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A SMALL AMOUNT OF TRUTH

WE are far better critics of poor and failing ideals in human life than we are formulators of good ones. Failure brings breakdown and pain, neither of which is difficult to identify. Anyone can point to the gross evidence of human defeat, and controversy is seldom aroused by elaborate catalogues listing the social and ecological disorders of the time. However, discerning the causes of failure before their effects appear requires ability of a higher order, with perception growing out of conscious participation on the constructive side of life. Tabulations of the statistics of psychological disturbance and juvenile delinquency have some value to us, but much more useful is a book like John Holt's *How Children Fail.* And Mr. Holt couldn't have been so informing on this subject without equal grasp of what happens when they don't fail—the understanding recorded in his later book, *How Children Learn.*

It can hardly be doubted that if large numbers of people developed serious interest in such studies, the occasions which arouse their angry concern for "law and order" would soon diminish, and less energy would be devoted to the search for scapegoats to punish for the multiplying casualties of the times.

Yet it is misleading to speak of changes of this sort as though they could easily be brought about. Consider the story told by Eda LeShan in *The Conspiracy against Childhood* (Atheneum, 1968):

> A nursery teacher and I were having a conference recently with the mother of a perfectly charming, normally endowed four-year-old girl. We had nothing but good things to say about Jessie; she was friendly, spirited, enthusiastic and happy in school. Her mother was pleased but not ecstatic, and finally she said, "In other words, you're telling me I have an average child." She sounded so crestfallen that I found myself feeling somewhat ashamed, as though I had insulted her child. She went on to tell us that in her neighborhood all the mothers knew their children's I.Q.'s and as it came closer to the time Jessie would enter grade school and be tested, she was getting more and more nervous about having to know "the verdict" as to how smart the child was. "Suppose it turns out she isn't as brilliant as her father thinks she is?"

Here, perhaps, was another poor little "Dibs" in the making; and if Mrs. LeShan's experience is, any measure, enough parents participate to put the process on a mass production basis.

But what, after all, could Mrs. LeShan have said to that mother to make her realize what she was likely to do to her child? There was indeed a conspiracy against the child, but it wasn't just one mother's fault. The same attitudes were held by other women down the block. An earlier conspiracy had infected all these mothers with urgent competitive notions of human development. Here were women who thought that a "good" child was one who would support the parents' idea of their own status—an idea, moreover, that was now entangled with feelings of mother love. Mrs. LeShan couldn't correct this idea the way a grade-school teacher might point out a mistake in arithmetic or a spelling error. It was a conception deeply rooted in the parents' lives, shaped and sharpened by generations of habitual distortion of human goals. It was an inescapable indoctrination of the tribal encyclopedia of middle-class American life.

About all Mrs. LeShan could do was lose her professional cool. She told the woman: "Well, there's obviously only one thing you *can* do—throw her back and try for another!"

The modern parent suffers from other conspiracies, some of them learnedly elite in origin. In *The Social Basis of Consciousness,* Trigant Burrow relates:

> I shall not forget the experience told me by a patient whose mother actuated by a theory of motherhood in its highest "scientific" interpretation, undertook to enlighten her on the subject of sex. The incident left the most painful impression on her. The mother, having gathered courage for the performance of her maternal duty, delivered her errand with a punctiliousness which from the point of view of technique was irreproachable. She spoke out of the strictest regard for the theory of motherhood. But unfortunately her theory left out of account an item that needs to be reckoned with, namely, the native simplicity of childhood. The woman spoke out of the theory of a truth, but her child listened with the organic susceptibility of truth itself. The mother had not accepted within herself the actual significance of life, and so, in accordance with the formality of a theory, was vicariously imposing its acceptance on her child. But childish perception pierces the veil of pedagogic finesse. The rigid demeanor of her instructor readily disclosed the discrepancy between the verbal recital and the utter lack of conscious acceptance within herself. For the child, now a middle-aged woman, the moment was an unforgettable one. She had witnessed in her mother an outrage of organic truth, and the shock of that experience caused a psychic disunity between mother and child from which there resulted an introversion of personality that covered half a lifetime. And so, while the theory of the nursery is from the point of view of theory wholly irreproachable, it is from the point of view of the nursery wholly absurd.

Well, what are we trying to illustrate with these stories of disaster to the young? The two incidents have in common the paralyzing effect of borrowed norms, of ideals of human growth or progress which have no relation to living process. The objectives sought for their children by these parents were based on hearsay, on propaganda, not on anything the parents had been through or experienced themselves. In a word, their heads were filled with superstition. The fact that it was fashionable or learned did not keep it from being superstition. No man who imagines that other people—or "tradition"—can tell him who he is, what to value, and what to strive for, can avoid being deeply superstitious. Superstition is not believing things that aren't true, but believing things that "other people" say are true, without even a gesture toward finding out for oneself.

