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THE "WHY" FOR EXISTENCE

WE owe to Erich Fromm the conception of the "therapeutic leap," which he first developed in an article, "Man Is Not a Thing," contributed to the *Saturday Review* in 1957. Essentially, the idea is that the person who is troubled by a psychological ill must sooner or later take his recovery into his own hands. He has to decide to get well, and to act upon his decision. Someone else—a therapist or a good friend—may help him to reach the point of decision, but he must leap for himself.

This is apparently a law of psychological health, similar to the rule which applies in all actual learning. The kinds of things which can be learned through various conditioning processes—by exposure, and without deliberated effort, that is—are never decisive for growth in understanding, for which creative mental activity is necessary. Other people can perform many facilitating services for us, such as improving the tools in common use for work to be done. They may even dramatize wonderful acts of decision by men of the past, providing through literature a wide acquaintance with the classical confrontations of human life, thus enriching the vocabulary of reflection about decision, but the saving act, or the leap of growth, has to be initiated and carried through by the individual.

What more can be said about this crucial inner reality? Not much, apparently. Few similarly indisputable facts of experience have so little theoretical explanation or support. Theories—the kind of theories we are familiar with—are made up of decompositions into cause and effect, and the tendency of theories of human behavior is to turn a man's life into a series of interrelated effects in a causal chain, as though *he* could have no part in what he does. Analytic method, which developed out of the study of "things," has no means of recognizing primary or "uncaused" causes. If you say that a man's life is somehow a mix of recognizable and unrecognizable causes, then study of his behavior seems hopelessly blurred by incommensurable factors. For how will you distinguish between action which is a response to a definable stimulus and action which results because the *man* is the cause? So the claim that man is himself a cause has long been regarded as anti-scientific. If you make the claim, there seems hardly anything further to say. If you say more, you speak in the terms of art, or begin to give science new meanings.

Well, saying this much at least helps us to understand why the therapeutic leap—the revolutionary act of self-determination—is simply an empirical fact of human life in consciousness, not supported or framed by explanatory theory. As a fact it is the inevitable Waterloo of every theory which attempts to explain it away. It is a fact well known to men who, for some equally obscure reason, are convinced that they have in themselves the power to shape their own lives—not arbitrarily, but in fulfillment of an unfolding sense of purpose, even a destiny, which is also a strain of their being. And it becomes an unavoidable fact to men who give their lives to the hidden and unsung heroism shown by some of the victims of mental illness, who find in themselves the resources to get well.

What do they struggle against? The opposition has had a vast variety of definitions, and doubtless does in fact have many grades. But the barrier is always to true self-determination. The Prodigal Son had to struggle against a wide range of distractions before he could rise up and return to his father's house. In modern times, the struggle is more commonly thought of as being against the trap of belief-systems. The renaissance of thought represented by Emerson and Alcott and the other Transcendentalists was

accomplished by a painful, soul-searching liberation from the logic of John Calvin. Today the struggle, as seen by Erich Fromm, is against the mechanistic logic of scientism and all its encircling technological demonstrations and persuasions. Toward the end of his *Saturday Review* article, he says:

> . . . modern man experiences himself as a *thing*, an embodiment of energies to be invested on the market. He experiences his fellow man as a thing to be used for profitable exchange. Contemporary psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis are involved in this universal process of alienation. The patient is considered a thing, the sum of many parts. Some of these parts are defective and need to be "fixed," like the parts of an automobile. There is a defect here and a defect there, called symptoms. The psychiatrist considers it his function to fix them. He does not look at the patient as a complete totality.

So the patient, if he is to stop being a patient, must somehow emancipate himself from all this cultural deception To be well, he must recover from his personal ill, and also from popular conceptions of health. This seems to call for a brand of independent resolve as difficult for the "normal" members of society as it is for the disturbed.

The impoverishment of theory in relation to such necessities is no doubt responsible for the fact that what little has been written along these lines, declaring the independent potentialities of human beings, has often arisen out of experience of extreme situations. We hardly encounter accounts of what can only be termed "acts of the will," save in reports of men pressed to the limit. It is as though men seldom meet head-on with the issues of authentic human life except through ordeals of terrible intensity. Yet there is evidence that this intensity may be found by means other than the pressures of outward experience. Men who genuinely hunger for truth or knowledge sometimes generate a field of subjective experience where the fires of their own longing burn away all but ultimate options. Circumstances become the servants of such men. No doubt the old lore of the tests of heroes and the trials of initiation are ancient cultural recognitions of the necessity for the self-reliance of the therapeutic leap, but represented in a context of health and growth rather than pathology.

