VOLUME XXIII, NO. 36
SEPTEMBER 9, 1970

TOWARD A GLOBAL CANON

IT may never be possible to form a definition of "human" to which all humans will consent. If animals were to be invited by proxy to the debate, which might be only fair if it is they who are to be downgraded in the act, the exercise could lead to some lively dialogue. One can imagine them, a vast congregation of sentient creatures—Orpheus perhaps for spokesman—arguing warmly with Henry Anderson a point in his series, "The Nature of Human Nature (MANAS, April, 1970): for however unintelligible to them the capacity for "Symbolic Interaction" might appear as a criterion of human-ness, any like claim in regard to "Sympathetic Interaction" might be rejected out of hand.*

Yet in an age newly awakened to the importance of healthy eco-systems the investigation of human claims to uniqueness, in the sense of apartness—*apartheid*—remains a serious one. It is seldom nature, with her instinctive paraphernalia intact, that presents an ecological problem. It is highly conscious, obsessively anthropocentric man. How can *he,* with instincts dwindled virtually, some say, to two—self-preservation and sex—relate to any biosphere until he has redefined and discovered a viable bearing within it?

From the lunatic fringe, to which establishments seem hardly immune, comes one proud, contemporary answer: that he may not have to; that, having overpopulated and contaminated his own, he is on his way to other spheres. This fantasy of the few has already evoked high daring, titanic intellectual and engineering skills, and a vast outlay of the public's funds. No guarantee goes with it that such qualities and commodities can be put to saner, if any, use in the environments to be explored. The wit of a UFO enthusiast has suggested the results of one such planetary failure "flap" all about us. Such programs, like the dreams of *avant-garde* biologists, may be typically Faustian, but they are not answers.

Some will contend that the problem is here wrongly stated. Man, although mammalian, is more than a simple vertebrate. He has a third instinct, the religious: and he has his intellect. There may be little harm in his attempts at self-definition, but where is his obligation to include himself in a natural order from which he has been emancipated both by divine decree and by his own technological inventiveness?

The second half of this claim might merit consideration rather than platitudes were technology administered by philosopher-kings. But technology is no more than the sophistication of mechanical aspects already eminent in nature. Being essentially amoral and ambidextrous, what its right hand has built its left can destroy, only more quickly and after a brief reign of optimism it is becoming apparent that neither hand can thwart the reprisals of nature herself when she is placed at bay.

If this hope of immunity is founded on shifting sand, what can be said of the other, the divine concession?

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* Some casual experiments with a polygraph machine and a *saintpaulia* which led to the naming of the "Backster Effect' and to subsequent research in "primary perception," so called, seem to throw a bizarre and dramatic light on hidden sensitivities in nature. They suggest that some principle akin to "Sympathetic Interaction" may have to be conceded even m interrelationships between plant and animal life.

In the tradition of Paracelsus, a psychiatrist, Jule Eisenbud M.D., has speculated upon this principle, in connection with a probable "psi" factor as being radical to all cosmological processes. (In *The World of Ted Serios* Morrow, 1967, and in miscellaneous essays.)

In his essay, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," published in 1967, Dr. Lynn White Jr. examined this question from the perspective of a historian. According to Dr. White, who is director of Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies at the University of California, it was the "enthusiasm" and the "rage" his study provoked that prompted him to include it in a book of eleven essays, *Machina Ex Deo* (MIT Press, 1969).

There can hardly be any doubt that the more emotional repercussions arose from the author's basic proposition, long entertained perhaps by polite pagans, that "our [Western] science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes towards man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians."

No one, least of all the aspiring Faustian, likes to be reminded that some cardinal ingredients of his faith may have affected the biosphere catastrophically: or that many a scientist who contributed to these results was convinced he was only "thinking the thoughts of God after Him."

Yet there were those who cheered Dr. White. Some of these may have been disturbed "churchmen," like himself, who accepted his conclusion as valid even while it forced on them the corollary that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" in the current ecological crisis. Some may have been industrialists and their engineers resentful at being made scapegoats of a cause, not just the most sensational distributors of its effects. No doubt there will have been conservationists and dissenters of various kinds: also admirers of St. Francis of Assisi, Dr. White's (and perhaps Christendom's) favorite heretic. Indeed for him some hope seems to lie in a reformed Christian ethos stamped with a Franciscan regard for sentient creatures.

If the restraints of intuition or conscience were always decisive in human affairs this should be a none too difficult consummation, although it might leave great sectors of the biosphere vulnerable as ever. Quite primitive peoples have achieved something like it. Laurens van der Post relates that when the Kalahari Bushman tracked the hartebeest his attitude, as the arrow flew, was one of prayerful apology towards a beloved fellow-citizen of the *veldt;* and thereafter one of total economy in the use of hide, muscle, bone and entrail. A fruit of animism, such expertise in empathy and conservation might be found difficult to match by the modern Caucasian, especially when it is remembered that amongst his quite recent ancestors were Cape settlers who shot at Bushmen when "other game" was scarce: yet how deplorable if the dead letter of a scripture could be cited as the obstacle.