It is no crime to be ignorant. We are all pretty ignorant when it comes to the most serious questions. It is not even a crime to be ignorant of one's ignorance, since that too is a common failing, overcome only by rare men through the endurance of pain and by the practice of relentless personal honesty. Ignorance becomes an anti-human offense only when it is supported by self-righteousness. The really dangerous men in the world are the spreaders of self-righteousness. It is an ill which thrives on mass opinion, and when it is allowed to infect whole populations, the remedy of self-questioning becomes very difficult to apply.

The worst underlying superstition of our time is the idea that civilization can survive the loss of ennobling individual ideals. The whole of the deliberated life of human beings is lived in the field of tension between existing reality and ideal objectives. And the one has always to be defined in terms of its distance from the other. There is no other way to arrive at conceptions of value. There is no other way to decide what one ought to do. No man can think reasonably about the future, or even about tomorrow, without bringing in ideal considerations. We quote once again from Wendell Berry:

> Neither the ideal nor the real is perceivable alone. The ideal is apparent and meaningful only in relation to the real, the real only in relation to the ideal. Each is the measure and corrective of the other. Where there is no accurate sense of the real world, idealism evaporates in the rhetoric of self-righteousness and self-justification. Where there is no disciplined idealism the sense of the real is invaded by sentimentality or morbidity and by fraudulent discriminations.

The fundamental lesson of the ordeal of modern history may be the discovery that a human being has to live in the light of an ideal, and that it must be *his own* ideal; yet he cannot help but recognize at the same time that the vast incompetence he feels in formulating his ideals requires him to learn from others. There is a difficult paradox here: How can others help us to learn to be ourselves? Only the most excellent of men, it may be, can offer help of this sort. They

help, but devise ingenious safeguards against imitation. This means the formulation of ideals which men cannot pretend to realize without having personally experienced their meaning.

In *Beyond Alienation* (Braziller), Ernest Becker unearths a quotation from Rousseau which suggests that the eighteenth-century thinker was aware of this rule, although he set the problem in different terms:

> For it is by no means a light undertaking to distinguish properly between what is original and what is artificial in the actual nature of man, or to form a true idea of a state which no longer exists, perhaps never did exist; and of which it is, nevertheless, necessary to have true ideas, in order to form a proper judgment of our present state.

This expresses the sense that we all have, in our most humanly aware moments, of always having to do what we do not know how to do. That what we already know how to do is never more than a rock to stand on, something accomplished in the past, while our real life lies in what we do not yet understand. If this should be the case, then history is largely instruction in how men have been led into massive mistakes by letting other people tell them what they ought to do. Mr. Becker has a luminous passage which goes back to the beginning of this sort of history for the West:

> Let us begin with the first man who saw that civilization was a new social game, who saw that it was an uncritical and debasing game; and who knew that the one hope for saving man was to awaken his critical sense, turn him against the mere forms of things. It was Socrates who saw that mass opinion and the easy praise of one's fellows unmanned the Athenians of his day, prevented them from being free and noble citizens. They were too readily playing the game of private profit and display, of power and pomp, of career and fortune; and they were neglecting the cultivation of the inner man, upon which alone the city-state could thrive. Socrates wanted man to be autonomous, to follow his own idea of justice and right, provided he reasoned it out carefully. He saw that reliance on the justice of others was the great danger for a brotherhood of free men; and rather than stop his peculiar attempts to awaken his fellows from their uncritical sport, he preferred to die. In other words, he saw that his historical mission was to attempt to save society by making it self-critical, and he was willing to be a martyr in this unprecedented cause. And that is why we cannot talk of primitives, but must begin with Socrates—with the ideal, with the enjoinder to man to rise above the constraints in which he is held by society, no matter what kind of a society it is, or where it is found. And this, as we said, is precisely what Rousseau, some two thousand years after Socrates, meant by the primitive ideal.

