

## THINKING AND WRITING

THE power of words is something to ponder. Words, whether spoken or written, have a shaping influence on the mind, and critical observers from Plato to Korzybski have warned of their confining effect. Buddhist philosophers went further, speaking of the delusions which arise from supposing that names and forms are "real." Much more recently, Buckminster Fuller pointed out that when you look at an object, you can see only the side you face—the world, in short, can never be seen in its entirety, and description of it, proceeding at the pedestrian pace of linear exposition, falsifies as it elaborates, the illusion becoming more persuasive as description grows increasingly precise. Michael Polanyi regarded this as a misuse of science, since unity of meaning is lost in the preoccupation with what is often excessive and irrelevant detail.

Concepts, apparently, anon save and anon damn. The concept of a thing, a situation, a process, while providing a sense of what it represents, at the same time strips its rounded actuality to the bare bones of definition. Yet if we are to speak of these matters, our only weapon of defense against the reductive tendency of concepts is another concept—embodying criticism in words and ideas. . . . But then, all that is accounted communicable knowledge has the form of concepts. Feeling may be more direct, more powerful than ideas, yet we must use concepts to say what we think or know about feelings. The matter is puzzling.

Thought, Ludwig Wittgenstein suggested, is little more than a play of words, and he concluded that most statements about "reality" are really statements about language. Plato might have agreed, although he thought that the spoken word gives better clues to reality than anything written down. In any event, it seems clear that speech or

language is at once both access and barrier to knowledge.

Hoping to establish some order in this disputed area, Plotinus proposed three degrees or stages of the approach to truth: Opinion, Science, and Illumination. We know more or less what these terms represent. Opinion is hardly more than hearsay, largely determining the common state of mind. Opinion is what we take in without thinking much about it. Science is the selected opinion which survives verifying tests of one sort or another. Science is what we believe there is good reason to believe is true. Illumination is the state or condition of *knowing*—an achievement which we feel is real, but which hardly survives the mutilations of definition.

Using the categories of Plotinus, we could say that the world conducts its affairs mostly in the light of opinion. Since there are comparatively few scientists and practically no identifiable illuminated people, the pressure of opinion rules wherever numbers control decision. But the actual processes of human affairs are still more confused by the frequent pretense of opinion to science, and by the claim of science to have replaced illumination. Meanwhile, those who have only opinions sometimes insist that their views are inspired by illumination, with the result that the very idea of illumination loses its peculiar or sacred meaning.

These categories also suffer distortion from what we speak of as institutionalization. Politics, you could say, is the institutionalization of popular opinion. The university is the institutionalization of science, and the church is the institutionalization of illumination. These institutionalized centers wield different sorts of authority, often borrowing from one another to strengthen their influence and power. The

political institution, for example, employs many scientists as technicians and advisers. In an age when science is widely respected, politicians assert that they are going to conduct public affairs under the guidance of the latest scientific knowledge. Often, at the same time, they give the impression that their acts are sanctified by religious illumination. Although there are commonly many unresolved conflicts between scientific and religious assumptions, politicians readily exploit the prestige of both, since the only negotiable currency of politics is opinion, and contradictory beliefs are its natural ingredients.

Yet it should be recognized that underneath these confusingly mixed classes of attitudes and beliefs are genuine human hopes and aspirations—longings to know more about the world and about self. Analysis often neglects these human realities for the reason that, as qualifications, they blur the impact of criticism. Yet analysis by itself puts thought in a sterile condition. Fortunately, human hope and will are continually reborn, and from effective critical analysis there then arises a kind of self-consciousness which resolves to make new beginnings.

At times of a general intensification of such awakenings, historical epochs are born. The Reformation, for example, was a vast, collective decision about the source of Illumination. The Bible remained as Divine Revelation, but interpretation of its *meaning* was no longer the function of a single institution. After Martin Luther, interpretation belonged to individuals and groups of individuals relying on inward inspiration. Every man his own priest was a Lutheran slogan. The result was the beginning of freedom of religion and of fragmentation of religious institutions. A great release of energy in thought was one valuable result.