What actually happens when a man takes a therapeutic leap? Perhaps we can say simply that at last he embraces the reality that he is himself an effective *cause.* He can't change the constitution and order of the universe; he can alter very little of the circumstances of his surroundings, and he can't revise the temperaments and habits of the people with whom he must for the time being live. He can only change himself—begin, that is, to retune the feeling-relationship he has with everything and everyone around him. That this is possible is evident from the widely varying uses people make of the same general environment.

He will begin to live, in short, with a new polarity of feeling about himself and his circumstances, and this cannot help but affect his perceptions of others. In *From Death Camp to Existentialism,* Viktor Frankl quotes Nietzsche's words: "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how."* In a situation which could not be changed at all, all that remained to the men in the camps was control over their own feelings and attitudes. Frankl put what he learned from this ordeal into a few words:

> What was really needed was a fundamental change in our attitude toward life. We had to learn ourselves and, furthermore, we had to teach the despairing men, that it did not really matter what we expected from life, but rather what life expected from us. We needed to stop asking about the meaning of life, and instead to think of ourselves as those who were being questioned by life—daily and hourly. Our answer must consist, not in talk and meditation, but in right action and right conduct. Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfill the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual.
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> These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, differ from man to man, and from moment to moment. Thus it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way. Questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements.

> "Life" does not mean something vague, but something real and concrete, just as life's tasks are also very real and concrete. They form man's destiny, which is different and unique for each individual. No man and no destiny can be compared with any other man or any other destiny.

Dr. Frankl says that it is impossible to define life's meaning in a general way, but it seems as reasonable to think that it is impossible to define it in any other way. He defined it here in a general way. The individual *gives* life its meaning. This was also the conclusion Tolstoy came to, during his own self-created ordeal, and recorded in his *Confession:* the meaning is what a man contributes to life. The same idea comes out clearly a little later in Frankl's book, when he speaks of two cases of would-be suicide in the camp:

> Both men had talked of their intentions to commit suicide. Both used the typical argument—they had nothing more to expect from life. In both cases it was a question of getting them to realize that life was still expecting something from them; something in the future was expected of them. We found, in fact, that for the one it was his child whom he adored and who was waiting for him in a foreign country. For the other it was a thing, not a person. This man was a scientist and had written a series of books which still needed to be finished. His work could not be done by anyone else, any more than another person could ever take the place of the father in his child's affections.
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> This uniqueness and singleness which distinguishes each individual and gives a meaning to his existence has a bearing on creative work as much as it does on human love. When the impossibility of replacing a person is realized, it allows the responsibility which a man has for his existence and its continuance to appear in all its magnitude. A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the "why" for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any "how."

The task Dr. Frankl pursued in writing this book is not obscure. He evolved out of the immediate experience of consciousness a theory—a metaphysic, if you will—of meaning in human life. He is saying here that these are the laws of nature, of human nature. He doesn't use a high rhetoric, but the language of ordinary discourse, yet the nobility native to these conceptions shines through. In the depths of a designed degradation of human kind, he saw the Promethean aspect of the human enterprise. He saw that the meaning of the enterprise doesn't change with circumstances, has not its quality from circumstances, but remains constant through the fulfillment of purpose. It is out of the furrow plowed in experience by that purpose that comes the rich harvest of effects of the man who lives as a cause. The purpose, if strong enough, can create fertility in the most barren soil. There is the power of a transforming alchemy in high human purpose, consistently pursued, which generates meaning. Frankl's book is sufficient evidence of this. Such a man carries the symmetries of meaning around with him. Others feel his purpose as a warmth and inspiration.

How would anyone "prove" all this? This question requires inspection of the order of evidence that would bear on such matters. The evidence could hardly consist of "things," but would have to be sought in the field phenomena of the lives of men, to be known only at second-hand, in history and biography. The proof, in any event, would lie in a process of being and becoming, not in logical demonstrations. There is, however, a language for speaking of these things—referred to by Dr. Maslow as the Blanguage, "the language of poets, of mystics, of seers, of profoundly religious men, of men who live at the Platonicidea level or at the Spinozistic level, under the aspect of eternity." This is not commonly thought of as the language in which "proofs" are offered.

