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IS THERE A NATURAL RELIGION?

WE seem to be in the midst of the disintegration of the institution of the church. Hardly a month goes by without some new disclosure, usually by a clergyman, reporting its decline. There are numerous books and articles on the subject. The reasons given are various, but the chief assertion is that the churches are not meeting the needs of the people. Catholic priests say this also, adding their dislike of the authoritarianism of their institution. Many of them are leaving the priesthood and getting married. As for Protestants, in a current book, *Last Days of the Church,* David Poling, a Presbyterian minister, relates that more than a hundred clergymen have recently applied to one corporation alone for sales positions. In Mexico, a Benedictine Monastery at Cuernavaca has been outlawed by the Vatican for experimenting with psychoanalysis; however, all but three of the monks are continuing their work and association as a "fraternity" while the prior, who left the church, accuses the hierarchy of total ignorance of psychoanalysis, maintaining that the analyst is regarded as a rival of the priest. "I think," he said, "the church is going to disappear." All churches, he said, will eventually merge with mankind and the priest of tomorrow will be an "awakener" instead of a "protector" of conscience. This rejection of special authority is a familiar note in the declarations of disenchanted clerics everywhere. They find the burdens of institutional pretense to religious truth unbearable and some of them see in secular ethics the means of evenly distributed moral responsibility among the population at large.

Curiously, however, a contradictory tone of retained "authority" is apparent in some of these pronouncements. It is as though, in many cases, men of the cloth feel somehow qualified to manage or control the great religious abdications they find to be necessary. Their loss of faith seems now to define the limits of the possibility of human knowledge. If the church didn't know, then nobody can know. The meaning of the "death of God" is a theological mystery which they, little by little, will explain to the rest of us. They are, it seems, still specialists in these matters.

Could there, one wonders, be a wholly "natural" religion? We don't, of course, have any final certainty about what "natural" means, but the tendency of the word is to suggest the spontaneous, the first-hand, the autonomous and free. How, then, would natural religion differ significantly from the new movement in philosophy, called Phenomenology, which Viktor Frankl has defined as "an attempt to describe the way in which man understands himself, in which he interprets his own existence, far from preconceived patterns of interpretation and explanations such as are furnished by psychodynamic or socio-economic hypotheses"? Phenomenology relies on immediacy in knowing, putting aside theory and tradition.

Could, on the other hand, thought pursued independent of theory and tradition be called natural? Is it possible or even imaginable? Man is a social being and his birth into cultural idea-systems is as natural as his dependence on the physical environment. We soon see that "natural" is a word saturated with utopian longings—which are doubtless natural, too—and that its use isolates the ideal from the failing and perverted. And in what, we must ask, would *vision* consist, except for this capacity? Well, we have intuitions about the natural and we cannot afford to dispense with them, any more than we can do without other idealizing goals, such as transcendence. We communicate our ideas of value with these words, and every time, whether from religious or scientific authority, we try to limit what might be

with arguments from what is, we shape a revolutionary situation.

Perhaps we can say a little something about what natural religion would be like. In a society of good, kind, and wise men, there would probably be little or no talk of religion. We don't talk much about breathing. Even thinking about it seems to interfere. We just do it. A man doing an act of kindness doesn't say to himself, "I am being kind." Kindness isn't really kind until it's self-forgetful—no longer a matter of choice. For the kind man, kindness is existential and he doesn't need to preach to himself about it. It is part of the flow of his being. So the wisdom of the wise needs no institution to keep it going. We might call that the way and practice of natural religion.

But if a wise man comes among others who are not wise, he finds it necessary to externalize in some way certain of the meanings of wisdom and goodness. He has to do a kind of violence to what he knows—project it from the existential to the objective, communicable level. This is the highest sense of the meaning of art. It must employ some method of abstraction. The wise man knows that the description of a thing, the name of a thing, the picture of a thing, is never the same as the thing itself, and he has to explain this, too. More art. He makes the best description he can, adds all the pertinent *caveats* he can think of, hedges his abstractions with paradox; then, having done his best, he goes away.

Well, if people can't get at the thing itself, right away, they can at least admire and cherish the description, which is all they've got, and better, they say, than nothing at all. Converting the description into knowledge, the theory into practice, they say at the beginning, is the meaning of the religious life. They wish, of course, that the religious life were easier than it turns out to be; and some of them, being impatient, or lazy, figure out ways to make it easier; and then, to encourage use of those ways, they give out badges and banners and devise symbolic rewards for incentive. This doesn't work, but the experts on Religion and/or Progress almost never admit it; the rest is history.