Another far-reaching change which took place more recently—we are still in the midst of it—has been the gradual realization that what we speak of as scientific knowledge is really a large collection of intellectual abstractions which have

the special feature of giving manipulative control over certain natural forces which are not understood in themselves, but which we are able to use. Science, moreover, has its own built-in uncertainties, as shown by Werner Heisenberg and Kurt Gödel, and must periodically make a new start by adding fresh postulates as the foundation of analysis. Revolutions in the scientific outlook produce a restructuring of the assumptions of science, involving both breakdowns and new developments. Sometimes such changes are accomplished with considerable rapidity, as in the "jump," as John Platt has put it, "within a generation or so from the Ptolemaic system to the Copernican system in astronomy, or the jump in 1895 to 1925 from classical mechanics to quantum mechanics, in the field of physics."

Gone, today, is the placid security of a universe which, once described in scientific terms, will stay that way while additions are made to our knowledge of it. Subtler approaches to understanding are now appearing. Much more subjective conceptions of reality are displacing old ideas, and during this time of transition we find that we have as much to unlearn as we have to learn, and that the old "knowledge" gets in the way. So regarded, science is transformed into a department of intellectual progress. It is no longer a body of natural truth about the world.

Science, we now know, is subject to cyclic relativities, and is held together as a discipline more by the integrities and motives of scientists than by the finality of its conclusions. The conclusions are *not* final, and perhaps will never be. In some measure this converts science into a particular kind of language, subject to general judgments about language. Indeed, as Jacob Bronowski showed in his memorable *American Scholar* (Spring, 1966) article on science, whenever the logic of a scientific system breaks down, it becomes necessary to formulate new assumptions or postulates. How is this done? By, he said, an "act of self-reference." This was virtually anticipated by Einstein in his declaration,

many years ago, that the perceptions of the senses afford no foundation for generalized scientific knowledge. In the *Journal of the Franklin Institute* for March, 1936, he wrote:

Physics constitutes a logical system of thought which is in a state of evolution, and whose basis cannot be obtained through distillation by any inductive method from the experiences lived through, but which can only be attained by free invention. The justification (truth content) of the system rests in the proof of usefulness of the resulting theorems on the basis of sense experiences, where the relations of the latter to the former can be comprehended only intuitively.

For a general account of how great changes in science take place, Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (MIT Press) is almost certainly the best book to consult.

Two broad results are now coming out of the present revisions in the idea of science and scientific knowledge. One is that the best books on science are quite evidently turning philosophical. Indeed, the sciences are slowly rejoining the Humanities. The basis for this self-reform is set forth in Michael Polanyi's classic, *Personal Knowledge*, but the general change is spontaneous and universal, being too pervasive to be attributed to any one writer or book. In the sciences concerned with man, the pioneer was the leading humanistic psychologist, Abraham Maslow.

The other result is the movement toward disorder and unaccountability in thought. Whenever there is a decisive shift or breakdown in dominant cultural authority—and science has been for generations the principal external authority in our society—the wrong sort of anarchism breaks out. Expressions of paranoid opinion, if they have enough drama, gain wide followings. Sectarian religion springs up in dozens of tropical growths. The same thing happens in art when the Academy loses its standing, issuing in bold declarations that there are *no* standards. Whirl, in short, is again king.

How can all this mess be coped with intelligently?

Actually, it *can't* be coped with intelligently unless there has been some individual preparation for cultural disorder and breakdown. This preparation is the discipline of the mind which Socrates taught and exemplified so well. If you read the Platonic Dialogues, particularly the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*, it becomes evident that Socrates got himself ready to cope with disorder by pursuing a personal quest for knowledge which precipitated a prior disorder in his own mind. He spent his life getting rid of the illusions upon which most men relied, and he made his search for stable principles the source of independent equilibrium. This needs particular emphasis: He relied, not on his conclusions, which he gave no final certainty, but on the spirit and energy and integrity of the *search*. There are dangers in this—unavoidable dangers—but not so serious in their consequences as remaining unprepared for the changes that eventually overtake society from without.