Socrates knew but would not accept the plausible arguments that justify telling other people what to do. He knew the itch to be a "manager" and despised it. Mr. Becker's only criticism of Socrates is that he didn't realize what a tough project he had taken on:

> Man needs to rely on the judgment of others, in order to earn his own feelings of worth. He needs to protect himself in the social encounter; he needs to save his "face"; he needs to perform, in a word, in the shared social fiction, in order to earn social honor, social approval, and social protection. Socrates intuited these things; he saw that they meant the decay of free society, because they made of man a social automaton. But one thing he could not see, and historically, it proved the most important of all, because it explains why his enjoinders to his fellow Athenians failed. He could not see how deeply rooted the mechanics of playing at society is, he could not see how much the individual self is a function of the social group; he could not see how deep "social performance" goes, how it is rooted in the anxiety of man, the anxiety to be accepted and honored. He did not see the crucial dynamic of the whole thing, the dynamic that a series of the best modern minds had to unveil, unveil almost tremblingly, reverently: that man's slavish devotion to the social game is rooted in the anxiety of self-discovery, that man does not know what he is, unless he is told by his social group.

Well, Mr. Becker is saying that Socrates didn't understand the power of the opposition. Maybe so. But we ought not to be too certain about this. Maybe Socrates *did* understand what he was up against, but saw no educational point in publishing a discouraging inventory of the weaknesses of mankind. Socrates was a *teacher*. Perhaps he understood the dynamics of self-fulfilling prophecy. Could he have foreseen the effects invited, centuries later, by the doom-saying

champions of sin and damnation? You can emasculate the will of a child by explaining to him in too much detail how tough it is to grow up.

A practical result of "scientific" description of the forces working against autonomy may be the implication that autonomy is out of bounds and impossible for all, except, perhaps, maddened nihilists. Plato, at any rate, would provide no such statistical discouragement. The pressures of personal experience were discouraging enough, and he was looking, you might say, for men who could succeed by not knowing they were licked. He would leave the scientific case for human discouragement to the Grand Inquisitors of a later age—to men who, having carefully compiled the statistics of human failure, insisted that a true "compassion" would seal up all the portals to a heroic life. It's just too tough to be a hero, they said. So they made heroism a capital offense.

The argument of the Grand Inquisitors is always the same. They hide their instruments of anti-human persuasion in the basement and ask you, What about the *masses?* The masses are *helpless,* they say, and they do everything possible to keep them that way. In this way dehumanization gets the approval of social science. After all, there's only one hero potential in thousands of human beings, and the greatest good for the greatest number, you know!

A society deconditioned for heroic behavior may be the exact specification for the production of nihilists, men of the terror. Because there is a heroic potential in human beings, and it *can* be distorted by social suppressions into wild desperation. Is a nihilist really worse than a soldier of the cross? Couldn't he be, conceivably, just a tiny bit better? He is a terrible man, very "negative" in outlook, but he hasn't given in to the social lie.

Instead of reciting statistical discouragements, Plato constructed inspiring myths. He revealed, as through a glass, darkly, his eschatological convictions. He declared for the immortality of the soul. He vouched for the reality of spiritual states of being. He proposed a philosophical cosmology in which man is recognized as a fallen god. In short, he confirmed by a series of wonderful mythic fantasies the dream life of mankind. He constructed the Myth of Er to provide some sort of rational schedule in time for the drama of human growth. But he made no utopian promises. He didn't say when there would be a "Second Coming." He just worked to get ready for the age of Philosopher-Kings, even if it wasn't going to arrive for a million years. What else was there is there—to do?

We used to make fun of the passive East where people didn't believe in Progress. Well, it may be wrong to disbelieve in progress, but it doesn't seem much better to be right in believing in it, while doing all the wrong things for bringing it about. How long does it take for the blood on the hands of righteous, progressive men to stain their souls with the consciousness that they are doing evil things?

It was Plato's conviction that men are souls, which use but are confined and deluded by bodies. He believed that men could hardly act like souls unless they adopted this idea as a *working* hypothesis. So he stuck by that hypothesis. He didn't give great attention to other hypotheses that could gain some support from the data of experience. These theories seemed ignoble to him—alien to the best in man. Plato believed that a man has to conceive of himself ideally before he can start growing into realization of the ideal. Actually, no conception of authentic human development has been able to avoid this sort of foundation in theory. It is the inevitable shape of thought spurred by human aspiration. Here is a felicitous version of the theory, taken from the first chapter of Louis J. Halle's *Men and Nations* (Princeton University Press, 1962):

> In the individual the process of growing up is a process of discovering his individual identity, the kind of person he is to be and way of life proper to such a person. In the species the process of evolution has similar ends. That process has now been

completed by every surviving species except man alone. "Man," says Sir Julian Huxley, "has now become the sole representative of life in that progressive aspect and its sole trustee for any progress in the future." . . .

We men identify the ideas of propriety that each of us respectively entertains with the *Logos,* each of us basing his allegiance to them on the belief or assumption that they represent what is right in terms of what God or nature intended. "There is," says Cicero, "a true law—namely right reason—which is in accordance with nature, and is unchangeable and eternal. . . . It will not lay down one rule at Rome and another at Athens, nor will it be one rule today and another tomorrow. But there will be one law, eternal and unchangeable, binding at all times upon all peoples. . . . The man who will not obey it will abandon his better self and, in denying the true nature of man, will thereby suffer the severest penalties."