It is desirable, at this point, to distinguish between kinds of knowledge. There is knowledge of things—a knowledge built up by description, analysis and counting. It is knowledge of objects external to ourselves, with which we are able to do a great many things. The proofs we are

familiar with relate to the manipulation of these objects, which have obvious importance to the physical aspect of our lives. Another kind of knowledge relates to the quality and meaning of our lives. This knowledge is not acquired by the same means that we gain knowledge about things. The properties of selves are different from the properties of things. But, as we suggested earlier, we are almost entirely lacking in theory about the properties of selves—which would be knowledge of ourselves as causing or meaning-generating beings. The test of all theory about selves is not in logic or in demonstrations similar to what we can do with things, but in extending the radius of our comprehension of meaning. Such learning is slow, arduous, and often painful. Its rewards are not obvious. They are like the view obtained by reaching a height—it does not exist until you make the climb. They are not transferable.

Ideas along these lines are gradually becoming part of the currency of modern thought. The men who express these views are gradually acquiring an audience, perhaps because the conditions of the modern world now seem to be shaping the ugly confinements and threat of an extreme situation. The very urgency of these observed tendencies is spurring an increasing number to look upon the world and the tasks it represents as a great field for the realization of meaning. And since it is difficult to view the world in this light without getting some deepening ideas about the world itself, there is an inclination to think about the planet, and even the solar system, as a vast continuum of potential meaning. Nature becomes a living collaborator in this new view. So, more and more, as philosophic ideas of the self gain currency, there is a growing feeling of responsibility in thought about man's relations with the world. Occasionally vigorous objection is voiced to purely man-centered ethical principles. The rights of other forms of life are acquiring defenders.

A lyrical pantheism now and then has spontaneous expression and finds sympathetic ears. What larger becoming may we share with the whole world? it is asked. And could there possibly be, one wonders, a therapeutic leap by the human race, in behalf of the brotherhood of life? Or, more modestly, could human communities leap to a natural order that is on the side of life?

The evidence, if one looks around at present collective patterns, seems very much in the other direction. Yet if the flowering of individual resolve is evoked by extreme situations, it may not be impossible that men in the mass, or at any rate in significant groups, will seriously contemplate the idea of a change in the polarity of their common undertakings.

If there is anything at all to be learned from men like Dr. Fromm, Dr. Frankl, and Dr. Maslow, it is that human beings ought never to be measured or defined by their existing achievements or habits, but by their potentialities. The meaning of a man lies in his capacity to become.

The "thing" methods of definition have resulted in some very bad habits for thinking about human beings. Things remain constant. That's why we are able to formulate dependable scientific laws which make possible the extraordinary constructions of modern technology. The nature of a thing is grasped by a detailed account of its unchanging attributes, its properties, affinities, etc. The nature of a man is grasped through recognition of his unborn powers, the possibilities which make him a man. "Thing" science must learn to avoid all judgments concerning the most distinctive qualities of man. Dr. Fromm's 1957 statement is epoch-making:

> The question is: *To which extent is psychology* (the knowledge of others and of myself) *possible?* What limitations exist to such knowledge? . . . The endeavor to understand man by thought is called psychology, "the knowledge of the soul." However, complete rational knowledge is possible only of *things.* Things can be dissected without being destroyed, they can be manipulated without damage to their nature; they can be reproduced. *Man is not a*

> *thing*. . . . Psychology can show us what man is *not*. It cannot tell us what man, each one of us, *is*. The soul of man, the unique core of each individual can never be grasped and described adequately. It can be "known" only inasmuch as it is not misconceived. The legitimate aim of psychology, as far as ultimate knowledge is concerned, is the *negative*, the removal of distortions and illusions not the *positive*, full, and complete knowledge of a human being.

Getting rid of the spurious certainties of "thing" definitions was no doubt one of the great advances of twentieth-century psychology. And this statement by Dr. Fromm has incidentally a rather wonderful "fit" with the Socratic insight that the worst sort of ignorance is "double ignorance," which results from unquestioning acceptance of bad or false explanations.

Meanwhile, Dr. Maslow's lifelong concentration of the psycho-dynamics of human excellence and even greatness is a significant step toward obtaining workable theories concerning man's life as a *causing* being. The importance of a body of thought on this subject lies in the fact that it is very difficult to set out to live a useful, constructive life, by deliberation and design, unless you believe that this is a real possibility. Moreover the belief itself, taken as a working hypothesis, has an upgrading effect on the way other people are regarded. There is a natural tendency to see them in terms of *their* potentialities, instead of making casual status quo estimates. The judgmental mood declines and the habit of regarding others in their "thing" or utility aspect comes under control. The field of this kind of disciplined thinking about human potentiality develops its own natural "lines of force" and begins to exercise an influence which affects others for good. People who are understood are always benefited. What else is authentic human culture but a great overlapping of many such "fields," belonging to persons of vision, ability, and humane intent, sometimes attaining dimensions and strength which make it the quite tangible opposite of what has long been known as the mob spirit and the insanity of crowds? Great schools and centers of education should all be sources of such influence, and would become so through teaching and practice illuminated by conceptions of the high potentialities of man.