Some passages from the late Hannah Arendt's paper in *Social Research* (Autumn, 1971) provides a helpful account of both the hazards and the fruits of the Socratic vocation:

The quest for meaning, which relentlessly dissolves and examines anew all accepted doctrines and rules, can at every moment turn against itself, as it were, produce a reversal of the old values, and declare these as "new values." This, to an extent, is what Nietzsche did when he reversed Platonism forgetting that a reversed Plato is still Plato, or what Marx did when he turned Hegel upside down, producing a strictly Hegelian system of history in the process. Such negative results of thinking will then be used as sleepily, with the same unthinking routine, as the old values; the moment they are applied to the realm of human affairs, it is as though they had never gone through the thinking process. What we commonly call nihilism—and are tempted to date historically decry politically, and ascribe to thinkers who dare to think "dangerous thoughts"—is actually a danger inherent in the thinking activity itself. There are no dangerous thoughts; thinking itself is dangerous, but nihilism is not its product. Nihilism is

but the other side of conventionalism, its creed consists of negations of the current, so-called positive values to which it remains bound. All critical examinations must go through a stage of at least hypothetically negating accepted opinions and "values" by finding out their implications and tacit assumptions, and in this sense nihilism may be seen as an ever-present danger of thinking. But this danger does not arise out of the Socratic conviction that the unexamined life is not worth living but on the contrary, out of the desire to find results which would make further thinking unnecessary. Thinking is equally dangerous to all creeds and, by itself, does not bring forth any new creed.

The trouble with living by prevailing opinion, Hannah Arendt points out, is that people, not having to think, get used to never making up their own minds. A population so conditioned to the rule of opinion can be led around by the nose by skillful demagogues. "How easy it was," Hannah Arendt observes, "for the totalitarian rulers to reverse the basic commandments of Western morality—"Thou shalt not kill" in the case of Hitler's Germany, 'Thou shalt not bear false testimony against thy neighbor' in the case of Stalin's Russia."

To try to prepare yourself in Socratic fashion is one thing; to set out to help or persuade others to prepare themselves is another:

The Athenians told him that thinking was subversive, that the wind of thought was a hurricane which sweeps away all the established signs by which men orient themselves in the world; it brings disorder into the cities and it confuses the citizens, especially the young ones. And though Socrates denies that thinking corrupts, he did not pretend that it improves, and though he declared that "no greater good has ever befallen" the polls than what he was doing, he did not pretend that he started his career as a philosopher in order to become such a great benefactor. If "an unexamined life is not worth living," then thinking accompanies living when it concerns itself with such concepts as justice, happiness, temperance, pleasure, with words for invisible things which language has offered us to express the meaning of whatever happens in life and occurs to us while we are alive.

Socrates called this quest for meaning *eros*, a kind of love which is primarily a need—it desires what it has not—and which is the only matter he

pretends to be an expert in. Men are in love with wisdom and do philosophy (*philosophhein*) because they are not wise, just as they love beauty and do beauty as it were (*philokalein*, as Pericles called it) because they are not beautiful. Love, by desiring what is not there, establishes a relationship with it. . .

Where does this leave us with respect to our problem—inability or refusal to think and the capacity of doing evil? We are left with the conclusion that only people filled with this *eros*, this desiring love of wisdom, beauty, and justice, are capable of thought—that is, we are left with Plato's "noble nature" as a prerequisite for thinking.

We may not be content to be left in this condition, which seems just about opposite to the promises of the confident "faith" religions, and opposite, also, to brash Enlightenment expectations—that an ever-growing body of certified scientific knowledge will eventually tell us all that we need to know. The traditional religion virtually discarded the requirement of "nobility," explaining that since we were "born in sin," we can't really help ourselves, but that, for Believers, Christ will wash all sins away. The champions of objective scientific knowledge offered what seemed an even more attractive package—they abolished sin and promised a this-world paradise.

But what if Socrates and Plato were right? What if Michael Polanyi, repeating them many centuries later, is also right? And what if that distinguished philosopher and teacher, Ortega y Gasset, was right in maintaining that only determined pursuers of knowledge will ever get it?

Plato feared as subversive, not the asking of questions, but the failure to ask them. This was his reason for opposing the mimetic poets, the shapers of traditional culture, the repeaters of conventional beliefs. Plato was against any influence which discouraged independent inquiry. He did not believe in the unexamined idea any more than the unexamined life. Curiously, while Plato wrote a great many books, he was especially skeptical of the written word. Books, he maintained, could hardly avoid spreading mere

opinion, often in the guise of either science or illumination. He preferred dialogue, formed of living speech, in which vital interchange permits the continuous evolution of meaning, without ever reaching supposed finality. To illustrate the dangers in written words, in the *Phaedrus* Plato has Socrates tell a story of the encounter between Thoth and the chief Egyptian god, Ammon. Seeking the god's approval, Thoth described the various arts he had invented in order to teach them to mankind:

On each art, we are told, Ammon had plenty of views both for and against; it would take too long to give them in detail. But when it came to writing Thoth said, "Here, O king, is a branch of learning that will make the people of Egypt wiser and improve their memories; my discovery provides a recipe for memory and wisdom." But the king answered and said, "O man full of arts, to one it is given to create the things of art, and to another to judge what measure of harm and of profit they have for those that shall employ them. And so it is that you, by reason of your tender regard for the writing that is your offspring, have declared the very opposite of its true effect. If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. What you have discovered is a recipe not for memory, but for reminder. And it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance, for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing, and as men filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom, they will be a burden to their fellows."