Cicero identified his own views of human propriety with this natural law on the assumption that the logic of his own mind was the "right reason" which corresponded to it. The difficulty is that the logic of other men's minds has represented "right reason" otherwise, thereby arriving at other views of human propriety. The *Logos* itself may be the same at Rome as at Athens, tomorrow as today; but the identification of it by the men of Rome has been different from the identification of it by the men of Athens, and the identification made by the men of one age has been abandoned in favor of another identification by the men of the next.

This experience suggests that, unlike Cicero, we should distinguish between the ideas that we have in our minds and the *Logos* itself. The Logos remains largely unknown: the ideas in our minds represent only our partial apprehension of it, or our supposition of what it must be. The idea of the Athenian (as described in Pericles' funeral oration), the idea of the Roman (as represented by Cincinnatus at the plough), the old Teutonic idea of the peaceable man—each of these may, by comparison with others, have points of greater and points of lesser correspondence to the original idea (i.e., the *Logos*). But they are not the original idea itself.

The dual philosophy holds that, implicit in the order of nature from the beginning, there has been an idea of man that represents what he is intended to be. We ought to model ourselves on it, as Cicero and others have affirmed. But we are able to apprehend it uncertainly at best and cannot agree on it. In our ignorance and disagreement, then, some of us follow Nietzsche, and some St. Francis, some Kipling and some Gandhi, some Tolstoy and some Hitler. Without knowledge of the ultimate, we are constrained to make do among conflicting opinions as best we can.

This may seem cold doctrine to men used to promises of certainty, but it has the warm enticements of impartial search for those who begin to live by its light. A small amount of truth makes a better human environment than the grandeur of false assumptions. And this much truth is not so slight, after all. It is the foundation of all nobility in human life.

REVIEW
THE SPIRIT OF SCIENCE

IT is a commonplace of modern criticism to notice the inability of any single man, however learned, to comment intelligibly on the meaning of the "knowledge" of our time. The only *general* comment one can make concerns this inaccessibility of an over-all view of the world and human experience, based upon the deliveries of contemporary science and scholarship. The effective generalist thinker of today, therefore, is a man who writes lucidly of this dilemma. He discusses, not the solution, but the plight.

This is a way of saying that modern knowledge has for generations been in the hands of specialists—men charged by other specialists who trained them to make no general statements and to think no general thoughts. And that the data of research have grown to such mountainous proportions that even specialists are no longer masters of their specialty—which undergoes frequent subdivision as a result—has long been known to scientists, librarians, and scholars. The latest serious comment on this broad problem was by John Platt in *The Step to Man* (Wiley, 1966). But the same point was made thirty years ago by the Harvard anthropologist, Clyde Kluckhohn. After reviewing the literature then current in his field, he said of hundreds of papers: "To suggest that something is theoretical is to suggest that it is slightly indecent." He argued:

> Science is on the quest of knowledge as well as of information, hence it is a form of intellectual cowardice to maintain or imply that we should stop with the accumulation of "facts" simply because their interpretation is fraught with difficulties and perils. . . . science must aim, at least, at theoretical principles which are more universal and which more nearly approach absolute validity. (*Philosophy of Science*, July, 1939.)

This was of course excellent advice. It was not followed, mainly, no doubt, because no one knew how, and practitioners in the sciences have been schooled in the idea that conceptions of general meaning can have no scientific standing. It takes a brilliant and creative man to integrate scientific thought with philosophic content, and even then his work is likely to be rejected by his colleagues. There are always more plodders than creative minds in any field of research, and the plodders set the pace. Eventually, they get to make the rules. The prevailing rule is to- keep science "value free."

Actually, very few scientists feel any responsibility except to their colleagues in a particular area of research, who will also judge them. This seems right and proper to a scientist. He has made no undertakings to assist the generalists in philosophical inquiry, and if synthesis is an unmanageable problem, it is not *his* problem. Science avoids the indefiniteness of subjective meaning by design.

Well, we know all this. We understand the scientist's caution, sensing that he is not likely to change his view save from a desperation that might abolish his faith in science itself. Yet one can now find here and there a scientist who has already felt this desperation and has been moved to just such apostacy, but with a rather remarkable switch: the discipline of mind acquired through the years of practice of science is not abandoned, but applied in a less confining way. The training in science is now turned to what Plato held to be its highest use—rigor of mind in pursuit of philosophic truth.