Again, it is true that millenniums ago a Jewish scribe let it be known that his god had given man dominion over the earth and over everything therein, exhorting him in addition to increase exceedingly. But who in that time could have accepted the gift with much interest or enthusiasm? As Dr. White points out, only in the last three or four centuries, and especially the last three generations in which the marriage of science and technology was consummated, could such licence be pressed to extremes of advantage. He does not remind us that such sanctions were borrowed from an ancient testament in some conflict with a later, although both come bound frequently in one volume. Can you, in all seriousness, love anyone or anything, neighbour or planet, adequately when bound to a wheel of exploitation for most of the week? How strange that it should have taken rising generations, usually perceptive in such matters, till now to discover that the end-product is confusion when not hypocrisy!

In a half-million or so copies of *The Naked Ape* an English zoologist has urged that man is essentially not more than a rather brainy, tool-using, tool-making primate. If this is widely acceptable as a description of *Homo sapiens,* which the book's sales might indicate, hope has a

long road to travel. *Sapiens* for Desmond Morris, the author, must mean sagacious, an adjective which could be applied to animals of many species and, in particular, to a certain tool-using, tool-selecting Galapagos finch. For Morris, Dr. White's title *Homo signifex,* the symbol-maker, must remain subordinate, and the implication that metaphysical ideas affect man's conduct more profoundly than his genetic codes, largely void.

A zoologist's can be a salutary attitude, yet also remind us of a need for humility while itself taking much for granted. It forgets that the judge must have law books at hand, too, the codifications of an ethos, such as it is, otherwise he could not function at all as a *human* judge. And that the toolmaker, if human, is already a self-conscious artisan and perhaps half way to the artist or scientist, priest or philosopher.

In the end we are virtually forced to a definition of man in which self-consciousness, surely the unique factor, is of the essence. Dr. White's "symbol-maker" is one of these.

Yet, is it possible to contrive symbols without first assuming realities for which they stand? Perhaps "man, the assumption-maker" suggests that priority. Both definitions offer the advantage of maneuverability: they imply freedom of choice, whether of assumptions or symbols, without which it might be impossible for men to extricate themselves from untenable positions or for psycho-social evolution to proceed. Will, as an aspect of self-hood, is fundamental here. To the zoologist,* on the other hand, to the *avant-garde* biologist and eugenist in particular, genes have come to assume an illusory priority as determinants of human development. Such scientists deduce from nature's past success in applying genetic techniques that they themselves are clever enough to take over, perhaps to do better.

* Not all zoologists, of course. Some, like Huxley and Alister Hardy, have more ambivalent outlooks.

This surely is an example of an assumption quite as irresponsible as that of the author of Genesis, with its franchise to exploit. Today we are having to study the effects of the latter upon our outer environment. The effects of the former, as Dr. Catherine Roberts has stressed in *The Scientific Conscience,* would be strictly upon the inner, upon the intimate environment of the self. They could arrive in the form of an epitaph. Even Pan, not notably a specialist and with perhaps many more shots in his locker than a biologist dreams of, entered blind alleys—witness the dinosaur and the Irish elk. Nor is there much evidence that the goat-foot god designed a gene for the moral-volitional aspects of character.

We are after viable assumptions and in his quest for them Dr. White remains wary of the hope that more science and technology of themselves can restore equilibriums which science and technology have helped human arrogance and greed to shatter; although obviously much ingenuity and billions of dollars are about to be poured into the correction of current abuses. This is now plain necessity. Time, say ecologists, has nearly run out; so if enough rudiments of ecology as a science are to be learnt, let alone passed on to those whose need may be even more desperate, time must be borrowed.

But a far more basic problem arises in studies such as Dr. White's, founded as they are on the premise that man is the symbol-maker and that the symbols he makes wield subtle powers over his will, over his destiny therefore. It is a problem which might seem to affect professional purveyors of symbolic propaganda, whether politicians, theologians, scientists, artists or simply, most importantly, teachers of children, more directly than others. Yet as these groups have usually a vested interest in the symbolic postulates of the moment, they are the least likely to attend to it. It calls for a ceaseless reviewing, and possibly revising, of our most cherished assumptions in the light of contingencies not apparent when they were accepted. In practice there is little option in

the matter: beneath the threshold of consciousness the process goes on all the time. If too slowly, historically considered, there comes revolution to speed it up.

