to some extent, in conjunction with love, power over life and death as humans know and suffer them, that this power is almost indestructible and may turn, even in its own disaster, to something akin to prophecy. This is not a clear statement. It does not leave the mind resolved, it leaves it wondering: is the claim made by the story in any sense true? if so, in what way? what is the nature of the power and what are its limitations? Mythological statements lead to questions. Then follows something rather strange, for to these questions only the story itself can make an answer. The myth turns back upon itself because it is a question that figures its own reply, and it is that inner movement or dynamic which makes it feel obscure. This kind of unclearness is not muddle or mystification, however, but an indication of method. The myth of Orpheus is statement, question, and method, at one and the same time. This is true of every myth.

Contending that "language and mind, poetry and biology meet and bear on one another in the figure of Orpheus," Miss Sewell then takes up the challenge of the Orphic statement, question, and method. She formulates the question contained in the myth in two ways (the first presumably for the Humanist, the second for the Scientist): *What power and place has poetry in the living universe?* or *What is the biological function of poetry in the natural history of the human organism?*

With this line of inquiry laid down *The Orphic Voice* develops a number of vividly conceived and closely reasoned theses. In Part I our attention is drawn to the fact that "nowadays we have almost two languages on our hands . . . language-as-poetry and language-as-science." Language as poetry is essentially figurative, imaginative, synthesizing, and mythological. Language-as-science, however, is essentially nonfigurative, logical, analyzing, and literal. So much is common intellectual currency in our time. It is hardly news that these distinctions are usually made to disparage poetry and exalt science. What Miss Sewell attempts, though, is to show (1) that these distinctions are not fundamental; (2) that in our time science is becoming more imaginative and synthetic, and poetry more logical, analytic, and even literal; and (3) that these distinctions have developed from a long-standing but unnatural division of function. She summarizes her discussion in terms which can't help provoking us, but which may provoke us the right way—to reconsider, redefine, re-evaluate:

> Science and poetry, mathematics and words, intellect and imagination, mind and body: they are old, they are tidy, they are mistaken. If we can dispose of these recurring antitheses which the last 400 years have, with the best of intentions, bequeathed us, we can turn to bequests made on our behalf by other ancestors, for they are there and ready to help. We have given ourselves credit, as human beings, for rather more and rather less than we possess. The human organism, that body which has the gift of thought, does not have the choice of two kinds of thinking. It has only one, in which the organism as a whole is engaged all along the line. There has been no progression in history from one type of thought to another. We are merely learning to use what we have been given, which is all of a piece. This means too that we have to admit and affirm our solidarity with the thinking of the child and the savage. All thinking is of the same kind, and it is this we have to try to understand and to exercise.

Miss Sewell then reminds us that though "science cannot absorb myth, we can try the other way around, taking myth as a nearer model of the activity we want to explore and letting it interpret science as no less imaginative, corporeal, figuring, than itself":

> Discovery, in science and poetry, is a mythological situation in which the mind unites with a figure of its own devising as a means toward understanding the world. That figure always takes the form of some kind of language, and that is why we have to go more deeply into language instead of trying to escape from it. Discovery is always under Orpheus' patronage, so to speak; something that the good poets have always known.

The rest of *The Orphic Voice* concentrates on developing the implications of these statements. The development takes the form of examining the achievements and commitments of eighteen persons, from the English Renaissance to our own day, who "mention Orpheus in a significant context." These include poets and biologists: Bacon, Shakespeare, Milton, Hooke, Vico, Linnaeus, Swedenborg, Erasmus Darwin, Goethe, Novalis, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Emerson, Renan, Hugo, Mallarmé, Rilke. Indicative of the depth as well as breadth of creative criticism involved here are the titles of Parts II-IV: "Bacon and Shakespeare: Post-logical Thinking," "Erasmus Darwin and Goethe: Linnaean and Ovidian Taxonomy," "Wordsworth and Rilke: Toward a Biology of Thinking."