But these few pioneers have had little effect on institutional science and institutional education. The moral paralysis afflicting the universities of the present is directly traceable to the absence of significant generalist thinking, which turns out to be nobody's business in a scientific world.

Again, we know all this. Knowing it does not help us. Diagnosis brings mostly depression and sometimes abdication. Only an occasional classicist seems able to throw authentic light on the modern scene, and he does it by ignoring two thousand years of history—going back like William Arrowsmith to the Greeks. Dr.

Kluckhohn sensed a similar need when he observed, some eighteen years ago: "Plato was a wiser man than Aristotle because Plato realized the dynamic nature of events and therefore utilized the myth and other dramatic modes, whereas Aristotle looked upon experience as something almost static, something which could be described adequately by an architect's drawing."

Some kind of a "leap" is needed, yet it is difficult to say in what direction. Well, let us consult science at its best. When was science at its best?—not its technological best, but its humanistic best?

When did the spirit of science inspire the most confident generalist thinking? The answer seems easy—in the nineteenth century. Take for example three men who were being published a hundred years ago: W. E. H. Lecky, John W; Draper, and H. T. Buckle. No one would *dare* write, they way of savoring the "idea of progress"—now quite departed from this world—without soaking for a while in these nineteenth-century "greats." Today's young didn't lose the nineteenth-century dream; they never had it. Their parents participated only in its lunar reflection and last decline. Had there been any intrinsic moral energy in the twentieth-century ethos, World War I would have been enough to teach us that it was time to start something new, but we weren't Platonist enough to know what we lacked—a conception of life as moral drama. In place of the old moral ideas we had the works of Darwin, Marx, and Freud. These powerful thinkers wrote a great deal about the "natural forces" which shape human life, but they said practically nothing about how human beings must learn to shape themselves. So, for all their humanitarian concern, these men were not humanist thinkers. For them, men were not causes but effects. After their views were accepted, truth was subdivided into specialties. Thought about general questions died away.

But what did science mean to a man like Henry T. Buckle? It meant material progress, of course, and the rise of commerce and industry. But most of all it meant the exercise of individual opinion. It meant the liberation of man from the authority of oppressive institutions. Science had challenged theological authority, and Buckle saw its leaven as the very spirit of progress itself, working independently of social institutions, declaring itself in spite of them, defying the majesty of kings and the patchwork devices of legislators. For Buckle, science was the glory of the human mind in search of truth. It embodied the spirit of reason on the march. Scepticism and toleration are the hand-maidens of reason, and "the ultimate test of truth is individual judgment."

In an account of the rule of Charles II (in *History of Civilization in England*), Buckle notes that the Royal Society, which Charles incorporated, declared in its charter that its object was the extension of natural knowledge as opposed to that which is supernatural. Much hostility was directed toward the Society for this reason. Buckle comments:

> At present it is enough to say that the reactionary party, though led by an overwhelming majority of the clergy, was entirely defeated; as, indeed, was to be expected, seeing that their opponents had on their side nearly all the intellect of the country, and were moreover reinforced by such aid as the court could bestow. The progress was, in truth, so rapid, as to carry with it some of the ablest members even of the ecclesiastical profession; their love of knowledge proving too strong for the old traditions in which they had been bred.

Further, science had a built-in tendency to independence of mind:

> For in the first place, the mere habit of cultivating physical science taught men to require a severity of proof which it was soon found that the clergy were, in their own department, unable to supply. And, in the second place, the additions made to physical knowledge opened new fields of thought, and thus tended still further to divert attention from ecclesiastical topics. . . . It is evident that a nation perfectly ignorant of physical laws, will refer to supernatural causes all the phenomena by which it is surrounded. But so soon as natural science begins to do its work, there are introduced the elements of a

> great change. Each successive discovery, by ascertaining the law that governs certain events, deprives them of that apparent mystery in which they were formerly involved. . . . Hence it is that, supposing other things equal, the superstition of a nation must always bear an exact proportion to the extent of its physical knowledge.

It becomes apparent that the role of science, as understood by Buckle, was to bring emancipation of mind, freeing men from external authority of every sort. At its beginning, it absorbed the moral energy of liberal men of religion. Religious tolerance, hardly distinguishable today from mere indifference, was in the days of the early development of science a matter of life and death. So that the very meaning of science has changed greatly in the passage of a few hundred years. And the "physical knowledge" which Buckle regarded as the liberator from superstition is now little more than advanced technique in production and destruction.

Can the spirit of science now gain a new focus which will serve the longings of the present, as physical inquiry supported the aspirations of an earlier age? Should science now be totally redefined, according to the kind of knowledge that men can actually use in their lives?