REVIEW
PROBLEMS OF TRUST

THAT a change of polar significance is affecting the thought of the age there can hardly be any doubt. It amounts to growing recognition that what a man as subject says about himself, and about the idea of the self, may have a self-validating character. While this contention is not new, and attempts to date the change could easily be disputed, it is not difficult, on the other hand, to point to key works which have done much to restore the dignity of serious introspective inquiry. Involved are the integrities and disciplines belonging naturally to the study of man considered as in some sense an independent reality—as, that is, a reality which must be understood in terms of its own distinctive qualities and powers, and only secondarily through definition of the surrounding circumstances and other environmental factors.

First, perhaps, on the list of such influences should be Alexis Carrel's book, *Man the Unknown*, published in 1935. Seldom referred to today, this volume dramatized the self-limiting myopia of a medical science which neglected the study of human beings, concentrating almost entirely upon disease entities, as though these had more reality than the nature and qualities of the persons who are to be made well. Much of Carrel's work was devoted to illustrating aspects of human potentiality which both the science and the medical practice of that time either denied or ignored. His book became a best-seller and within ten years of its appearance a new branch of medical practice, called psychosomatic medicine, was on the way to recognition. During the same ten-year period, the work of J. B. Rhine at Duke University began to make a serious dent in the façade of assumptions maintained by mechanistic psychology. While the psychologists themselves for the most part ignored Rhine and his demonstrations of extra-sensory perception, workers in the less defensive branches of science could not help but be impressed by the accumulating evidence for a kind of dynamics which had little in common with the known laws of the physical universe.

Again, in the same period, the psychoanalytical movement began to claim the attention of thoughtful men active in the branches of science devoted to human welfare. Henry Murray's paper, "What Should Psychologists Do about Psycho-Analysis?", published in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* for April, 1940, was both a litmus-paper sort of indication of the new temper and a heralding of reorientation in psychological studies of man. Since then the mounting energy of this spirit of inquiry has informed tendencies too numerous to list, although they all seem to have common origins in insistent existential longing, feelings of compassion for the pain of the human condition, and a profound sense that knowledge of man must be more immediate than the behavioral descriptions provided by objectifying scientific method. Brief identification of the main currents in the transformation of thought about man's nature is obtained by mentioning Sartre and Camus, various phenomenologists in philosophy and psychology, pioneer neo-Freudians such as Karen Horney and Erich Fromm, the increasing influence of the Jungians, and the work of Carl Rogers, of Rollo May, and the philosophical psychology of A. H. Maslow.

A useful account of this great trend was contributed to the *Saturday Review* of last Dec. 20 by Herbert Otto, psychologist and educator, in an article, "New Light on the Human Potential." This review of expressions concerning the untapped resources of human beings is dramatic evidence of the change in the focus of thinking. A century ago, Western man was entirely preoccupied with the resources of external nature. The very idea of "potential" then signified only the potential of man's manipulative capacities through the advance of the physical sciences. The excitement of discovery came entirely from breakthroughs in knowledge of natural law, with man simply an observer rather than a subject for

study or investigation. This emphasis has now plainly changed. Man himself, as subject-object of research, provides the excitement. Dr. Otto starts by recalling the opinion of William James that the human being typically functions "at less than 10 per cent of his capacity," going on to review numerous lines of current research into human potentials, sometimes with illustration of prodigious feats by individuals. In one place Dr. Otto discusses the reasons for the low estimates people make of their own abilities. "This," he says, "is traceable to the fact that we are members of a pathology-oriented culture." Continuing, he writes:

> Psychological and psychiatric jargon dealing with emotional dysfunction has become the parlance of the man in the street. In addition, from early childhood in our educational system we learn largely by our mistakes—by having them pointed out to us repeatedly. All this results in early "negative conditioning" and influences our attitude and perception of ourselves and other people. An attitudinal climate has become established which is continually fed and reinforced.
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> As part of this negative conditioning there is the heavy emphasis by communications media on violence in television programs and motion pictures. The current American news format of radio, television, and newspapers—the widely prevalent idea of what constitutes news—results from a narrow, brutalizing concept thirty or forty years behind the times and is inimical to the development of the human potential.

It is hardly necessary to identify the blighting effect of all this on the arts. Degraded ideas of the self and of man generally are widely spread by pathology-oriented thinking, so that themes of human excellence which might leaven and uplift can now find little hospitality. They have been made incredible. It is difficult to read Walt Whitman aloud, today, without feeling that the doors to vision have been closed and barred. Cynicism and depression have become "normal" attitudes, affording no generous spaces for resonating with the harmonious and the heroic in human expression. Perhaps a new psychological health will have to be forged out of the fires of psycho-social failure before affirmative forms of art can be renewed.