The only difference at the moment is that the rebel-in-chief is not man, not even young men and women, but nature herself; and in facing her at the barricades, self-preservation, the strongest, most universal instinct of the "naked ape," seems an unlikely match for her arsenals. In any event, war with the environment, a time-honoured preoccupation with the Western somatatonic, is based on stultifying assumptions: accommodation is naïve, cooperation with nature, impossible.

In a democracy, theoretically at least, every assumption is debatable. Socrates saw the debate as never-ending, a constant fiat from the Self to the self in the interests of self-knowledge. Symbols are arbitrary. They do not *have* to bind. No philosophy for an eco-system which has inherited humans can be expressed by the West's orthodoxies, scientific or other. It has to balance the needs of a hierarchy within man, the microcosm, against those of massive hierarchies without. More importantly, if its consideration is to have any lasting effect on human conduct when, hopefully, the climate of fear has moderated, it may have to be expressed as a mystique: Self in relation to not-self, and each in relation to a larger Self, whether immanent or transcendent, assumed to be causative of both.

It is doubtful whether, in private, any contemplative person can escape his contribution to this mystique, although, needless to say, he will furnish it with his own symbols. But arrange the furniture as he may, the subject of his meditation will tend to be a somewhat nebulous, because numinous, trinity. For what he will be attempting to preserve will be a triad of sanctities: that of the individual; that of the "ten thousand things"; that of the Ground of Being.

"Show me the man," said Plato, "able to see both the One and the Many in nature, and I will follow in his footsteps as though he were a god." If such insight seemed difficult in Plato's day, how heroic must it not appear in the late twentieth century? For it is not quite what a governor of California meant when he announced, as quoted, "When you've seen one Redwood you've seen them all!" "By destroying pagan animism," Dr. White observes, "Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects." Even amongst conservationists few care to defend nature *per se* or from a point of view other than the anthropocentric. The platforms are utility, recreational or æsthetic; and contamination—the contamination of *man's* air, *his* water, *his* earth. The protective spirits in the glade have been evicted, it is thought, then amalgamated into a popular symbol, "Mother Nature," quite powerless and with almost nursery-rhyme connotation. Save from rare mystics, naturalists and artists, few feelings of respect or love flow to this particular "mother," nor do her sentient or inanimate broods, when we have put them in trouble, arouse more than shrugs or brief pity, never the sense of injustice. That is reserved for man, not for the victim on the vivisection table. For here, most graphically exhibited as a rhesus monkey or as "man's best friend," lies one of our symbols, that of vicarious sacrifice, shamelessly and endlessly misapplied to innocence in nature.

In refreshing contrast to this attitude comes the advice of Charles Lindbergh: "Let us never forget that wildness has developed life, including the human species. By comparison, our own accomplishments are trivial."

Lindbergh in his *Life* essay was alluding to what we celebrate widely as the conquest—more commonly rape—of nature. Dr. White, while admiring the techniques that made this possible, looks at the religion which made it probable. If his reasoning holds water, then a set of assumptions which the West incorporated in a mystique for itself, are inconsistent with the ecological, therefore metaphysical, needs of the future.

No sensible person, least of all Dr. White, would construe this as a dismissal of the nobler Christian values from a desired picture of futurity. But neither could he regard the acceptance by technologists (if that were likely) of St. Francis for patron saint as the new and sufficient "Reformation." Religious philosophy has been capable of greater mutation than this within the terms of its own symbolism: Zen, for instance, within the structures of the *mahayana.* It might be more hopeful to quote one who, having thought deeply over the Christo-Judaic dispensation, attempted to lead what he believed to be the life. In his autobiography Albert Schweitzer had this to say:

> Christianity has need of Thought that it may come to the consciousness of its real Self. For centuries it treasured the great commandment of love and mercy as traditional truth without recognising it as a reason for opposing slavery, witch burning, torture and all the other ancient and mediaeval forms of inhumanity. It was only when it experienced the Thinking of the Age of Enlightenment that it was stirred into entering the struggle for humanity. The remembrance of this ought to preserve it forever from assuming any air of superiority in comparison with Thought. (*My Life and Thought,* p. 275)

The very fact that man's inhumanity to man does come in for some attention, however erratic, today, makes it seem possible that his inhumanity to nature will again receive consideration in metaphysical terms as well as on the plane of expediency. The precedents are old as the hills. Quite small bookstores, even in the relatively non-populous area of Canada where the writer lives, carry the evidence in paperback. Here the Upanishads rub shoulders with Pythagorean thoughts, Vedic and Buddhist expositions with the works of Thoreau and Emerson. Lao Tzu is to be found differentiating a Tao which can be known (presumably to discursive thought) from a Tao which cannot. And beside him—for the bag is mixed—the *pan-en-henic* experimentalists of our time, convinced that the ineffable can be had by chemistry. The customers to be seen scanning the titles are more often young than old.