COMMENTARY
MORALITY AND COMMON SENSE

RESPONSIBILITY, the underlying theme in both this week's lead article and the discussion in "Children" is too often defined in terms of relating to the conventional structures of society. It is not impossible, of course, to turn these structures to better purposes than the ones they are generally used for, but this takes unusual amounts of both imagination and persistence. The combination is rare in any generation.

Many of the rebellious young, it seems clear, feel responsibility to some kind of remote vision or dream. They may pursue this ideal with intelligent reality-testing, each step of the way, or they may drift, waiting for a miracle to happen. There will be casualties; but for some of them, the vision will eventually materialize into new ways of doing things—ways parents have not thought to be possible. Meanwhile, it is well to recognize that against the background of a society accustomed to working within rigid structures, almost *any* fine dream will seem ridiculously impractical.

In the present, we are habituated to practicing numerous technical efficiencies devised by extremely talented specialists. Virtue and sound character are regarded as present when young people meet the requirements of these efficiencies in a satisfactory way. Not even trying to meet them seems like a rejection of the normal responsibilities of growing up. It seems like a decision to flunk out of *life*.

So the rebellious young, it is said, exhibit no sense of responsibility. They may have a few good ideas, but these are all mixed up with impossible demands. They don't like the way older people do things, but they don't offer any "practical alternatives." Well, not even a man with Aladdin's lamp could satisfy some of their requests. Yet they want other things. Some of them, for example, would like to live quietly on an acre of land with a garden and a goat, even though small farm economics makes this very difficult. They also want world peace. If they can't have it, they say, they'll just walk out on the system. But that's ridiculous. You can't walk out on the system. There's no place to go. But they're doing it.

A great many older people think the system has to be kept going the way it is. A poor thing, they say, but our own. But it's also a very retarded thing, that system. A lot of its ends, or end-products, seem moronic. It doesn't respond to the most desperate appeals. It will take us more than thirty years, captains of the automotive industry tell us, to change to a kind of local transport that won't drown us in smog. What they mean is that they won't try to do it except in a business-as-usual style. But spending two billion a month on a completely unnecessary war—that's *different.* We are a nation of heroes with a great revolutionary tradition and unique skill in the techniques of war. The war is a *challenge* and of course we must meet it. It's our responsibility.

But a young man of draft age may look at the product instead of the obligations to efficient production when he decides where his responsibility lies. He may do the kind of thinking and acting that used to be called morality and common sense.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

AN UNWILLING MAGICIAN

EVERY parent practices sympathetic magic. You rub the sore place. You hug the crying child, making him realize that the whole world is not against him, and that parts of it don't have any sharp corners.

But the time soon comes when it may be a mistake to let the child think that you can fix everything up for him. Magic works for the regions where sympathy rules, but not in relation to emerging individuality. Not the removal of pain, but understanding it, is what a becoming human being needs to obtain. Magic, in this context, is always a power exercised by somebody else, and there is no worse deception of a human being than to encourage him to think that someone else can do for him what he will have to learn to do for himself.

A school is a place where people skilled in estimating the potentialities of self-reliance in the young load students with as much responsibility as they can carry. Too little will spoil them. Too much will turn them into failures or rebels. The means of engaging the young in individual responsibility is the central mystery of education. All things are added to those who gain individual responsibility. This is the only kingdom of heaven on earth.

An ignorant culture teaches the young to believe in the magic of the adult population. An intelligent culture dissipates this illusion as soon and as thoroughly as possible. It is pretty hard to find an example of an intelligent culture, by this definition, although there is a delicate web of recognition of its principles, spun by rare individuals who seem to occur randomly in very nearly all cultures. One such man was Wendell Johnson, who taught a course in general semantics at the University of Iowa until he died, a few years ago. *Etc.* for September, 1968, printed the last lecture of this course. It deals mostly with the stultifying effect of "belief in magic." (There may be a better use for this word, but Mr. Johnson's critical version has obvious validity.) In this context, belief in magic means simply trust in the power of others to solve our problems. Early in the lecture, he says:

> I think we all believe in magic. . . . What do I mean by a belief in magic? Well, let's be simple about it. When we were very young and something went wrong—when we broke a toy or bumped our heads—we learned that Daddy would fix it or Mother would kiss it away. . . . We were taught in this way to believe in magic, and the magician was father or mother.
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> Then we got measles or mumps. The doctor was called and he said we should be good and take pills and a cherry-flavored syrup. We weren't taught very much about what was going on inside our bodies. We weren't taught anything to speak of about the chemistry of the pills, the cherry-flavored syrup, and practically nothing about the relationship, if any, between these and the measles or the mumps. We were taught to take the pills and wait—and the magician was the doctor.