The most discouraging thing about the history of the uses of religion is that, repeatedly, religious institutions have ignored, persecuted, repressed, and often destroyed wise men who practice natural religion. The institutions use the faith still remaining in the people to support them in these most unforgivable of crimes. But after a few centuries the betrayals become generally known and sometimes, in the fervor of reaction, the conclusion is drawn that the only way to protect the world against the abuses of religion is to declare that it doesn't exist. That happened to us in the eighteenth century. There can be no doubt about the fact that religion *shouldn't* exist in certain of the forms it took in the West. Yet the denial of transcendental reality—which seems the heart of natural religious inspiration—is as arbitrary as any other claim to knowing what is finally true and what is not. There are, in fact, *no* reliable insurance policies to protect us against the risks involved in the search for meaning. Only wisdom guards against risks, and getting wisdom always exposes us to risk. Some of the older or even "primitive" religious institutions seem to have maintained awareness of this.

It must be faced as a fact that some people—perhaps a great many—*want* the guidance of others in what they should believe as religious truth. Almost nothing can be done about this, although something can sometimes be done about the quality of the guidance they receive. At any rate, the historical record shows little evidence that really wise men were ever willing to mess with compromised institutional religion. They always start fresh. They leave the compromising to people who don't know any better and are disinclined to learn. Maybe a little progress can be made that way, but not much. The wise always choose to work in areas where some natural religion has a chance to flower. The great teachers of religion hardly ever addressed what they had to say to conventional institutions. They

spoke to *people*—people as individuals. A wise man, today, doesn't spend time worrying about the fortunes of the ecumenical movement. He knows that what is needed is not a brotherhood of religious clubs. The historic achievement of these clubs has been to keep men apart, and what is wanted is a brotherhood of *man*. If you need a club manager to tell you how to be a brother to others, there will be managers of other clubs who will be able to persuade you whom to kill when the time comes to save the world from evil.

But let us get back to natural religion, which may be the real hope of the world. It is born in individuals and in them alone. That it awakens in individuals does not make them separate from the world. That this may happen in particular places is not a revelation of the holiness of particular places but a sign of the inner connectedness of all places. In *The Long-Legged House* (Harcourt, 1969), Wendell Berry writes of the meaning to him of a particular place:

> Much of the interest and excitement that I have in my life now has come from the deepening, in the years since my return here, of my relation to this countryside that is my native place. For in spite of all that has happened to me in other places, the great change and the great possibility of change in my life has been in my sense of this place. The major difference is perhaps only that I have grown able to be wholeheartedly present here. I am able to sit and be quiet at the foot of some tree here in this woods along Camp Branch, and feel a deep peace, both in the place and in my awareness of it, that not too long ago I was not conscious of the possibility of. This peace is partly in being free of the suspicion that pursued me for most of my life, no matter where I was, that there was perhaps another place I *should* be, or would be happier or better in; it is partly in the increasingly articulate consciousness of being here, and of the significance and importance of being here.

What is it in the world that speaks to a man? What quiets the prowler in him and gives restless energy some proper work to do? How does a small, opaque spot on earth become a burnished mirror of the cosmos? For these things do happen, again and again. There are guide-lines of meaning that men find for themselves, bringing the capacity to endure, even to have a kind of peace in the presence of unanswered questions. The transcendental harmonies of the voice of nature seem a core reality of the discovery of natural religion. Yet a man must pluck the strings. He has to sound some of the notes himself. The truths which belong to natural religion are generated, and while universal, bear somewhere the private hallmark of a man.

Mr. Berry writes:

> After more than thirty years I have at last arrived at the candor necessary to stand on this part of the earth that is so full of my own history and so much damaged by it, and ask: What *is* this place? What is in it? What is its nature? How should men live in it? What must I do?
>
> I have not found the answers, though I believe that in partial and fragmentary ways they have begun to come to me. But the questions are more important than their answers. In the final sense they *have* no answers. They are like the questions—they are perhaps the same questions—that were the discipline of Job. They are a part of the necessary enactment of humility, teaching a man what his importance is, what his responsibility is, and what his place is, both on the earth and in the order of things. And though the answers must always come obscurely and in fragments, the questions must be persistently asked.

But religion, one might insist, ought to instruct us in the topography of the invisible universe and declare the immortality of the soul. Well, yes, religion will do this if we know what strings to pluck on its lyre. Yet instruction in matters concerning which we are ready to be satisfied with acceptable belief is always a two-way undertaking. It can make a man think he knows something about life. The confidence of Socrates in his immortality was grounded in foundations far superior to belief, and he hesitated to give it the form of words that men could turn into a doctrine, something they could repeat to others without knowing it first-hand for themselves. Well, perhaps he didn't know. Maybe not. But he had no fear of death. Ignorant or not of the truth about immortality, he lived *sub specie eternitati*s and he knew one thing that may

be more important—a man needs to be clear on what is worthy of eternal life before he subscribes to any belief about it. The Stoics, who admired Socrates, also understood the intoxications that grow out of too easy belief, and seemed indifferent to such questions. Yet Plato was not really neutral concerning the after-life; however, he put his views in myths that might stimulate the truth-earning talents of his readers. All this may go to show only that there are priorities involved in the construction of a natural religion, and that the wise try to provide clues to their natural order. The Buddha remained silent for cause when questions about the soul were put to him flatly, and Krishna, who was not lacking in doctrinal resources, on one occasion said to the querulous Arjuna:

> Death is certain to all things which are born, and rebirth to all mortals; wherefore it cloth not behoove thee to grieve about the inevitable. The antenatal state of beings is unknown; the middle state is evident, and their state after death is not to be discovered. What in this is there to lament?

Actually, we may even have some choices concerning these things. A man suspicious of doctrines could try to figure out how to produce in himself the intimations that visited Wordsworth, who found an inspiration of his own. Possibly a serious inquiry into natural religion would bring a preference for independent insight into the nature of enduring things. A man needs this in order to examine the already prepared schedules of post-mortem connections. Yet that such transitions and migrations have witnesses seems clear enough. The Books of the Dead were not compiled by inexperienced romancers, nor was the eternal return declared by Krishna an invention of the moment. What more than half the world has been convinced of does not become less likely from the neglect of those who have been busy with other things.

But Mr. Berry has more to say concerning his questions, which shows why independent insight can be neglected least of all:

> They are fertile questions. In their implications and effects, they are moral and aesthetic and, in the best and fullest sense, practical. They promise a relationship to the world that is decent and preserving.
>
> They are also, both in origin and effect, religious. I am uneasy with the term, for such religion as has been openly practiced in this part of the world has promoted and fed upon a destructive schism between body and soul, heaven and earth. It has encouraged people to believe that the world is of no importance, and that their only obligation in it is to submit to certain churchly formulas in order to get to heaven. And so the people who might have been expected to care most selflessly for the world have had their minds turned elsewhere—to a pursuit of "salvation" that was really only a form of gluttony and self-love, the desire to perpetuate their own small lives beyond the life of the world. The heaven-bent have abused the earth thoughtlessly, by inattention, and their negligence has permitted and encouraged others to abuse it deliberately. Once the creator was removed from creation, divinity became only a remote abstraction, a social weapon in the hands of religious institutions. This split in public values produced or was accompanied by, as it was bound to be, an equally artificial and ugly division in people's lives, so that a man, while pursuing heaven with the sublime appetite he thought of as his soul, could turn his heart against his neighbors and his hands against the world. For these reasons though I know that my questions *are* religious, I dislike having to *say* that they are.

Mr. Berry conveys in a very few words what some other writers have labored through volumes to propose—that the religious pretensions of the world are so grossly irreligious that saying a little something about the graces of natural religion becomes an embarrassment to a man. The fact is that the opinions of men who claim to have charge of religion are not of any religious importance. So natural religion, in order to remain natural, must begin by recognizing this. It must develop some means of distinguishing between religion and the "sociology" of religion. It will prove its identity by its rejections as much as by its affirmations. It will grow by finding better ways to formulate its questions, testing its wisdom by use of the

fragmentary answers that come through. Of these questions, again, Mr. Berry says:

> But when I ask them my aim is not primarily to get to heaven. Though heaven is certainly more important than the earth if all they say about it is true, it is still morally incidental to it and dependent on it, and I can only imagine it and desire it in terms of what I know of the earth. And so my questions do not aspire beyond the earth. They aspire *toward* it and *into* it. Perhaps they aspire *through* it. They are religious because they are asked at the limit of what I know; they acknowledge mystery and honor its presence in the creation; they are spoken in reverence for the order and grace that I see, and that I trust beyond my power to see.

Mr. Berry's approach to religion seems to get rid of a lot of nonsense. There is nothing here to suggest, for example, that religion produces a special kind of euphoria. He does not go on about how *good* he feels. He does not tell about his ecstasies. The main thing seems to be that a man can find out what he ought to do with his life, and there may be some contentment in this. One man's mode of discovery is not a specific model for anyone else. It would be pretty silly for anybody else to go down to the shores of the Kentucky river to find what Mr. Berry found there.

Yet it must be there, and some kind of hearkening must be involved. A common trouble with religion is the habit of identifying it as something "special" or apart, something that requires direction from experts. But a man's religion is more than picking up a pattern of something that already exists. All he can ever pick up is a few seeds. People say they are looking for "teachers." Will too much "looking around" take them far away from their best instructors?

Just possibly, a man begins to be religious only when he knows what he must do without anybody telling him anything. Having done it, he may then be ready to learn from other men—the men who know the difference between revealable and unrevealable truths.