In several important respects *The Orphic Voice* represents culmination of one line of inquiry in the many-routed trek of "the logic of imagination." With this book, that is, Miss Sewell has brought a whole series of questions full circle; they now enclose a landscape she has already explored. She began, as we saw, by building up a way of thinking about poetry. Here, she identifies what she has built; for poetry is now, in itself and in relation to biology, a way of thinking as such. That is why Miss Sewell must now take up another line. (We are not prescribing, of course, but in a sense predicting.) Miss Sewell herself seems to hint at this culmination. As Part V she gives us "Working Poems for *The Orphic Voice."* She tells us that in the course of thinking the book through, "poems presented themselves from time to time as working instruments in the inquiry." These poems—thirteen in all—appear in the order in which they, and the book, were written. Most of them, for this reviewer, have something of the terrible beauty of Yeats' later work. Here, as example and exemplar, is "Orpheus I":

To sightlessness is love consigned
And if it love, the thinking mind
Consents no less to being blind;

So the musician at the strings,
Withdrawn from all surrounding things
Attends to what the music sings:

Orpheus descends, as he was taught,
Toward his dear remembered thought,
But lost in seeing what he sought.

Intensity surpassing sight,
Shadows of sensing hands invite
The concentration of delight

In all whose thought and love, compact,
Feel with a long and fingering tact
For outline of an artifact:

Orpheus in minds undoes the curse
That splits us into prose or verse;
And, shaping, finds the universe.

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COMMENTARY
THE NEW SPIRIT

NOT long ago a writer of some eminence noted that the youngsters who are coming along—even the brighter ones in college—seem to have very little sense of history. They don't know or have never heard of so many things. It is as though a big psychological dyke had suddenly thrust itself upward into the intellectual continuity of the age and blotted out the past.

You could say, of course, that there are always fissures which widen between the generations, but a more-than-ordinary discontinuity seems involved. The zig-zags of political alliances since the turn of the century have made any thorough-going knowledge of history unpalatable, if not slightly indecent, and the present frozen state of political philosophy—due to the cold war—gives a sympathetic account of the revolutionary movement of the past the flavor of dangerous heresy.

But these are only accidents of the psychological environment. The young men and women of our time have other qualities which set them off from their forebears. Many of them are astonishingly intuitive in their judgments, less reliant on authority of any sort, and simply unimpressed by the heavy intellectual arguments which marshal data and draw weighty conclusions. We say that people ought to "think for themselves," and these young people seem to be doing it. That they do it without the sanctions required by previous generations may be to their credit.

Of course, to have only a sketchy impression of history, to have read but little and to have "hunched" rather than assimilated the meanings of what one has read, can easily produce a frothy superficiality. The virtues of breaking with the past and relying on oneself have their corresponding defects, and these we see all about us. But to leave the old grooves of thinking and to desert authorities which have more or less controlled behavior for many years is bound to cost us *something*. No doubt the Bomb had a great deal to do with this liberation from the past, and emancipations gained because somebody pulled a trigger always leave something to be desired. Yet new days are here, and the generation now in its twenties may show us how different the future can be. The thing that older people ought to remember is that the chief inspiration they have offered the young is an invitation to walk the plank. What reason is there to honor a history which marked its "finest hour" with a mushroom cloud?

Two weeks ago (MANAS, March 28), in discussing (in Frontiers) the question, *Do you think that Man is inherently good without the aid or directives of religion?*, we neglected to add that the correspondent asking the question would be glad to have answers from MANAS readers. Those wishing to cooperate should address their replies to Mr. M. D. Reger, Luz 90, Chapultepec, Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE INDIVIDUAL YOUTH AND RELIGION

IN a report entitled *Teenage Religion*—a lengthy inquiry conducted in respect to British secondary schools—are the following questions and answers:

> *What do you think about the Scripture you have in school? What use do you think it will be, or will not be?*
>
> "Well, when we have Scripture it's like the teacher dictating to the class—I think it should not be so much 'what Christ is' and 'what Christ did' but more of a discussion."
>
> "We used to keep going back over the same things and they'd flog the same old things to death. It was all about the Bible and not about Christianity and its effects. I don't think Christianity should be forced on people. Now we have a one hour lesson a week and that's in the form of a discussion, and I think more people should take notice if it's a discussion. But well, in our form you get three or four people taking part and talking and the rest . . . well, it's never come to any use."
>
> "The ideal place to discuss religion is at a party where everybody is talking and discussing their views."
>
> "Well, at a party you are not afraid to say what you feel, but in a class. . . ."
>
> *Well, is it an interesting subject or not?*
>
> "Yes, it's a very controversial subject. But Scripture lessons are totally boring."

These responses to the questions put by the researcher, Harold Loukes, are certainly typical of both British and American attitudes among thoughtful teenagers, showing that religion is of value only when it can stimulate the imagination. Introducing the 159-page volume, *Teenage Religion,* Mr. Loukes comments:

> Here, more urgently than in mathematics or geography, it is not enough to have acquired a body of "inert ideas," for while the world can be counted on to lend point to mathematics and geography, however arid, it must be expected merely to see no point in religious lumber; and the young man or woman will dispose of his lumber accordingly. Here, more than anywhere, it is essential that the school leaver should have attained a measure of insight, have seen relevance, and have felt the strain of his own short but vivid experience of real life on the framework of his interpretation of its ultimate meaning. A scientific formula he can tuck away until he needs it in later experiment; a religious formula must become experimental, and must be seen to work, before he leaves, for in this field, he will find men working with other formulae, which in their way, still work too, but may work for evil.

A major theme in Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces* suggests that ancient religion reveals the need for progressive initiations of the spirit. If, today, there is no feeling of this need, religious symbolism is clearly of little significance. Mr. Campbell's "hero" is the man who had accepted tribal beliefs in early youth, but felt an inner compulsion to move beyond them towards some new symbol, or at least to a reconstruction of the old; and thus would religion and presumably society improve. Piaget notes that today children move from an attitude of unquestioning acceptance towards a sort of "autonomy" at earlier and earlier ages, but the child who reaches the autonomous stage needs, if not rules, at least something of the heroic tradition. And where is one to find the heroic image in our time?

We have no familiar answer to this question. But we do find quizzical passages in Walter Van Tilburg Clark's story, *The Watchful Gods,* indicating something of the impoverishment of a culture which is without tales of heroes and gods. In this story, the young aspirant who yearns for mystic realization is but twelve years old. He has been exposed to conventional Protestant instruction in religion, but in his favor is the opportunity to wander through the lonely canyons of a remote California seashore, a region suggestive of both the darkest and the brightest things:

> If compelled to discuss God, Buck would have spoken in the standard Protestant-go-to-Sunday-school terms used in his presence by adults who also wished to veil reservations. If Buck had been able to

explain really what he felt, he must have confessed that for him the Jehova of the Old Testament and the God of Jesus were two quite different head Gods. He must also have confessed that the Jehova of the Old Testament was not by any means always the same Jehova, or that, if he was, He was dangerously and incalculably whimsical. Certainly there was not at all the same intention operating in the deity which chose, simply because they were devoted to Him, a ribald, drunken, fleshy outfit like Noah and his family, to save the creatures of the world, and in the deity which quietly and gently walked with the good Ruth at sunset, and put her life all in order again. It was still a different God, for that matter, or God in a very different mood, Who amused Himself by giving Adam his beloved companion Eve, and then, just when everything should have been happiest, doomed them with the smiling little apple trick as if their tranquil drama bored Him. No, when you came right down to it, the Jehovas of the Old Testament seemed almost as many and as various as their worshippers.