What Mr. Johnson found out as a teacher and a speech specialist who endeavored to help people recover from stuttering was that most people unfit themselves for human growth by continuing to believe in magic. Our scientific progress has apparently not interfered at all with this medieval attitude of mind. As Wendell Johnson says:

> In the curious and hazardous business of teaching that I am engaged in, the basic problem I have is that those who come to me to learn tend to react to me as if I were a magician. This is their disease, their maladjustment from which their other maladjustments in large measure, I think, develop. The gravest problem I have is that I might get caught in this delusion—as I think many do who work in this business—and begin to think myself a magician and to believe in my own magic.
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> How do I know that those who come to me believe in magic? They differ, of course; some believe in it very much and some only a little. I am talking about averages. How do I know they do? For one thing, I know by their expectations. You would be surprised how many students come to the University of Iowa simply because the Speech Clinic is here. They stutter, but they do not come to me

> until the last semester of their senior year, usually a month or two before they are about to go into the world to look for a job. Then they ask, "How soon can you cure me?"

He has dozens of illustrations of faith in professorial magic. Girls want to be "cured" of stuttering because they will be married in a month. Parents bring children to be cured a few weeks before they start going to school. They all could have come sooner. Why didn't they? They didn't think they needed to. Magic would fix things up.

There is other evidence of a common faith in quick and easy solutions:

> I suppose the question I am asked most often when people find out that my specialty is the study of stuttering is, "What about hypnotism? Can you cure stuttering with hypnotism?" The next most frequent question is, "What about the new drugs?"
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> What about hypnotism? Do you want to be hypnotized? Is this the way to maturity? You want to use my mind? You don't want to use yours? Hypnotism is, among other things, incantation. What goes on when your mind is filed away?

You might say that if people think that solutions for human problems can be obtained from hypnotism and drugs, they are filled with belief in a power outside themselves. Mr. Johnson says:

> What about the new drugs? These drugs are the cherry-flavored syrup—it is an elaborate form of Mother kissing your troubles away. What are you doing when you give a person who has some kind of trouble a happiness pill? Is it therapy, or is it postponing therapy? Does he become a more mature person able to deal with the world and with himself? Ought you never to be anxious about anything? Should you just go around happy? Is "happy" the word we should use here? Are these people happy—or just indifferent? I take it for a sign of a belief in magic when people ask for hypnotism or drugs.

Actually, the majority of the people who came to Wendell Johnson for help thought he was some kind of magician. They wanted to know about his "slick trick, the quick result, the secret." These people could all read and write, but they believed in magic:

> Over many years of practice, there are two things you get tremendously impressed by. One is the apparent belief on the part of many patients in incantation—the magic of the doctor's words. Hardly ever does anybody ask, "What did the doctor *mean?"* "What did he *know?"* "What did the doctor *say*?" Does the patient believe that he will get better because the doctor said words over him? He acts as if he does.

Wendell Johnson used general semantics as a tool for growth into maturity—which meant, for him, getting a mind of one's own. He concluded this lecture:

> If you want to be a parent, teacher, or doctor—or anyone who presumes to help others—an important question to ask yourself is, "What is help?" Help is something you do that enables others to become mature, to take responsibility for what they say and do and think. They can be themselves because they can take responsibility for themselves. If you are going to be a parent, teacher, or doctor, rather than something I would call a magician, this, so far as I know, is how you become one.

FRONTIERS

The Import of the Humanities

THE decline of the Humanities has been the subject of much academic anxiety in recent years. One effect of the decline, it is pointed out, has been an increasing shallowness in the nation's cultural life. And the public morality, while never exactly admirable, has become brutish by comparison with earlier periods of history.

Is there a simple way to illustrate the practical losses involved?

An article in a recent (Dec. 16) issue of the *New Leader* gives a clue. It is a surprisingly interesting discussion of the literary ideas of Milovan Djilas, the Jugoslavian Communist who was kept in prison for a number of years by Tito for daring to voice unwelcome political opinions. Released two years ago from a second term, Djilas talked with an American professor last January about his literary work. One learns, for example, that he wrote continuously while in prison. He put Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Serbian. Asked about the harsh cruelties described in his recent book, *The Leper and Other Stories*, he replied:

> First let me say that I am, in principle, an optimist about life. One has to be an optimist. This doesn't mean that good is gloriously triumphant, but that it wins in the end. By the narrowest of margins. As for the cruelty in these stories, such things did happen. The war was terrible and brutal, and there were many atrocities. Also, I think the fact that I wrote these stories in prison had a great influence on their mood. I wrote *Legends and Realities*—my publisher changed the title to *The Leper and Other Stories* because he thought it would sell better—I wrote Legends during my first imprisonment from 1956 to 1961. I was in solitary confinement for 20 months, it was very cold, and I wrote with gloves on my hands, on toilet paper. I didn't get writing paper for two years.
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> My first imprisonment was very difficult for me. When I was released I felt unsure of myself—I was afraid to walk across the street. I could not adapt myself to outside life. But during my second sentence [1962-66] I . . . yogaized myself *[Ja sam se* jogizirao*;* a Djilas neologism, I think], nothing bothered me, and when I got out of prison it was as though I had not been away a day.

The American professor, Thomas J. Butler, asked how he got his manuscripts out of jail. Djilas answered:

> They would never take them from me. After all, these men have some sense of honor. This is not the Soviet Union. What do you think of my writing?

Well, there is more on Djilas' ideas, but this is enough to bring home how little we know of men whose activity is reported to us in terms of ideological conflict. We know nothing of their inner lives, their *human* interests.

Humanistic studies behold human beings, giving reason to honor them for what they are, while the reports we are continuously fed about other people are concerned only with what they *do*, so that we can make practical decisions as to what to do, ourselves, about them—with them, or against them. The "objective" report on Frantz Fanon, for example, informs us that he celebrated violence and has helped many black men to justify their hostility toward the whites. A *humanistic* study of Fanon would show what he might have done under less bitterly coercive circumstances. It would generate human patience, and great respect for this man who hated violence all his life.

That all men have inner lives, that their high hopes and dreams are approximately the same, the world over; that recognition of these humanizing realities in all men is the first requisite for creating conditions under which such motives can begin to find practical expression—this is the import and importance of the Humanities.

To behold the human qualities of human beings, to recognize defeated longings, to know the loneliness and struggle of other men, and to sympathize and identify with this universal, tragic aspect of the human condition—may bring us, as we say, no "practical" advantage or guide. All it can do is determine what another man sees in your eyes when he looks at you, and you look at him.

The Humanities never speak of human beings as objects.

They offer nothing that is useful in making utilitarian decisions. The only war on which the Humanities can legitimately give a progress report is the war in the human breast.

A great deal is written, these days, about "African culture." Much of what is said smacks of "practical" purpose because it is said to relieve bad consciences. Americans and Europeans would like to atone for things white men have done to black people in the past. But there ought never to be a practical reason for the study of the humanities. The reason for the investigation of Indian religion, given by Sir William Jones in his introduction to the *Laws of Manu*—that the British were going to *trade* with these people, and had best understand their religion—was no reason at all. It blasphemed against the Humanities.

As to black culture—its importance is that it is human culture. In an unusual book on this subject, *Muntu* (Grove, 1961), by Janheinz Jahn, there are wonderful passages on African philosophy and art, understood, as they should be, as notable accomplishments of man:

> According to African philosophy man has, by the force of the word, dominion over "things"; he can change them, make them work for him, and command them. But to command things with words is to practice "magic." And to practice word magic is to write poetry. . . . That is why African poetry made such a world-wide impression the moment it was heard beyond the bounds of Africa. African poetry is never a game, never *l'art pour l'art*, never irresponsible. . . .
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> The force, responsibility, and commitment of the word and the awareness that the word alone alters the world; these are the characteristics of African culture. When, after the long agony, in the middle of this century, poets began to speak African words in European languages, the world began to listen. "Natives" who had been taught in missionary schools to repeat European words and descendants of the generations of slaves shipped to the New World who learned the words of Europe from their fathers and mothers, and who had scarcely heard a word of an African language, spoke the first *free* word that they were allowed to speak in their acquired or inherited European languages with that same degree of commitment proper to the word in African culture, and so transformed the European word into an African word. The Europeans could not recognize their own words, for they were different. At first it was only the reproach, the attack that was heard and this strange sound was interpreted in terms of the situation. "What did you expect when you took away the muzzle closing those black lips?" asked Sartre. "Did you think they would sing your praises? Those heads that our fathers ground into the dust, did you think when they raised themselves again, you would read adoration in their eyes?"

But the power of the word as used by African poets is nothing new. Jahn points out:

> For the central significance of the word in African culture is not a phenomenon of one particular time. It was always there, an age-old tradition which has recently—and here only is the "situation"—been carried on in European languages and will be carried on so long as and wherever African poetry makes its influence felt.

To be asked here is only the question of whether the practical history of Africa during recent centuries would have been different if Western man had devoted himself somewhat—only somewhat—to recognition of these riches of the African people.