It is doubtful whether science and a rigid monotheism, which between them have done much to belittle the grandeur and generosity of ancestral insights, have seen the last of monadology. Nature will always find ways to enforce the recognition of soul, not only in her most formidable child, but in the many mansions of herself: nor will her allies always have to be resurrected from the past. The Spring 1970 issue of *Horizon* devoted its pages to some of the exotic tangents at which the younger generation has gone off upon, striking what might be described as the body of "Hermetic" ore. The flights range from imagined Zen to astrology and tantricism, from psychic to psychedelic adventures. And to much else besides, for the catalyst is a powerful one, discrimination rare. Do the more earnest amongst them, regarding themselves as rebels, realize they are late-comers to this particular rebellion; that, unwittingly, scholars and linguists amongst their more diligent forbears have been preparing for a century or two an extensive literature for the revolt? Does anyone tell them that barely a hundred years ago a movement, much underrated, named "theosophical," took on the establishment in five continents while it gave popular foothold to antique, yet forever new, ways of thinking about man's place in the universe? And this before any racial or ecological crises were being contemplated? Does anyone, for that matter—anyone in high places—confirm youth's instinct about a parapsychological factor, or suggest that its inclusion will have to be considered in any full report on man and nature, on their ecology and ethology?

It has been said that every man, on his hidden side, is a near-Buddhist. Today, when young people do exercise the famlties of the "Sifter" within them and gravitate towards one or another aspect of the Middle Way, they do not find themselves alone. Dr. Lynn White, noting this gravitation as a historian, regards it as incidental evidence of a "Global Canon" which he sees supplanting the traditional Graeco-Judaic canons

of the West. But it has also been said about Buddhism, or the mother lode which yielded it, that alone amongst spiritual philosophies it has little to fear from the disciplines of the exact sciences, and little to learn from those of analytical creative psychology. As these disciplines are likely to be with us for a long time, it may be well to recall a remark of Einstein: "The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all science."

If Buddhism were to contribute to the "Global Canon" its assumptions of "Mind Only," *karma,*[*] and the Unity of Life, our ecological exertions within a chilling spacetime continuum might gain some impetus from the emotion Einstein speaks of. But the *mahayana* has more to offer. Its last words affect man alone, as the recipient of self-consciousness, suggesting to him a peak definition of himself. For he is here sponsored as an advanced candidate for *prajna,* total Enlightenment through personal effort, in a world whose equilibriums, endlessly disturbed, are being as endlessly restored under a law of impartial justice.

But then comes the rider. Despite appearances, the effort boomerangs, the reward recedes, whenever *karuna,* Compassion, is absent anywhere between the means and the end. Ruthless progress is, in fact, not progress at all.

This statement of the Good Law which, in times of its welcome, brought shining interludes to Asian history, both in social behaviour and in artistic creativeness, is not far from what Albert Schweitzer read into the canon of the West. Perhaps it can be found there. Should disappointment arise, an even closer kinship might be expected from a secular humanism with a mystique of its own, should the West manage to devise one before it is too late.

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[*] Sanskrit, literally "Action" or "Law of action": paraphrased variously as the "law of ethical causation" or "Compensation" (Emerson).

REVIEW
NOTES ON NOVELS

THE insights of novelists often seem more penetrating, philosophically, than statements in books on philosophy, probably for the reason that in a story philosophical ideas emerge as something that people are endeavoring to live by. In *Thy Daughter's Nakedness* (Lippincott and Bantam), a modern rabbi, conversing with a young woman taking instruction from him, discusses the presumptions of religious "belief," which he thinks Judaism avoids. He says:

> ". . . when you probe into ultimates you get to where you can't comprehend. Where you can't even conceive. And what does it mean to ask if you believe in something you can't even conceive? It's meaningless. Isn't it? To talk about something, and ask if you believe in something, you first have to have some conception of it. And idolators and atheists are alike in one thing, that they both presume that the concept of God can be comprehended. . . .
>
> "The question is how to live. If the believer and the nonbeliever both act the same, then it's a hairsplitting anyway. All we have is a working hypothesis—to live as if there were a moral law, as if the world were made by God. . . ."