While Plato recognized the subordinate value of books, he explained that they could be no more than clues to knowledge, a form of expression that should never be regarded more seriously than as a kind of "play," a suggestion of possibilities.

This is very like the conclusion reached by one of our best contemporary writers. No artist of merit, Joyce Carol Oates said recently (*Psychology Today*, May, 1973), pretends to disclose "truth." The artist offers only "works of art that are autobiographical statements of a

hypothetical, reality-testing nature, which they submit with varying degrees of confidence to the judgment of their culture." Then Miss Oates adds:

The greatness of a work of art usually blinds us to the fact that it is a hypothetical statement about reality—a kind of massive, joyful experiment done with words, and submitted to one's peers for judgment. Even if the work is not released for publication, as in the case of Kafka's uncompleted novels it is still, in my opinion, a form of inquiry, a testing of certain propositions by the author.

This, then, is the appropriate valuation to be placed on a book—any book. They are only suggestions, modes of inquiry. They come to the reader from the outside, not from within himself, where all truth, in whatever small amount, is encountered. The written word has had a long cycle of pretension, and is at last being reduced to normal size.

## *REVIEW*

### UNDERSTANDING NEUROSIS

MANY of the books about mental and emotional disorders make the healthy-minded reader "uncomfortable." They seem to be more about ills and oddities than about human beings. Often their content establishes a very low rating for the possibilities of the human race. They provide little sense of what "health" is, except for the unspecified condition that might result if all disorders were miraculously removed.

There are notable exceptions, however, of which works by Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Carl Rogers, and A. H. Maslow would be examples. And now we have for review another exception: *Neurosis and Treatment—a Holistic Theory* (Viking paperback, \$3.75) by Andras Angyal. Dr. Angyal, who died more than ten years ago, was a Hungarian psychiatrist who lectured at Harvard and Brandeis and was resident director of research at Worcester State Hospital, Massachusetts. This book, made up of papers not published during his lifetime, is edited by Eugenia Hanfmann and Richard M. Jones. In a foreword, Abraham Maslow strongly recommends it to "the nonprofessional reader who wishes to learn more about human nature." So do we.

Some reflection about the indistinct area of psychological health might serve as an approach to the merit of this book. We live at a time when an enormous number of "facts" about human behavior have been abstracted, noted, and recorded; we have virtually endless description of what is regarded as abnormal or sick. All this is probably in response to the urgent "psychologism" of the age; we have, as Jung observed years ago, an intense interest in understanding "ourselves." But this vast collection of facts is usually presented to us in a framework of analytical recounting. The facts represent the accumulated result of what in *The Tacit Dimension* Michael Polanyi calls "unbridled lucidity"—a profusion of detail not successfully related to central meaning.

This is almost certainly what makes us uncomfortable—too much on the phenomena of being sick, not enough about getting well. A special temperament is required to become fascinated with all these ills, to find fulfillment in cataloguing them. The "therapy," then, is itself a symptom of the sickness of the age.

Since the *good* books on this subject are few, it is natural to wonder why they are good. What is in them that isn't in the other books?

Well, one guess would be that if some of the old philosophers—say, Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus—were reborn and obliged to function in our society, having to make do with the resources of Western thought and culture, they might choose to work in the area where practical philosophy is needed the most—in the everyday lives of human beings. They would use the structure of psychoanalysis, the findings of academic psychology, and the reports of the various clinical schools as raw material for helping people to think about themselves constructively. But instead of being "foreground," all this would be absorbed and become background—as it should, once it is placed and understood.

The absorption process is something like the way in which the effective humanistic thinkers of our time are slowly sifting and ordering the masses of information accumulated by technological science; once *assimilated*, it loses foreground importance, permitting renewed emphasis on fundamental meanings and themes. Yet the details cannot be evaded—they represent the peculiar psycho-moral confrontation of the age. We have to cope with all this stuff because it has become an appendage-like part of our lives.