REVIEW
FOR LACK OF A PROJECT

THE clarifies of the times, such as they are, seem poorly reflected in the arts. This may be because our clarifies are mainly critical. The sense of the evil and anachronism of war runs through modern society like a lancing neuralgia, leaving its residual awareness, an ever-present ache, to prejudice sensibility with guilt and unutterable longing. To develop an affirmative medium, the arts must begin to celebrate and praise, and where are themes which lend themselves to this usage? A blurred emotionalism seems to have overtaken even the best of writers. "Involvement" is now muddy introspection, as though a sense of organizing and illuminating purpose were inevitably the tool of "escape."

One looks in vain for heroic undertakings. War is obscene, conquest a brazen confidence game based on fear instead of credulity. Social reform seems an endless visitation of the lame and the halt by the blind. What poet could hail the triumphs of technology? The best men, if you look for them, are likely to be found nameless workers in vast infirmaries whose environs reach out to claim as tenants more and more of us all.

You would think, from much of the writing done today, that the organisms given us by nature to make contact with the world were specially invented playthings for people without serious work to do. The mass magazines try to convince us, editorially as well as in their more vital communications, that ostentation is the only important occupation in life. The past seems mainly a catalog of forgotten manners available for revival in fashions needing constant changes to keep the meaningless present alive. Style is no longer the form taken by vigor in living, but a nervous imitation of itself.

People adopt old barbarisms with an air of uncovering unique novelties, and practice a deliberate vulgarity because it includes expressions within the reach of people with no imagination. They call this fellowship with the common man.

It seems a great pity that we have had before us the depressing affairs of large totalitarian states during the years in which we have been going most furiously in this direction. For we could always say to ourselves, while reading of veteran leaders shamed and executed, fine old writers persecuted and ignored, neighboring nations invaded and controlled by ruthless military power, that *we* are better than *they* are. What sort of selves, one wonders, are served by this means of bolstering self-respect?

Lately we have been hearing that the cultural life of the Russian intelligentsia is now entirely underground. Typescripts are passed around. Mimeographed papers abound, just as they do in this country, but in Russia the contributors are probably the most mature and choice of all the writers in the land. One is justified by evidence of various sorts in believing that numerous quiet islands of humanist culture exist in Soviet Russia, generating attitudes and producing enthusiasms which will doubtless surface some day, perhaps in unexpected ways. It is not the intention, here, to suggest that a time will come when the people will rise and throw off the "Communist yoke." An economic system, after all, is only an economic system. It is neither the root of evil nor the cornucopia of good. It is only a mechanism for the satisfaction of human needs and the Russians will probably think it silly to disturb economic arrangements that serve them as well as any elaborate bureaucratic system can, and in a technologically advanced society the system is bound to be increasingly bureaucratic. What needs to be abandoned is the psychological sovereignty of *any kind* of economic system, and the Russians, being human, will doubtless get around to that. The Russians, that is, will get around to it if we let them alone long enough for normal intelligence to play a part in change.

To assume that no such similar occupation for normal intelligence is necessary in the United

States might be a big mistake. Increasingly, in recent years, observant critics have discerned parallels between the motivating values of all social systems which lay claim to doing basic human good through economic manipulations and achievements. Beset by the same fallacy, they inevitably move toward the same reliances and solutions, and while the distribution systems of the United States and Russia are *conceived* very differently—the concept of ownership being an important theoretical ethical dividing line—the noisy faith in technological progress and the benefits of power through economic strength is very much the same. And the resulting mutilations of the intellect and of human feelings are also much the same. In America, however, the distortions can be more openly recognized and discussed. In an article in the *Saturday Review* for June 7, Archibald MacLeish speaks of how "the progressive diminution of value put upon man" has been reflected in the arts:

> This diminishment of the idea of man has been a long time in progress. I will not claim for my generation [MacLeish fought in World War I] that we witnessed its beginning, I will assert only that we were the first to record it where alone it could be recorded. The arts with us became aware of a flatness of human life, a loss of depth as though a dimension had been dropped out of the world—as though our human shadows had deserted us. The great metaphor of the journey of mankind—Ulysses among the mysteries and monsters—reduced itself in our youth to that other Ulysses among the privies and pubs of Dublin.