Not much is said, here, about how a person gains the stamina to live by a "hypothesis" instead of a belief, although elsewhere in the book it is suggested that study and ethical practice lead in this direction. Talking to this girl, the rabbi, Ed Gordon, stresses the misleading effect of superficial belief:

> ". . . you look close at people that call themselves atheists, and you find them begging the same questions as everyone else, and taking just as much on faith. Anybody that believes the golden rule is binding on him has already accepted a lot on faith—as much as anybody that calls himself religious. And from what I see around me, people that call themselves atheists can still believe in more stuff that doesn't exist than I ever thought of. They believe in neighborhoods, and prestige, and all kinds of things. I don't think people know what they believe. And to ask people to say 'I believe'—it would make for a kind of intellectual conformity that isn't possible. Every man's a sect, I think. Faces are different and minds are different. . . . If people were the same, evolution wouldn't work. Every creature, every individual is different, that's the whole mechanism that makes evolution. Only in order to make a community, then the individuals have to consent to a common practice. But a common practice can still bridge a lot of different theories. And no one who accepts a transcendental moral law is an atheist. Even if he thinks he is. He's accepted in his heart the hypothesis that moral law is real, it's binding. That's all I ask. Whether he says 'God' or whether he has another terminology, that's a matter of what words he's comfortable with. . . ."

There is a lot of common sense—or practical, working "truth"—in what Ed Gordon says to this young woman. It is wisdom based on experience at a fairly low level of psychological behavior. But it seems almost wholly lacking in the element of moral striving. And when Ed Gordon tries to introduce a little striving into the ways of his congregation, he is called a fanatic by his most active members and nearly loses his job. What should he do? Become a businessman? Do something else? No solution is offered in this book. It seems clear that the context of conventional religious organization and belief offers no solution for the characteristic problems of conventional religion.

A much older Protestant pastor in the same New England town, a close friend of the rabbi, feels these pressures more searchingly. Confiding, he says:

> "Nobody listens to us, Ed. They're prejudiced against the whole idea of listening to us. They look at us gravely and politely, that's all."
>
> "Maybe we're living the wrong century," said Ed.
>
> "Except that for a churchman there can't be such a thing as a wrong century. The wronger it is the righter it is. You don't go into the ministry to find satisfaction." He paused, looking dolorously at Ed. "You don't expect happiness when you choose battle. And maybe that's where I've made my mistake. Maybe I should have been the social-action kind of minister. And pushed the idea of the church as the vanguard of social improvement and all that—the opportunity's always there. Before the war we had the labor unions, and the farmers, and now there's the

UN, and the bomb, and the race question not solved yet. And conscientious objectors—I've even had a few right here in town. Or urban renewal—there's no end of city problems. A minister can do social work, or get into politics—there's no politics in Wilmerding Crosswalk. But even if I did those things, even if I had—I'd accomplish something, I'd do good, and I'd get some notoriety, but I'd still have a feeling of only selling the common wisdom of the race. . . . I preach on Sunday, and try to needle them, and relate religion to the morning newspapers, and even when I needle them, sometimes I have the feeling of being a quack, in the sense of selling only common knowledge. I've had a feeling of being small in the pulpit. As if I don't have any insights that the people I'm preaching to don't have. . . . I don't even know more about ethics than they do. Ed, do you ever ask yourself why they pay you a salary? Does a twentieth-century American community truly pay a man to teach them righteousness, to chastise them, to lecture them on the Golden Rule?"

Ed didn't know what to say. "Well, what's your answer?" he asked finally.

"I don't know," Caleb said. . . . "Do you know how people consider a clergyman?" he said. "Like a half-wit son of the oldest family in town. Treated respectfully, but not respected. The youngsters even—they're on their best behavior when I'm around. But not because they think I know more about the good life—it's because I'm supposed to know less about the evil life. I'm supposed to know less than my parishioners, not more. Do you know the feeling I mean?"

"Have you ever been a chaplain?" Ed asked him. "In the armed forces?"

"No, I never have."

"Well, I have. And when you're part of a military force you see it even sharper there, I think. You're like a mascot. There are good moments, but most of the time a chaplain is just a good-natured joke."

Both Caleb and Ed are in their way honest men. They have a more than ordinary share of the "common knowledge," and are further distinguished by their realization that it isn't good enough. It doesn't give them any leverage on people, nor any leverage on themselves. This is a heavy burden to bear—to be intelligent enough to know that what you know isn't good enough to meet the responsibilities you have assumed. Or that, from the viewpoint of existing "religious traditions," the past is an inadequate guide for either the present or the future.

Novels are able to reflect the best of this sort of common wisdom—what we know now. In a story of professional football players—*The Hundred-Yard War,* by Gary Cartwright (Doubleday and Dell)—the first-string quarterback of the Dallas Troopers has moments of feeling overwhelmed by the futility of his life:

As he drives toward his appointment at the Theater Center Rylie Silver aches to get out of town, to leave Dallas, to abandon reason and responsibility, and as always he sees himself with dyed hair, Aryan blond, he thinks, a close-cropped beard and shades, boarding a plane for Montreal or Mexico City, an attaché case and an umbrella his only baggage. . . . For a short time he believed that Diane was his destiny; now he realizes that people do not function permanently in other people's metaphysics. He thinks: The injustice I did Diane was expecting her to understand, but I thought that she could see that a man keeps running until he is caught.