Another phase of Dr. Otto's comment on the influence of the mass media has equal importance. He says:

> As a result of the steady diet of violence in the media, an even more fundamental and insidious erosion in man's self-system takes place. The erosion affects what I call the "trust factor." If we have been given a certain amount of affection, love, and understanding in our formative years, we are able to place a certain amount of trust in our fellow man. Trust is one of the most important elements in today's society although we tend to minimize its importance. *We basically trust people.* For example, we place an enormous amount of trust in our fellow man when driving on a freeway or in an express lane. We trust those with whom we are associated to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities. The element of trust is the basic rule in human relations. When we distrust people, they usually sense our attitude and reciprocate in kind.
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> The consistent emphasis in the news on criminal violence burglarizing, and assault makes slow but pervasive inroads into our reservoir of trust. As we hear and read much about the acts of violence and injury men perpetrate upon one another, year after year, with so little emphasis placed on the loving, caring, and humanitarian acts of man, we begin to trust our fellow man less, and we thereby diminish ourselves.

Dr. Otto's emphasis on the erosions caused by the social environment might be matched by inquiry into the psychological factors of our relations with the non-human environment. Can the trust we feel gain an adequate radius, one wonders, if it does not include the feeling Dr. Schweitzer spoke of as "reverence for life"? In an article in the *Saturday Review* for Dec. 2, 1967, Richard L. Means contended that even the ethical ideas of modern man are egocentric—they ignore the value and being of the vast world of nature, which is still regarded as a mere convenience and utility. He suggested that the moral crisis of the present goes far deeper than matters of political power and law, and urban riots and slums. It may be rooted in "American society's almost utter disregard for the value of nature." Again,

speaking on this theme out of years of clinical experience, a contemporary psychiatrist, Harold F. Searles, maintains that the non-human environment "constitutes one of the most basically important ingredients of human psychological experience." He has found that "there is within the human individual a sense of *relatedness to his total environment*, that this relatedness is one of the transcendently important facts of human living, and that if he tries to ignore its importance to himself, he does so at peril to his psychological well-being."

This testimony concerning the wider kinships of man brings to mind certain obscure events connected with the recent achievements of space travel, of which so many men speak with both pride and hope. The "conquest of space"—which seems an eagerly presumptuous expression—is held to signify the high potentialities lying within the scope of applied science and technology. It would be foolish to minimize this great technical triumph, yet one is brought up short and the enthusiasm damped by a little publicized account of one of its incidental costs. The following is from an article by Catherine Roberts, an American microbiologist, in a recent issue of *The Ark*, published in England:

> Before me is an American publication dealing with experimental animals which describes, among other things, some experiments which were carried out by the Northrop Space Laboratories under contract from the United States Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine in Texas. If nothing else, these experiments show how worthless is the claim that anaesthesia is the panacea for the suffering of experimental animals. The purpose of the experiments was to carry out a scientific analysis and evaluation of different types of restraining devices. For this purpose 23 chimpanzees were subjected to impacts which caused minor injury, disability, or death. In addition, some unexpected results occurred, including injury to the animals' faces due to broken and torn-off muzzles, asphyxiation due to the improper placing of the muzzle, and internal hemorrhage. The animals which survived these treatments were kept alive with the help of narcotics, artificial respiration, and oxygen. Each injury was carefully described, and the publication calls some of them "revolting."

One needs no special endowment of sympathy for animal life to share in Dr. Roberts' unqualified condemnation of such practices. This is a sort of violence the mass media do not glory in or even report at all, however much they may contribute to the now fashionable rhetoric concerning man's "ecological" responsibilities. To what extent is this rhetoric called into question simply by the *casual* character of such animal sacrifices? The worthiness of man to have trust from the world of nature may be no artificial question, but one fully as important as considerations of his unknown "creative" resources and the promise of his inner development. What sort of "spiritual" philosophy is possible for a being from whom all other and perhaps lesser forms of intelligence naturally—and with ample justification—take flight?

COMMENTARY
THE INSISTENT QUESTION

IF we take Viktor Frankl at his word—that the "why" of a man's life is what he must find out before he can make it *good*—we are confronted by a difficult dilemma at the social level, since it seems quite apparent from history that borrowed or conventionally believed answers to the "why" questions lead to artificiality and presence, and invite psychological tyranny. People who devise purposes and meanings for the lives of other men become architects of orthodoxy, and crimes of conquest are mere peccadilloes compared to the excesses then committed in the name of bringing men to "truth."