Reading Marcus Aurelius can be a deeply satisfying activity. But finding the insights of Marcus Aurelius tucked away in the implications of something said by Andras Angyal is exciting—as though, at last, we are getting *on top* of the mass of detail the bookkeepers of psychological science have collected. He seems a man

determined to make sense out of it all—a sense that people of normal intelligence can grasp.

What, for example, does Dr. Angyal have to say about neurosis?

I know [he writes] that it is considered adequate in some quarters to conceive of a neurosis as a focal emotional disturbance in an otherwise healthy organism, like a bad spot in an otherwise good apple. From such a conception it would follow that some procedure comparable to surgery could eliminate the trouble; something has to be taken out, but the rest is all right.

He rejects this view entirely. Neurosis is actually a way of life, a system of existence. It is deeply embedded in the system of healthy activity, twisting natural processes into self-destructive action. "The neurotic way of life tends to appropriate all the primary faculties and functions of the person and to use them in accordance with its own system principle." Normal living uses the same faculties and powers, but in behalf of goals which lead to human fulfillment. Any instrument or capacity can be used in either way. This duality of meaning in behavior results in a universal ambiguity which affects virtually all our behavior and also our language. Dr. Angyal says:

An instructive example of both the dual and plural meanings of an attitude for which our language has but one name is afforded by the analysis of curiosity as it appears in healthy and unhealthy contexts. Normal curiosity arises from the person's wish to broaden out, to learn about people and things for the sake of increased mastery and participation. Neurotic curiosity has entirely different goals and an entirely different emotional coloring. In one of its forms it is born of a feeling of helplessness, one feels that one does not know how to live and looks enviously at others who seem to be "successful" at it. The purpose of watching them is to find out "how they do it" in order to copy their methods; one does this without any reference to one's own inclinations and competencies, so that the borrowed methods remain inorganic accretions. Success is viewed as being achieved by some trick, not as growing out of one's total conduct of life. Much of the popular "adjustment" literature capitalizes on this neurotic trait; one reads it not to straighten out one's life but to learn the "techniques." The goal of curiosity in this

pattern is the appropriation of something belonging to others; it is a method of stealing and one goes about it stealthily. It may well happen that the patient attempts to "steal" something which he actually possesses without knowing it, but this does not change the meaning of the act.

The remedy for neurosis is the replacement of neurotic motives with healthy ones. Neurosis is an affliction of motive; recovery involves self-understanding, or being able to distinguish between healthy and neurotic motives, which are often intertwined. Dr. Angyal tells about a brilliant graduate student who suddenly found himself unable to prepare for his graduate examination. Investigation showed that he mainly wanted to please his father, do what was "expected" of him. While his achievements in his branch of science had been notable, they now seemed to him "selfish." Meanwhile his father remained indifferent.

As he [the student] put it, "It was all for *me*." The examination in which he had to meet the expectations of his teachers in order to obtain the degree, a confirmation of his "right to success," brought the issue to a head. The study block, while neurotically self-destructive, was expressive of healthy impulses as well. It reintroduced an element of uncertainty into a pattern that had become excessively centered on establishing certainty, and it covertly expressed his wish to give up his too willful control which permitted no sharing with others.

Another case of mixed motives:

Let us picture a patient who is considered a very warmhearted person, and let us say that in analysis he discovers in himself a strong tendency to exploit people. He can then say, "My kindness is phony; when I get a person well buttered up I exploit him. I have no real warmth." He may, however, be wrong. His warmth may not be a pretense but a genuine trait that has developed within the context of the health system but is used at times within a neurotic context, for a neurotic purpose. Figuratively speaking, it is unlawfully appropriated by the competing organization and perverted to its uses.

The chapter, "Reviving the Pattern of Health," will probably be of most interest to the general reader. While the language is that of the therapeutic encounter, it amounts to a discussion

of what it means to be a teacher. The subtleties and full responsibilities of the teacher are described. What he is can be seen to be far more important than what he does.