Even so, Buck found the activities of the Old Testament, dark and uncertain though they were, much more convincing than those of the New Testament, which stirred in him only an exalted and insubstantial urge to be pure, an urge which could be induced, actually, more quickly and more completely just by touching the little, black book and thinking about it in a vague and general way, than by reading in it. Indeed, this hunger for Godliness, which arose much more vigorously when he read one of the stories in his *Book of Saints and Friendly Beasts*, and lasted longer afterwards, too, was often lost when he really tried to read in the New Testament. It was so hard to believe some of the things that happened in it and so hard to understand much that was said, that the willing hopeful awe with which he usually opened the book, the eagerness of one in great need of an answer, was almost always transformed, after a page or two, into a discouraging perplexity and wish to escape. The god of the Old Testament, jealous, capricious, frequently angry and totally selfish, existed . . . somehow wholly believable, if not admirable. The God of the New Testament, on the contrary, became real only in the moments of ecstasy which arose from the union of the small, glad spirits of the outside world. He could not, therefore, be remembered and thought about. He had simply to be celebrated, as with trumpets and harps and gay, unquenchable dancing, during the brief time of His presence. The best that could be done beyond that was to keep the moments themselves, more in the flesh and the feelings than in the mind, as tokens of the one truly desirable state of the self, a state light as air, warm and single as sunlight, clean as a naked swim in the sea. And since even this representation of the bright god could not be long sustained, the dark god had a considerable advantage in their struggle for Buck's soul.

Well, we had an irresistible compassion to work these paragraphs in somewhere. They are, we think, a good deal more than clever writing and perhaps bring us close to the psychic roots of the problem of conventional religion as so many children encounter it.

FRONTIERS

Psychological Ecology

SEVERAL weeks ago, astrologers were predicting far-reaching disaster on the basis of an extraordinary conjunction of planets last February. So far as we know, nothing much happened, and we suspect that predictions of every sort are likely to be confounded, these days, since the principles of causality must themselves be confused by man's projections into space, as well as by the crazy-go-round of political propaganda! It's hard to tell whether we are preparing to take leave of the world, or whether it is simply a matter of blowing the familiar world away from ourselves. Yet, if one can peer through the traffic patterns of missiles, rockets and satellites, there are still a great number of human beings who want, as they have always wanted, opportunity for a bit of productive labor and a peaceful place in the sun—and these people seem to sense that what is wrong with our relation to nature is a misunderstanding of both physical and psychological ecology.

If there is any quality in humanity supremely worth preservation it is the sense of humor, for humor, inevitably at this juncture tinged with irony, is one of the strongest remaining preservative forces. The following passage from John Pairman Brown's *The Displaced Person's Almanac* (Beacon Press, 1962) annotates the sort of over-all "alienation" which seems likely to become characteristic in our time:

> It's all our fault; and we haven't yet learned (Anselm says) the seriousness of sin. Nobody knows this better than us; and still we're pagan enough to desire, not merely a pure heart, but a little patch of roentgen-free soil where the beach-plum bears its bitterest fruit, and the great waves, as in Homer's time, roll themselves onto the land, where a man might come to terms with the Scorpion-sting of death. We won't readily dispense with the wild rose, moving in cover of the salt fog to the places our mower can't get at, somewhere between the town and the wilderness. Our wants are few and easily supplied; is it unreasonable if we ask the rulers of this darkness to leave us so much?

Mr. Brown's particular brand of irony is capped on the last page of his book by a "night letter" received from his wife while publicity about moon bombardment was at fever pitch. When Mr. Brown was absent from the United States on a teaching assignment at the University of Beirut, Sophie Brown let herself go in a way that expresses a good deal for a great many persons:

> PLEASE DONT LET THEM SEND ANY MORE ROCKETS MOON STOP WHO GAVE THEM PERMISSION ANYWAY QUESTION MARK WOULD HAVE CABLED EARLIER IF HAD REALIZED MEN WERE SERIOUS ABOUT THIS STOP . . . PARAGRAPH DID IT EVER CROSS YOUR MIND STUPID THAT IF YOU SPOIL THE FULL MOON YOU CANT HAVE EASTER ANY MORE AND THEN WHAT WOULD BECOME OF YOUR DUMB OLD CHURCH QUESTION MARK DONT SAY THEY COULDNT SPOIL THE MOON COMMA NO I MEAN SEMICOLON THEY'VE BEEN ABLE TO SPOIL EVERYTHING ELSE WITHOUT HALF TRYING STOP AND ANOTHER THING ITS ONLY THE TIDES THAT CLEAN UP ALL THAT JUNK YOU DUMP ON THE EDGES OF YOUR CONTINENTS JUST LIKE JOHN KEATS SAYS AND IT WOULD GET VERY SMELLY WITHOUT THEM STOP BESIDES NOT TO GET PERSONAL BUT JUST AS A MATTER OF FACT THAT OLDFASHIONED MOON REGULATES US TOO AND IF YOU MAKE IT RADIOACTIVE OR START IT SPINNING WRONG OR SET UP ROCKET BASES ON IT I CANT ANSWER FOR THE CONSEQUENCES AND THEN YOU REALLY WOULD BE IN A FIX STOP DONT COUNT ON MONKEYS TO FIGHT YOUR WARS EITHER STOP I AM VERY UNDERLINED ANNOYED ABOUT THIS AND MY MONEY IS RUNNING OUT STOP PLEASE SILLIES CANT I HAVE SOMETHING THAT JUST BELONGS TO ME HUH WITHOUT YOU ALL THE TIME MESSING IT UP STOP I REALLY MEAN IT STOP STOP STOP PS REMIND READERS OCCASIONALLY FALLOUT ALSO STOP IN DISTRESS
>
> SOPHIE

True, there are no people on the moon yet—so far as we know. But the psychological drives which came into focus on the race for the moon are similar enough to those which make for war to

bear inspection. The point is, do we know any more about what we are doing when we send rockets into space—or propaganda missiles around the globe—than we do when we launch projectiles at a presumably recognizable enemy? In all this there is both comedy and a prescience of tragedy.

For something to go with Sophie Brown's night letter, we borrow from a New York *Herald Tribune* column by Harriet Morrison (Dec. 15, 1961) which reports an unusual "show" at the Museum of Modern Art auditorium in New York City. George Nelson, an architect-designer with a burning contempt for American taste in design, brought a robot to the platform to show, as through the robot's eyes, what the aesthetics of contemporary Americans are like:

> A bright green robot was the final irony of what turned out to be an hour-and-a-half stinging indictment, not without humor, of America's man-made environment. The program consisted of a showing of hundreds of colored slides of towns across the U.S., accompanied by sound effects that included patriotic songs, popular jazz and typical radio commercials in various towns, emphasizing local speech.
>
> Main Streets across the U.S. flashed on the triple screen. There were slides of suburban developments, of parking lots, street signs, litter baskets, store fronts.
>
> These were actual photographs and the sum total presented a disturbing picture of dull monotony and mediocrity in America's man-made landscape. Slides produced occasional titters, uneasy laughter and expressions of compassion and concern on the faces of members of the audience.
>
> What is happening to America? Mr. Nelson answered, with his typically dry wit, that our industrialized society has succeeded in building beauty in impersonal situations such as super highways, power relay stations and computors, but has failed not only miserably but frighteningly in situations involving people, such as the design of cars, houses or ball point pens. "The Seagrams building is only beautiful, when empty," he said. "People ruin the design."
>
> Winding up his lecture, Mr. Nelson said in a mood that was both serious and kidding, plaintive and despairing, that today's industrial designers have eliminated people. With that he disappeared and was replaced by the bright green robot who carried on in a mechanical voice. It announced that people cannot design for people but our society does have a clear symbol as significant in this century as pyramids, Parthenon, and cathedrals were in past centuries. "Our symbol," intoned the robot, "is junk."
>
> There followed a breath-taking movie called "Elegy in a Junk Yard." The photography was impressive and spellbinding with its beauty of pattern in rusty parts of automobiles. The design of broken bits of auto parts photographed in actual junk yards seemed more impressive than some modern sculpture and paintings made from "junk." The final scene showed a rusty bit of metal buried under water.