One of the crippling illusions of the game of football, he now believes, is that there is a goal. "There's not!" he told Diane one night. "I don't care if you score a touchdown or win a game or win a championship, there is never a time when you sit down and say, God love me, I am there! You might as well try making a blind landing on infinity!" The funny thing, he has thought of this until it makes him sick, and though he has the time and enough money, he has never bought the hair dye or the airplane ticket. Maybe, he thinks, it is not too late.

More common wisdom. Rylie is smarter than the other players. Actually, the two psychiatric advisers of the Dallas team believed he was too smart. These staff psychiatrists claimed to be able to tell by making tests and observing the players which rookies would develop into good material for the team. They insisted that "a quarterback's effectiveness reduces rapidly as his IQ climbs above 119." There might be exceptions, but these were still regarded with suspicion. The rule the psychiatrists adopted was that "the smarter a man was, the less likely he was to accept the

fundamental teachings of the game." Rylie had an IQ of 128. He couldn't be a true believer.

These books have no "answers," nothing better than the common wisdom, which sees very clearly what is wrong but cannot move beyond this point. So they revel in melancholia—very much the literature of a people resigned to wait for some kind of "end." From the upward and onward aspect of the common wisdom, the contemporary novelist turns to the pathos of its inadequacy and failure.

Why is the common wisdom so powerless, and why are the characters in modern novels so unheroic? One explanation would be that the social content of the common wisdom requires that any solution or proposal for change have a collective application. It must be the right answer for *everybody*—even for those who don't want answers and aren't looking for them. This tethers the novelist's imagination and the romance of defeat becomes his only resource.

COMMENTARY
THE SOURCES OF FREEDOM

THIS week's Review sets an old, old problem. It seems clear from all social experience that institutions are indispensable, yet they also confine vision and discourage originality. The reformer of religious institutions is continually confronted by the objection that "the people" are not mature or heroic or self-reliant enough to live without the compromises and reassurances of existing habits of mind. So, as a result, persons who work in and through institutions may find themselves accepting compromises as a condition of survival, in time coming to regard the stamp of mediocrity as the hallmark of truth. Feasibility then becomes the defining limit of authenticity, a rule which differs little if at all from the politician's scale of values. The good life is then regarded as no more than a problem of management.

There is really no rule for getting the most out of an institutional framework while being confined by it as little as possible. The talents of people differ, and some institutions are better than others. The ideal, of course, would be the development of institutions that would order without weighing down, give stability without restricting human freedom. The best institutions are tools for the mature, patterns for the young, and foundations for growth. Such institutions could never be regarded as substitutes for the high human qualities which pioneer all beneficent change.

Institutional rules guaranteeing freedom of religion, for example, are necessary but not sufficient. The true meaning of freedom is disclosed only by its exercise, its fruitful use, and the man who is content with managerial or legislated definitions of freedom will find it difficult if not impossible to understand the needs and possibilities of the free life of other men. So it is that institutional guarantees can never be more than very temporary safeguards of the conditions of human growth. Those conditions must be continually generated as by-products of the growth-processes of individuals who work in understanding and cooperation with one another, in full knowledge that the institutional reflection of their practice is only the shadow, the two-dimensional image, of their life in the round. The school is probably the best model for the study of institutions, since mistakes, here, are—or ought to be—most quickly recognized.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
BOOKS FOR TEACHERS

A CHARACTERISTIC of enduring work done in the study of human beings is that you are able to understand most of what is said without having to read a lot of other material. It has, in short, an *independent* excellence. A good example of this quality is A. H. Maslow's basic text, *Motivation and Personality,* which has just been issued in a revised paperback edition (Harper & Row, $5.95). The book constitutes a fresh start in psychology, and in many cases the reader will be better off for not having his head filled with conceptions Maslow intends to replace. *Motivation and Personality* first appeared in 1954 and is now both the first and last book by Dr. Maslow, a fitting testament and memorial, since he died suddenly last June, not long after completing its revision and adding a valuable Preface. This and his numerous other works have often been quoted in MANAS.

Dr. Maslow will almost certainly be remembered as the man who, in the United States, contributed most to the reconstruction of the meaning of "science." While he is thought of and recognized as a psychologist, he was first of all a philosopher. His influence has been toward restoring the primary role of philosophy in the shaping of psychological concepts. He demonstrated the functional importance for mental and emotional health of ideals and aspirations in human life, bringing new awareness of the vital bearing of subjective reality on the quality of behavior. It used to be claimed that scientific psychology had to be reductionist and mechanistic in order to avoid the pitfalls of wishful thinking. Dr. Maslow's work made this a ridiculous contention. He showed that it is quite possible to practice disciplined study in the light of a vision, and that any scientific investigation of man, pursued without vision, tends to become antihuman. *Motivation and Personality* is a book for everybody to read. Psychology, as Dr. Maslow conceived and wrote it, is not a "specialty."