Early in this chapter Dr. Angyal speaks of the weakness which results from lack of conceptual clarity concerning what is to be encouraged and fostered. Here the idea of the "real self" emerges in functional terms—as a development consistent "with the principle of confident self-acceptance that governs the basic system of health." He continues:

The healthy pattern must be sought and uncovered, not within the pseudo-normal surface personality where its vestiges serve merely to disguise the neurotic assumptions, but within the depth of neurosis itself. Only when the destructive and self-destructive attitudes . . . can themselves be shown to be distortions of healthy trends is contact with the real self established; one gets to it by going through the neurotic attitudes, not around them. Tracing manifest disturbances to the unacceptable motives generated within the neurotic framework takes one only halfway toward understanding them. This partial understanding fills the person with shame and guilt, which in themselves are not conducive to change. Real understanding traces the neurotic manifestation all the way back to its healthy sources. When the neurosis is discovered to be an approximation or a twisted version of health, the patient's outlook becomes hopeful.

Health, as understood by Andras Angyal, is the useful moral life.



## *COMMENTARY*

### A QUESTION OF MORALS

SEVEN years ago Harvard University was the scene of an unexpected revolt which ended in violence. The students decided to put an end to ROTC on the campus and to protest the Harvard Corporation's plans for construction that would dispossess poor people of their homes. The events of April, 1969, shattered the Harvard myth that "it couldn't happen here." Given the extreme provocation of the Vietnam war and Harvard's institutional lethargy, the explosion may have been inevitable, but at the time its most impressive aspect—from what we read—seemed to be "the struggle of the faculty to honor the moral feelings of the students and at the same time to preserve the dignities of a place of learning and intellectual inquiry."

For this reason some recent observations on the student revolt at Harvard seem worth repeating. They are by Alexander Gerschenkron, who teaches economics, and appear in the (Fall, 1974) *Dædalus* quoted in this week's "Children."

In those years students spoke about everything. What mattered were questions of morals. The brain became much less important than other organs. "I know it must be so," a student used to say, "I feel it in my guts." Those attitudes were deplorable, but perhaps not surprising. As Karl Marx the scholar, used to say, "It is peculiar to petty bourgeoisie to see every problem as a moral problem." And there was of course, G. B. Shaw's Stephen Undershaft, the unsmarter son of the smart Andrew Undershaft, the youngster who knew nothing of, and was not interested in, any field of study, but being an English gentleman knew one thing extremely well: the difference between right and wrong. The students in those happy years also were great specialists in knowing the difference between right and wrong.

Prof. Gerschenkron was born in Russia some seventy years ago and was educated in Europe, making his perspective of value to American readers:

Things can change fast in any direction—for good and evil, for better and for worse. And evil it

was that Harvard experienced in her years of turmoil. The great American universities and Harvard, still leading among them, are the finest flower of American civilization. Only someone who was put through the mill of a continental university in Europe can fully appreciate the freedoms of Harvard: The free access to one of the very great libraries in the world, the habit of classroom discussion, the tutorials, the generous office hours, the great care taken to give graduate students an early experience in teaching. All this is as downright uncontinental as can be. To have attacked and to have sought to wreck this University, including its library, was evil, and nothing is so evil as corruption of the best.

What now seems most striking about the whole affair is the defenselessness of a place of higher learning against attack—a vulnerability largely created by the virtues Prof. Gerschenkron describes.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves SOMETHING NOT YET TRTED

TWO or three essays on the needs and future of higher education in America would make a reasonable supply of material for brief review—but eighty-five of them—the eighty-five contributions to the Fall 1974 and Winter 1975 issues of *Daedalus*, collectively titled "American Higher Education Toward an Uncertain Future"—are overwhelmingly too much. These weighty volumes seem an open exhibition of the familiar American conceit—if enough is Good, more is Better.

What else is wrong with these volumes? Nothing that isn't also wrong with even very good expression of criticism, these days. They contain often excellent discussions by thoughtful teachers concerning what higher education ought to attempt, but they are vaguely addressed to institutions, not to individual readers. Some of the writers, perhaps, would say that they were *asked* to address the higher educational establishment—where, presumably, higher education goes on. But the most useful essays in these volumes are the ones which deliberately look beyond the imposing structures of Academia and raise fundamental questions. Robert Coles, for example, begins his contribution:

After surveying Hegel's massive philosophical effort, Kierkegaard was moved to observe that everything had been taken care of—except, perhaps, for the question of how a person actually is to live his or her life. . . . For Kierkegaard, quite simply, Hegel had become taken in by his own mind's brazen willingness to account for everything past, present, and future. The result, an astonishing irony: abstraction piled on abstraction, all in the name of understanding the world, and yet no real wisdom for anyone to take into consideration from sunrise to sunset or, for that matter, in bed at night.