And how easily the bright young men and women of America embraced the new anti-hero! Joyce had his skills and technical excellences, right enough, but what, after all, was he celebrating that ought to be remembered? With Joyce, we can say, if we wish, that expression still had the form and deliberation of art. Excellences, no more than vulgarisms, die a sudden death. After recalling that Ezra Pound said that *Ulysses* was a summary of pre-war Europe, that "Bloom very much *is* the mess," Mr. MacLeish continues:

> The arts, moreover, are honest witnesses in such matters not only when they achieve works of art as with Joyce and Eliot and frequently with Beckett. They testify even when they fail. The unpoem, the nonpainting of our era, the play that does not play, all bear their penny's worth of witness. The naked, half-embarrassed boy displaying his pudenda on an Off-Broadway stage is not an actor nor is his shivering gesture a dramatic act, but still he testifies. He is the last, sad, lost reincarnation of L. Bloom. . . .
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> What was imagined in Greece, re-imagined in the Renaissance, carried to a passion of pride in Europe of the Enlightenment and to a passion of hope in the Republic of the New World—John Adams' hope as well as Jefferson's and Whitman's; Lincoln's that he called "the last best hope"—all this grimaces in pitiful derision of itself in that nude, sad, shivering figure. And we see it or we hear about it and protest. But protest *what?* The nakedness! The morals of the playwright! Undoubtedly the playwright needs correction in his morals and above all in the practice of his art, but in his vision? His *perception?* Is he the first to see this? On the contrary, his most obvious failure as a playwright is precisely in the fact that he is merely one in a thronging, long contemporary line—a follower of fashion. He testifies as hundreds of his betters have been testifying now for years—for generations—near a century.

Now comes the paragraph which makes Mr. MacLeish's remarks memorable, for others have said what he has been saying up until now. He asks:

> Why have they so testified? They cannot tell you. The artist's business is to see and to show, not to answer why: to see as no one else can see, and to show as nothing else can show, but not to explain. He knows no more of explanation than any other. And yet *we* cannot help but wonder why—why the belief in man has foundered; why it has foundered *now*—precisely *now*—now at the moment of our greatest intellectual triumphs, our never equalled technological mastery, our electronic miracles. Why was man a wonder to the Greeks—to Sophocles of all the Greeks—when he could do little more than work a ship to the windward, ride a horse, and plow the earth, while now that he knows the whole of modern science he is a wonder to no one—certainly not to Sophocles' successors and least of all, in any case, to himself.

Man has suffered, Mr. MacLeish says—or seems to say—a displacement of his ends. His ends have been neglected, ridiculed, mocked at, ignored. Man *as man* doesn't do anything any more. Even in the activity he has become so good at—incalculably destructive war—the men don't fight: as Simone Weil said, they are *fought.* They are only *matériel.*

We can't leave the scene, desert a technological Circe who now rules everywhere. There are no new lands to emigrate to, they're all used up, and if people think that a burnt-out cinder 240,000 miles away holds any fresh promise for mankind, they are indeed lunatics. There is nothing left to do except to tame, somehow, the human wilderness, and it will probably have to be done inch by inch, or quarter section by quarter section, the way we did it before.

And if we would have arts worth looking at, books good to read, and music to temper and lift the feelings, we shall have to find projects that are worthy of human beings. Maybe they will be little projects pursued in isolation for quite a while. While the arts can survive only in a *milieu* of genuinely human achievement, there can be islands of decency and vision in a very cruel sea. Oases can be made to spring up in deserts and communities formed where some human independence can dwell. There is, however, one reality to be admitted and settled for. The many will never even attempt anything like this until pilot ventures are turned into going concerns by an enterprising few.

COMMENTARY
SOMETHING WORTH ARGUING ABOUT

PROF. ARTHUR JENSEN (see Frontiers) apparently believes that acceptance of what he regards as the decisive contribution of heredity to general intelligence, as measured by IQ tests, will improve the performance of the public school system. However, he makes it very plain that he is talking about statistical scores obtained from large populations and that these conclusions ought not to be applied to "individuals." Yet one result of his paper (which he certainly does not desire) will be to enable insecure people with tendencies in this direction to say, "The bell curve of general intelligence for *my* race is better than the bell curve of *those* people."

It is difficult to see how the spread of this idea will do anything to benefit education. Prof. Jensen thinks setting the educational sights lower will help in a practical way. But "practical," here, must also mean regarding teachers as having the same function as personnel managers who are not supposed to seek human enrichment and growth, but to find people for particular jobs.

Teachers, after all, don't teach bell curves. They teach individual children. And preoccupation with the "implications" of bell curves doesn't help them to teach. It has an opposite effect. William Glasser, who has observed its general influence on teachers, has this to say:

> The statistician who discovered and the psychologists who applied the normal curve evidently thought they had the Holy Grail of measurement in their grasp. They found that, *given certain limited descriptive conditions,* much human activity would roughly follow this normal distribution. . . . If one had to devise a method of measurement to reduce motivation in education, the normal curve would be it. Teachers need only make a superficial evaluation of their students. They can doggedly point to the student's place on the normal curve and say that the student has no basis for complaint because his grade is statistically correct. . . . You can't beat the normal curve, especially when it is applied in situations where statistically it is inapplicable, a common occurrence in education.