It is no accident that almost the entire moral strength of the scientific movement grew from the refusal of its founders to pretend to answers to the "why" questions. So, for several centuries, men of science have devoted themselves to describing *how* things work, and some of them, perhaps from occupational conditioning, have argued that knowledge about "why" is either nonexistent or unknowable. Neglect of "why" is of course a methodological dogma in science.

This principle may serve in the elaboration of technique, but it is ruinous as a guide to life. The world is now the scene of an anarchic competition of manifestly unworthy purposes which are dressed up in the splendors of advanced technique. So, beset by mounting inner and outer disorders, men are beginning to paraphrase Socrates and say to themselves, "The unexamined aim is not worth pursuing." Dr. Frankl's finding, in short, has daily confirmation in the lives of many human beings.

Yet the dilemma has not been resolved. A *borrowed* answer to the "why" question is still both useless and dangerous to us. This is really the sense behind Frankl's claim that "it is impossible to define the meaning of life in a general way."

What is the study of the meaning of life? It is commonly termed religion and philosophy—matters typically left to specialists. The fault, considered socially, no doubt lies precisely here. Delegating to others the quest represented by philosophy and religion leaves a man without answers of his own to the "why" questions, and he suffers confusion and failure when tested by life. And men who try to impose philosophy and religion on others *produce* confusion and failure. How, then, can there be "teaching" of either philosophy or religion? In the presence of this insistent question, the search for meaning in human life is now being renewed.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
MORE PROBLEMS WITHOUT SOLUTIONS

IT is not uncommon, these days, for teachers to unburden themselves of feelings coming close to desperation when they contrast the circumstances under which they work and what they are required or expected to do, with what they know ought to be done. Some monotony attends these recitations of what is wrong. The shortcomings of the schools are hardly matters of opinion, since the problems have grown so massive and the conditions under which teaching must proceed are so prejudicial to natural learning. One such teacher wrote recently:

> My ecological perspective on education, given the 18,000 people on this campus, makes me feel pretty hopeless sometimes. It tells me that those 18,000 people are all whole entities. That every part of their being is related to and affected by every other part. That if I wish to help them educate themselves—*i.e.*, to grow—then I must concern myself with every part and with the whole. It tells me that I must help them to come to terms with the effects that overcrowding has on them as whole persons. That I must help them create an environment for themselves wherein they can grow by understanding and accepting themselves. It tells me, in short, that I must do all of the things I can to counteract the profound effects which the university's environment is having on them—to try to provide conditions in which they can start opening up, letting the world in and themselves out, caring for themselves and others, and developing all of their bottled up potential. In a university as crowded as this one, everything I know about ecology, the effects of environment on people, and the consequences of packing too many human beings in too small an area tells me that the kind of growth I am talking about simply can't happen here.

Is he painting too dark a picture? Not really. Elsewhere he tells of classes meant to have twenty students which grow to 150. Of small dormitory rooms in which three students must live and sleep. He says:

> Now, given all of these conditions, I find myself trying to "educate" some of those students. The University seriously believes that it can do so via its large lecture classes, and that it can afford to ignore conditions of overcrowding in dorms (among other things). But I know better, because I live with the students. Those overcrowded conditions have some pretty deep effects on the people living in them—*educational* effects on their lives, on their growth as persons. A student sleeping on a floor in a small room with two other people going to physics lectures with 300 other people, is being educated in much more than quantum mechanics. He is learning how to be tense and anxious; how to hide from all the unpleasantness around him; how to shut off the unbearable environment so that he can survive; how to relate superficially and politely to other people because he is one of so incredibly many. These are the things the university is teaching him in the most deep, hard-to-change way. He *is* changing due to the totality of his university environment, but the changes are all toward alienation, self-degradation, and withdrawal from a very hostile environment. In comparison with all that the situation does to him as a person, his memorization of atomic structures for a final exam is pretty paltry stuff.

Well, that's probably enough "evidence." Anyway, it is always-possible to argue that conditions don't really doom people. Youth with spirit can survive far ruder circumstances than these, and do it cheerfully. It is possible to find accounts of the really extraordinary struggles of certain individuals to get an education, telling how, in the end, they came through with flying colors. And so on. Why can't a young man bear sleeping on the floor if his ancestors slept on the prairie? And so on.