A book not inappropriate to mention after consideration of Dr. Maslow's contribution is Jean Piaget's *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child* (Orion, 1970, $7.50). Piaget is a hallowed name in educational theory, but whether the implications of his discoveries are well understood is open to question. Asking around among teachers, we found that his name is better known than what he stands for. He does not make easy reading, yet the central contention of this book, representing the fruit of researches pursued between 1935 and 1965, is clear enough. Agreeing with Robert M. Hutchins that the aim of education is above all to develop intelligence, he goes on to maintain that intelligence has a universal quality and autonomous structure and that it grows through the dual process of understanding and inventing.

Opposing the traditional idea that knowledge is some sort of intellectual "copy" of the facts that are found in nature, Piaget writes:

> In child psychology, many authors continue to think that the formation of the intelligence obeys the laws of "learning," after the model of certain Anglo-Saxon theories of learning exemplified by those of Hull: repeated responses of the organism to external stimuli, consolidation of those repetitions by external reinforcements, constitution of chains of association or of a "hierarchy of habits" which produce a "functional copy" of the regular sequences of reality, and so forth.
>
> But the essential fact that contradicts these survivals of associationist empiricism, the establishing of which has revolutionized our concepts of intelligence, is that knowledge is derived from action, not in the sense of simple associative responses, but in the much deeper sense of the assimilation of reality into the necessary and general coordinations of action. To know an object is to act upon it and to transform it, in order to grasp the mechanisms of that transformation as they function in connection with the transformative actions themselves. To know is therefore to assimilate reality into structures of transformation, and these are the

> structures that intelligence constructs as a direct extension of our actions. . . . these structurations consist in an organization of reality, whether in act or thought, and not in simply making a copy of it.

Piaget shows from specific experiments that teaching which does not involve the young in action by themselves fails in essential steps in the development and exercise of intelligence. Following is a basic statement extending this discovery:

> There has been an ever increasing emphasis during the past few years on a point that I feel can never be sufficiently stressed, which is that there exists a fundamental lacuna in our teaching methods, most of which, in a civilization very largely reliant upon the experimental sciences, continue to display an almost total lack of interest in developing the experimental attitude of mind in our students. It is therefore a matter of no little educational interest to examine what child psychology has been able to teach us in recent years about the role of acquired experience in the development of intelligence and about the development of spontaneous experimentation.
>
> On the first point, we know today that experience is necessary to the development of intelligence, but that it is not sufficient in itself, and above all that it occurs in two very different forms, between which classical empiricism failed to distinguish: physical experience and logico-mathematical experience.
>
> Physical experience consists in acting upon objects and in discovering properties by abstraction from those objects: for example, weighing objects and observing that the heaviest are not always the largest. Logico-mathematical experience (indispensable during the stages at which operational deduction is still not possible) also consists in acting upon objects, but the processes of abstraction by which their properties are discovered are directed, not at the objects as such but at the actions that are brought to bear on the objects: for example, placing pebbles in a row and discovering that their number is the same whether we move from left to right or right to left (or in a circle, etc.); in this case, neither the order nor the numerical sum were properties of the pebbles before they were laid out or before they were counted, and the discovery that the sum is independent of the order (= interchangeability) consists in abstracting that observation from the actions of enumerating and ordering, even though the "reading" of the experiment was directed at the objects, since those properties of sum and order were in fact introduced into the objects by the actions.

The need of the child to structure his own intelligence, to act on whatever he is learning about, himself, to make his own discoveries, is repeated by Piaget again and again. All experiment requires some verbal introduction or preparation, but, Piaget says, speech which transmits "knowledge already structured by the language or the intelligence of the parents or the teachers" is not enough. Authentic transmission requires a fresh assimilation, "in other words, a restructuration dependent this time upon the activities of the hearer."

This principle applies at all levels of learning, and each level of structure becomes the foundation for the more interiorized and abstract kinds of learning. The problem, obviously, is one of encouraging individuality and self-reliance, discovery and questioning, and the young who are not given these opportunities will tend to be locked in position at lower levels of comprehension.

Piaget's discussion of Skinner's apparently successful experiments with teaching machines is amusing. Noting that some people have been saddened by this evidence "that schoolmasters can be replaced by machines," he says:

> In my view, on the other hand, these machines have performed one great service for us, which is to demonstrate beyond all possible doubt the mechanical character of the schoolmaster's function as it is conceived by traditional teaching methods: if the ideal of that method is merely to elicit correct repetition of what has been correctly transmitted, then it goes without saying that a machine can fulfill those conditions correctly.