What do the failing schools really need? The key, Dr. Glasser says, after considerable experience, is "warm, personal involvement among the students and teachers." Schools where this comes slowly into being often make hash of preconceived theories of pupil limitation. It would be a fine thing if, instead of giving the publicity of outrage and controversy to Dr. Jensen's paper, concerned educators would spread the word of the common sense and vision in Dr. Glasser's book.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
BEHIND COMMON SENSE

THERE is wonderful common sense in *Between Parent and Child* (Avon paperback) by Haim G. Ginott. On the question of praising a child, Dr. Ginott distinguishes between showing appreciation of what he does and showering compliments on *him:*

> When a boy cleans up the yard, it is only natural to comment on how hard he has worked and on how good the yard looks. It is highly unrelated, and inappropriate, to tell how good he is. Words of praise should mirror for the child a realistic picture of his *accomplishments,* not a Madison Avenue image of his personality.
>
> The following example illustrates desirable praise: Jim, age eight, did a good job cleaning up the yard. He raked the leaves, removed the garbage, and rearranged the tools. Mother was impressed and expressed her appreciation of his efforts and achievements:
>
> *Mother:* The yard was so dirty, I didn't believe it could be cleaned up in one day.
>
> *Jim*: I did it!
>
> *Mother:* What a job!
>
> *Jim*: Yeah, it sure was.
>
> *Mother:* The yard is so clean now, it is a pleasure to look at it.
>
> *Jim*: It's nice.
>
> *Mother:* Thank you, son.
>
> *Jim* (with a mile-wide smile): You are welcome.
>
> Mother's words made Jim feel glad of his efforts and proud of his accomplishments. That evening he could not wait for his father to come home in order to show him the cleaned-up yard and again to feel within himself the pride of a task well done.
>
> In contrast, the following words of praise addressed to the child's personality are unhelpful:
>
> "You are such a wonderful child."
>
> "You are truly mother's little helper."
>
> "What would mother do without you?"
>
> Such comments may threaten a child and cause him anxiety. He may feel that he is far from being wonderful and that he is unable to live up to the label. . . .

The operative word here is *label.* There is something intrinsically offensive in labels for human beings. They have an externalizing effect, suggesting that all a person is stands revealed by the label. But a man—just as with a child—is far more than what is revealed. The quality of a human being is not in any particular quality or achievement, but in *potentiality.* A man is neither his acts nor is he more largely the pattern of his present acts, and to label him narrowly or broadly is to classify him as a "thing"—maybe a metaphysical or a moral thing, but still a thing. Dr. Ginott gives as reason for avoiding labels the psychological burdens it produces for the child labeled "good." But labels delimit as well as burden. There is a sense in which a human being is beyond good and evil. He is not the offprint of any of the moral qualities. *Arete* is more than any of its examples, and even a good man cannot be a wise man without an understanding of evil. The use of good and the avoidance of evil depend upon being above them.

Children defend themselves against labeling praise by distrusting it, often responding contradictorily to disprove it as quickly as they can. Adults have the same uneasiness when undiscriminating honors are heaped on them. Dr. Ginott gives the case of Robert Frost, who was made exceedingly nervous by extravagant praise, which "may mean you have to do something better next time, something which you fear you will fail."

It takes a man of balance and humor to hear himself highly praised and then, because he finds the situation ridiculous, deflate this artificial image of himself without being ungracious. We can think of one good illustration. A few years ago, at a dinner given in his honor, Robert M. Hutchins listened to a series of speeches in which admiration for his career was necessarily the sole topic. Then, rising to respond, he began: "If all

the nice things these people have been saying about me are true, I wonder why I've never been able to give up smoking!"

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Some years ago, it was suggested in a MANAS article that the Cuban rebellion against Batista was a past-due eighteenth-century revolution, with the result that radical pacifists in the United States, having behind them the hard lessons of disillusionment with technological imperatives and the horrors practiced by the advanced warfare state, found the drama of Castro's struggle and violent means difficult to fit in with *their* revolutionary necessities. Today, with the outbreak of student unrest all over the world, there is reason to recall a discussion of Latin American student radicalism which appeared in the *Saturday Review* for Aug. 17, 1968. The writer, Luigi Einaudi, began by pointing out the differences between universities in the United States and the corresponding institutions in Latin America. The latter are the inheritance of a colonial situation and, as Mr. Einaudi says, "have contributed more to the social exclusiveness of ruling elites than to the education of the new skilled masses of industrial society." The parallels between the student revolts in Latin America and those in the United States, he says, are rather in the youth and forms of activity of the demonstrators than in objectives sought. Specifically, there is this contrast:

> . . . whereas militant students in the United States and France are today questioning the value of imposing or even seeking a completely rational structure for society, Latin American students are still much closer to the optimism of the enlightenment. This difference can be seen most clearly in the case of the machine. In the United States, many sectors of the student movement associate the machine and the technological society it symbolizes as readily with evil as with good. On occasion, as in the case of the air we breathe and the computer cards of the Registrar's Office it seems as though everything has gone out of control and man is now servant to the machine. In Latin America, where the problems of under-development and of the burdens of human labor are still very much in evidence, the machine is still the symbol of hope and progress, of man's control over nature and his limitless future as it was for the older generation in the United States.