Yet the issues seem badly mixed up by this sort of comment. The challenge of a tough environment is different from the ambiguities presented by the "educational" situation this teacher describes. You don't decide to leave pretentious, inadequate mediocrity without vigorous criticism simply because it can be transcended by heroic effort. It might also be pointed out that there is an extreme paucity of heroic models, these days. And, further, that a youth with the ingredients of latent heroism in him might not be able to make himself even register in one of those schools. What then will he *do*? You can leave that to him, since he will find his own way to ripen his life.

This is of course no "solution," yet it may be a fact deserving recognition. We have a tendency, when contemplating such widespread disasters, to

demand massive, total remedies. Nothing less, we say to ourselves, will be good enough. Yet this may be completely in error. Thinking "massively" about education created those great big schools in the first place. It was simply assumed that big schools would bring higher education to *everybody*. Today the judgment is that these well-intentioned plans are generating stress and anguish and frustration. The men trying to carry them out say that they don't really work.

When you try to think about what *would* work—of plans which *have* worked—you find yourself recalling non-statistical oddities, wonderful individual achievements. You remember enterprises that depended upon imagination and incredible resourcefulness—qualities which seldom survive vastly expanded programs which are hitched up to a production line with a "massive" educational quota. Perhaps we should say to ourselves, quite simply, that the remedy for massive ills in education is never massive and cannot be. The massiveness is itself the chief contributing factor in the breakdown and failure. Besides, so many artificial side-issues are created by problems which are intrinsic to the production-line plan of education that general disillusionment may be indispensable to *any* change for the better.

Musing about the hard lives of these students, we began to think of other difficult situations and how the obstacles to education were, in one case, not eliminated, but made to matter less. In the fall of 1898, an aging Scot—a man in those days known as an "itinerant scholar"—talked to a working-class audience at Cooper Union in New York. His subject was the importance of a liberal education as a "preparation for life." When the speaker was done a young man in the audience put up his hand. "How can people like us," he asked, "who work nine or ten tours and sometimes more a day, who come home tired, who have few books and no one to guide or instruct us, obtain a liberal education?"

The scholar, whose name was Thomas Davidson, replied:

> That is just the chief educational problem which the nineteenth century hands over to the twentieth. Of course, you do not expect me to solve it. But one thing I can do for you, of a practical sort. I cannot procure for you shorter hours, or make you less tired at night. I cannot supply you with home conveniences or with books; but one thing I can and will do if you care to have me. If you will organize a club of people who are really in earnest and who will work with all their might, I will devote one evening a week to it.

What began as a once-a-week night class grew before long into Breadwinner's College, located in the lower East Side of New York City. It offered courses in English, mathematics, philosophy, literature, and science. It lasted only eight years, but some of the most distinguished Americans of the first half of the twentieth century began their higher learning at Breadwinner's College. One of the young men so helped was Morris Cohen, who became a leading philosopher and teacher of philosophy. The quality of Cohen's thought is plain from any of his books, the best of which, perhaps, is *Reason and Nature.* Another graduate, Louis I. Dublin, wound up as vice president of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and described (in the *American Scholar* for the Spring of 1948) what Thomas Davidson did for him and other young men without money in New York, starting in 1898.

But that was different! Well, yes and no. The circumstances were different. The obstacles were psychologically different, and the way goals were then defined may have been different. Yet men like Davidson are not different, and young people who want to learn, and who are able to distinguish between authentic learning and academic union cards are becoming more numerous every day. These are the people—the *only* people who can accomplish the needed changes in higher education.

Such changes are certainly possible for those determined to make them. Ingenuity, search, and strenuous effort are naturally involved. But these factors have always been involved where genuine education takes place, and always will be. Finding ways to put the contemporary Davidsons together with the young men and young women who want learning for its own sake—that would be a great contribution to present and future education.

FRONTIERS

The Law of Schism

WHAT is it about the present that makes it seem different from other difficult and confusing times? Various socio-historical reasons might be given, and are being given, but the feeling that the present is becoming increasingly *unbearable*—with evidence of this feeling appearing at many levels of society—seems due mainly to a more sensitive moral awareness. Central in evoking this feeling, it must be said, is the indefensible horror of the Vietnam War, which irrationally goes on and on, in alienating contradiction to both the technological and the moral pretensions of American society. Joining with and becoming part of this deep disturbance is the fact that other insistent problems of the age are not being solved, but are instead increasing in number and offensiveness; and that existing authority, no matter how boastfully armed with expertise, gives the people less and less reason to suppose that they *can* be solved. These various sickening realizations are coming home, moreover, at a time when both skill and candor in the delineation of problems are at their height, and when unfulfilled political promises made in the past are generating an indignation amounting to fury in some segments of the population. Politicians who have used scape-goating techniques to ride to power now find the psychology of blame a whirlwind of destructive energy which anyone with a grievance can easily exploit, and the process of what used to be called "dialogue" has become a din of condemnation. The unhappy "man in the street," if he listens to all these charges of guilt and betrayal, is likely to suspect the presence of enemies around every corner.