FRONTIERS

New Ways of Thinking

IN the second section of a two-part article, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution," in the Summer *American Scholar,* James W. Carey and John J. Quirk say:

> The American romance with technology, and the attitudes and behaviors it nurtures, has . . . been summed up by the historian William Appleman Williams: "America's great evasion lies in the manipulation of nature to avoid a confrontation with the human condition and with the challenge of building a true community."

Lewis Mumford is quoted next by these writers:

> Murnford has suggested that Americans felt that the "problem of justly distributing goods could be sidetracked by creating an abundance of them . . . that most of the difficulties that had hitherto vexed mankind had a mathematical or mechanical . . . solution." Beyond quantitative solutions we need, Murnford has written, "a conception of what constitutes a valid life. . . ." What has to be challenged, he observes, "is an economy that is based not on organic needs, historic experience, human aptitudes, ecological complexity, but upon a system of empty abstractions" such as power, mobility and growth. The very value system of the powerhouse society, Mumford submits, has to be undermined: "The problem of quantity, the problem of automatism, the problem of limitless power, which our very success in perfecting machines has raised, cannot be solved in terms of the machine.

This is the fundamental criticism, and about the only one worth making, or developing. In the same issue of the *American Scholar,* in what is probably the last column he wrote for this journal before he died, Joseph Wood Krutch said:

> The fundamental fact is that you cannot solve the problems of pollution and environmental deterioration—or adopt an ecological rather than technological point of view—by merely giving them some thought while still accepting prevailing values. It will often happen that the only ecologically sound procedure is economically unsound. The two philosophies meet head on. They cannot be reconciled. We must make some sort of choice between them. To put it into even simpler terms, we would just have to stop asking, "Is this the cheapest way to make something or do something?" but ask instead, "Which way will leave the least residue of one kind or another, even if (as will usually be the case) this means a loss of convenience?"

Perhaps, during the major portion of Mr. Krutch's long and fruitful life, it *seemed* that sound economics contradicts ecologically sound procedure. But it is evident today that the old economics was based on specious foundations and filled with anti-human follies. For example, no one can read Wayne Davis's article in the Jan. 10 *New Repub*lic on "Overpopulated America" and fail to reach this conclusion. Mr. Davis shows that expectations of continued prosperity based upon "the Keynesian concept of a continued growth in population and productivity" are now blindly optimistic and held in stubborn neglect of the realities of human ecology. One or two insistently intelligent economists have been saying things like this for years—Walter Weisskopf (Roosevelt University) in the United States, and E. F. Schumacher in England. The changes in thinking sought by these men are every bit as important as the reforms Ralph Nader is working on, and much closer to the cause of the multiplying abuses and deceptions with which Nader and his youthful cohorts heroically contend.

Even the few articles by Schumacher which have appeared in MANAS—a small fraction of his writings—could be put together to make a splendid introductory text on economics—humanist economics. It is only intellectual habit which makes economics founded on simple verities concerning the good of man seem "unsound." Background reading for such studies could begin with Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac,* a book or two by Henry Beston, and Mr. Krutch's earlier essay, "Conservation Is Not Enough," which appeared in the *American Scholar* for the Summer of 1954, ought to be included.

"Studies" are of course only a beginning. The vast if blundering and inexperienced "return to the

land" by so many of the young gives evidence of intense longing in the coming generation for another kind of life, out of which, in time, new economic forms and customs will doubtless evolve. Why not try to develop new forms of craftsmanship and manufacturing, and even technology, at the same time? New ways of thinking are difficult to sustain without new ways of acting, related to the practical needs of daily life. This was central in Gandhi's conception of Basic Education.

Yet "study" materials are surely needed. We read today of the hundreds of new schools being started by concerned parents and young teachers no longer able to tolerate the methods of conventional public schools. There are plenty of children ready and eager to attend these schools, and it may be comparatively easy to devise content for the lower grades or ages, but what will replace the educational-materials and texts of conventional instruction at, say, the high school level? What is appropriate education for the young of a society in tumultuous and disordered transition? What should happen to the conventional "subject" categories? What is history without nationalism and free of ideological bias? Which books could be used to teach economics based on "organic needs, historic experience, human aptitudes, ecological complexity"? Do such books even exist?

A counter-culture that is to gain strength, coherence, and endurance will have to give attention to such questions, and begin to devise alternatives providing links between what is constructive in the past and desirable in the future. New books—or possibly substantial pamphlets, at first—are needed. Compilation of bibliographies might be the first step. Teachers could help with this.