After reporting the "sudden explosion" in Latin America, during the past ten years, of new technical and agricultural schools, non-sectarian universities for the wealthy, and even private medical and business schools, Mr. Einaudi concludes:

> Latin American economics, though still hesitant and weak, tare gradually building an industrial sector and modern agriculture alongside their traditional rural backwaters. The future will be determined less by those who sit in cafes providing copy to American journalists than by the increasing number of students who are preparing themselves to fill technical and non-elite functions in a future society whose coming no one questions. Whether, once that is achieved, the problems of future generations of Latin American students will become more like ours remains to be seen.

FRONTIERS

A Defense of "X"

BOTH the general magazines and the journals of education will doubtless give much attention to the new challenge to the environmentalist school of human betterment which is embodied in the long paper (100 pages) by Arthur R. Jensen (University of California, Berkeley) in the winter 1969 *Harvard Educational Review*. Prof. Jensen champions heredity as a seriously neglected factor in human intelligence. He seems to know the literature—at least the literature on his side of the argument—and he sounds like a fair-minded man. Those who believe that a human being is nothing but what heredity and environment make him and for ethical reasons opt for environmental influence, since it seems subject to human control, will not rest until Prof. Jensen is properly "refuted." On the other hand, those who think of education as increasing man's potentialities for transcendence will be less concerned about doctrines of initial limitation which still appear to be, at this reading, incapable of final proof.

We shall leave the technical side of this argument to those better equipped to gather and present evidence at the specialist level involved, attempting, here, a brief justification of indifference to Prof. Jensen's claims. There seems no doubt that *something* is transmitted from generation to generation of human beings which plays *some* part in their quality, but the prevailing reality in a human being is almost certainly what Philip Ainsworth Means once called, in addition to heredity and environment, the *x* factor, an "unknown quantity, apparently psychological in kind." He added:

> If *x* be not the most conspicuous factor in the matter, it is certainly the most important, the most fate-laden. When, through a tardily completed understanding of the significance of life, we achieve mastery over *x*, then, and not until then, shall we cease to be a race of biped ants and, consummating our age-old desire, join the immortal gods. (*Ancient Civilizations of the Andes,* 1931.)

Prof. Jensen's immediate target is the compensatory education programs for deprived children, mainly black. He thinks that what can be done by these means is overestimated and gives his reasons, based on (in part) an analysis of what he regards as the misleading results of intelligence-testing. Apparently dramatic gains have various deflating explanations, an important consideration being the distinction between what he calls "associative learning" and "conceptual ability." The first kind of learning, which he names Level I, involves memory training, whereas the second, Level II, develops conceptual ability and is what he means by intelligence.

The application he would make of this view, for mass education, is that "associative learning" may be all that is needed for a lot of fairly good jobs:

> Before going overboard in deploring the fact that disadvantaged minority groups fail to clear many of the hurdles that are set up for certain jobs, we should determine whether the educational and mental test barriers that stand at the entrance to many of these employment opportunities are actually relevant. They may be relevant only in the correlational sense that the test predicts success on the job, in which case we should also know whether the test measures the ability actually required on the job or measures only characteristics that happen to be correlated with some third factor which is really essential for job performance. Changing people in terms of the really essential requirements of a given job may be much more feasible than trying to increase their abstract intelligence or level of performance in academic subjects so that they can pass irrelevant tests.

We should pause here to notice that education is unquestioningly identified by Prof. Jensen with qualifying people for employment. Earlier, he has shown that intelligence is what it takes to occupy a high-status position in our society. "Whether we like it or not," he says, "the educational system is one of society's most powerful mechanisms for sorting out children to assume different positions in the occupational hierarchy." He piles up authorities to confirm this view. One of them, O. D. Duncan, is quoted as follows:

> When psychologists came to propose operational counterparts to the action of intelligence or to devise measures thereof, they wittingly or unwittingly looked for indicators of capability to function in the system of key roles in the society. . . . Our argument tends to imply that a correlation between IQ and occupational achievement was more or less built into IQ tests, by virtue of the psychologists' implicit acceptance of the social standards of the general populace. Had the first IQ tests been devised in a hunting culture, "general intelligence" might well have turned out to involve visual acuity and running speed, rather than vocabulary and symbol manipulation. As it was, the concept of intelligence arose in a society where high status accrued to occupations involving the latter in large measure, so that what we now *mean* by intelligence is something like the probability of acceptable performance (given the opportunity) in occupations varying in social status.