A point is reached in the increase of awareness of such disorders when it becomes natural to think that all the things that are wrong are connected up. War, pollution, and social injustice are declared to be mutually consistent products of the highly organized technocratic state. The web of ills is then made to justify the demand for "total" change or revolution; but this, in turn, has the effect of reducing the number of rebels to a very small but very noisy minority, which succeeds mainly in hardening a great many other people in self-justifying postures, and a totally unimaginative mediocrity becomes public policy because of the madness at the extremes. It is then that various kinds of withdrawals—"inner emigrations"—take place. Nihilist frivolity springs up little by little to fill the cultural vacuum and the intoxications of emotional abandon or "letting go" compete on a market shrouded by ill-concealed despair.

How can one make some sense out of such a time? Must the hysterias arising from wild expectations ungrounded in the natural processes of reconstruction or growth simply exhaust themselves before very many human beings can join to work together toward realizeable ends?

"How," asks a contributor to the January *Liberation*, "can we really create a humanistic society in our country when we hate most of its inhabitants?" And Paul Goodman, speaking of the self-reliant society of skillful anarchists which he champions, said recently: "In order to be an anarchist, you have to be competent in the crafts, in the professions, and you also have to have trust in other human beings. Once you begin to call another guy a pig, then you can't be an anarchist any more."

Yet still another side of the picture cannot be ignored. The conventional approach to "ethics" is to "make a survey" and then to work up some kind of "cost-benefit" comparison to show how the moral tendencies of the times, whatever their vagary and indecision, can be quantified and somehow served. As Theodore Roszak exclaimed in a review of several works in praise of the "systems" attack on social issues (*Nation*, Sept. 1, 1969):

> How does one drive it home to such academic cold fish that their project, serviceable as it is for purposes of technocratic consolidation, is misconceived *ab initio*? As Socrates knew 2,500

> years ago, to enter the agora simply to survey the so-called values of a befuddled public is the betrayal of philosophy. The values of men are not to be measured or predicted but to be honestly debated, affirmed and deeply lived, so that we may educate one another by mutual example. It is *this* that we owe one another as fellow citizens. But I doubt that this distinction between the academic and the irreducibly existential would prove persuasive. Expertise, being committed to that self-congratulatory form of alienation called "objectivity," makes no allowance for the person. It discounts the experimental deeps and attends to the behavioral surface.

Is there, one wonders, enough strength in the awakening moral sense of the times to penetrate "the behavioral surface" and to recognize the human being inside? It sometimes seems worse to regard human beings simply as "objects" than it is to speak of them as "pigs." The offense in any case is deep because it is committed in the name of knowledge, while epithets are used by men in the grip of emotion. Yet both the revolutionary and "academic" solutions rest on judgments of men as they are, or seem to be, and lack confidence in the capacities of human beings to be moved to change by their own moral perceptions.

The chief objection to waiting on moral perceptions is that they come too slowly and submit to no easy management by planners. They emerge unpredictably and respond apparently at random—indeed, the patience of a Socrates is required for reliance on them. Yet regimenting plans for an imposed moral order soon drive men into protective citadels of conflicting claims, and then the fractionating effect of the law of schism swings into full play. Enemies multiply by geometrical progression from insistent demands for an enforced righteousness that has not gained the sanction of the moral sense.

Is there a way of thinking about these things which does not invoke the law of schism and yet is more than soft-headed wishing? It is certainly not soft-headed to recognize that no humanistic society can be born by hating most of the people who will make its population. And if, in order to help people, it is necessary to trust them, this means at least having confidence in the potentialities of their moral feeling and perceptions. How, then, can these realities be fitted in with the realities that are back of the disturbances throughout the country, today? Is there another sort of "objectivity" which will admit the folly of expecting to improve human beings by treating them as "objects," or by calling them names?

It was some kind of high impartiality of the human spirit which made Socrates insist in the *Gorgias* that it is better to suffer than to do wrong. Could we say that through his study and observation the growth-processes of humans had been outlined with a second-degree objectivity for Plato, so that he felt able to declare that men learn only when they are not compelled or punished, but when they are invited, and when the spirit of this sort of learning is spread by those who are teachers and leaders?

Much of the moral awareness of the times may waste by diversion into futile attempts at coercion unless morality is seen to have disciplines and laws of its own.