Prof. Jensen makes no exaggerated claims for IQ tests. They measure, he says, what they test for, not the whole of human capability. They test for "the factor common to all tests of complex problem-solving." This is the capacity to abstract, to shape concepts and to manipulate them fruitfully—to use *science*, you could say. Prof. Jensen contends that some people don't learn to think conceptually as well as others. He gives the figures which make him think they can't. His practical proposal, at the end of his study, is the following:

> Educators would probably do better to concern themselves with teaching basic skills directly than with attempting to boost overall cognitive development. By the same token, they should deemphasize IQ tests as a means of assessing gains, and use mainly direct tests of the skills the instructional program is intended to inculcate. The techniques for raising intelligence per se, in the sense of *g* [general intelligence], probably lie more in the biological sciences than in psychology and education.

There is a sense in which this entire issue is distorted by a hot-house conception of intellectuality. The kind of intelligence Prof. Jensen is talking about is typified in the think-tanks around the country—manned by super-intellectuals who are specialists in systems analysis. They, at any rate, are regarded as the highest echelon of problem-solvers in the land. Of course, people who would like jobs which are filled according to criteria which have this model at their apex are not really comforted by being told that they have a lot of "soul." But much moral heat could be subtracted from the controversy if we could find more rational ways of admitting to ourselves that fitting into the vast educational service station that waits on modern technology does not qualify anybody as a first-class human being.

As for concentrating on "associative learning" in order to prepare people for jobs, we have done this before, with far less deliberation, and no consideration to race. Telling the story of the impact of the industrial revolution, Moholy-Nagy wrote in *Vision in Motion*:

> With growing industrial opportunities the entire educational system attained a vocational aspect. Schools lost sight of their best potential quality: universality. . . . A wholesale literacy seemed at first to open new and happy visions for everyone. But, paradoxically, the mass distribution of schooling accomplished a negative miracle. The speedy dispensation of education for *immediate use* . . . provided the masses with a quick training but threw overboard its purpose, namely, that "not knowledge but the power to *acquire* knowledge is the goal of education." (Pestalozzi.) Exactly this was circumvented. The masses received a training by verbalization, emphasizing the process of receiving instead of producing. The goal was not to express oneself, to think independently, and be alert, but to "apply" education for running machines according to instruction.

It seems a pity that Education is now deliberately thought of as having to be scaled to fit the needs of a deep crisis brought on by economic deprivation and the over-due obligations created by social injustice, and that nasty undertones of the "measurement of men" are the inevitable result. Meanwhile, what will a man who desperately needs a job say if you tell him that "true" education is not for "immediate use"?

The trouble is, if you object to such "practical" arguments you sound dreamy and

unrealistic, or indifferent to human welfare. Well, there are various ways to miss the point, and Prof. Jensen's critics, who will be many and articulate, may nonetheless fail to show how far off center this whole argument may be. An early sentence in his paper seems evidence of this distortion. "The interesting fact is that, despite all the criticisms that can easily be leveled at the educational system, the traditional forms of instruction have actually worked quite well for the majority of children." Somehow, we have gained another impression of "working well."

The bite of the heredity doctrine in this paper is Prof. Jensen's contention that while Level I (associative learning) is a pre-condition of operating at Level II (concept-formation and problem-solving), "certain neural structures must also be available for Level II abilities to develop, and these are conceived of as being different from the neural structures underlying Level I." His position: "The genetic factors involved in each of these types of ability are presumed to have become differentially distributed in the population as a function of social class, since Level II has been most important for scholastic performance under the traditional methods of instruction." What are the weaknesses of the paper? Apart from research method, they seem familiar ones. The evidence that "behavioral characteristics . . . can be manipulated by genetic selection" is taken from experiments with rats. The implication that eugenics is a science still seems without support,- and what Raymond Pearl wrote years ago still applies:

> In animal breeding it has been learned that the only reliable measure of genetic superiority is the progeny test—the test of quality of the offspring actually produced. Breeding in the light of this test may, and often does, lead to the rapid, sure, and permanent improvement of a strain of livestock. But when the results of human breeding are interpreted in the light of the clear principles of the progeny test the eugenic case does not fare so well. In absolute numbers the vast majority of the most superior people in the world's history have in fact been produced by mediocre or inferior forebears; and furthermore the admittedly most superior folk have in the main been singularly unfortunate in their progeny, again in absolute numbers.