This is the need Dr. Coles considers musingly, starting with the self-examination of a student who went to Mississippi in the summer of 1964, then turning to James Agee's reflections about what he saw in Alabama, and then to what George Orwell learned from being "down and out" in London and

Paris, and what Simone Weil found out by working on the line in a Renault factory.

He ends with the comments of a working youth who had no opportunity to go to college:

What more can I ask of life? A lot, I guess. I guess I should ask everything of life. I guess I should look deep into myself and the world, and find some answers. Maybe one day I will. But you can't just blame your job if you're not happy, or if you're becoming a superficial person—you know, skin deep. That's what kills me about these college students, some of them—my cousin included. They shout at the police, and the government, and they say the colleges aren't any good either (my cousin says), because they don't teach you about the real world, only about this one's books and someone else's books. Well, what's all this business about "the real world"? I'm in the real world, so are they, so is everyone.

Didn't he know enough to complain about his own deprived existence—or did he know too much? Commenting, Dr. Coles says:

No matter that one moment he is by implication a caustic critic of university life and the next, also by implication, an equally determined critic of those who want their four years at college to be a mixture of all sorts of things (formal learning, experience at work, social action—and as he once put it at his most sardonic, "a few months of saving the world"). What he compels us to think about is at once concrete and abstract: what, specifically, if anything, can our colleges do to satisfy the hunger some of the students feel—a thirst for action to express their ethical concerns? The young factory worker has no answer to that problem, only his obvious mixed feelings; but I am not sure his state of mind is any less clear and precise than that of many who have a right to claim themselves vastly more knowing about university matters.

Dr. Coles goes on, attempting to do justice to the puzzles of human differences, least of all claiming to have answers. But his essay does set the problem in a way that hardly occurs to the other contributors.

Reading all these "critiques" has one unfortunate effect. They tend to make you forget that a young man or woman with a little extra money can sign up for a course in history or biology or literature and start a program of reading and study, often under the

guidance of a good teacher, and learn a great deal of what he wants to know. The colleges and state universities make this possible, if you know what you want to know. Some of them may be great places, if you know what is there for you; if you've already obtained, somehow or other, what Dr. Coles is talking about.

Most of these essays are about institutions in themselves, and what can or should be expected of them. It is really easy to attack present-day institutions. Besides their usefulness they are, so to say, avid fault-collectors and fault-reinforcers. People hide behind them, use them to avoid responsibility. This tends to make institutions into dehumanizing, tyrannical places. At the same time it is possible to imagine institutions which unify excellences, mirror vision, and focus inspiration.

There are various collective values which are able to give institutions an extraordinary atmosphere—devotion to truth, regard for the common good, devotion to the defenseless young. Good public places can result from such qualities. The Founding Fathers recognized this. They spoke of the need to create "self-regenerating" institutions, but no one has been able to figure out how to do it. Like human bodies, institutions grow old and die. When dead they need to be buried. But they also need to be reborn.

Institutions are social necessities. They can be made to focus good and compensate for weakness. It follows, inevitably, that they can also be made to repress good and perpetuate weakness. Virtues never rule except in the presence of flaws. Actually, it is difficult to say what a "perfect" institution would be like—probably, only a contradiction in terms. To be perfect, an institution would have to be devised and conducted by perfect human beings, but perfect human beings wouldn't *need* any institutions. So there you are.

This may be a time for starting new institutions, but to do it in full recognition that they are monuments to human fallibility. There will have to be great determination to keep them flexible, even fragile, and responsive to the informed intelligence that shaped them.

The *Dædalus* contribution by Thomas Boylston Adams strikes a note complementary to the one by Dr. Coles. Mr. Adams speaks of the moral decay reflected in present-day public institutions:

The two most discouraging documents of our time are the Pentagon Papers and the transcripts of the White House tapes. One would like to toss them into the trash with other bad novels. Such things cannot be real. But they are real. This is the record of college men at work. This is decision-making at the top. The law has become a school of chicanery. Cheating, apparently cultivated in college and maybe learned there, is perfected by daily practice. Skillful lying is a virtue, especially when used on a great scale. Government is a field for mere gamesmanship. An advanced degree from a graduate school turns out to be a certificate of blindness. Higher education has taught no values. Nothing has been learned but the vulgarity of price.

We know, Mr. Adams says, how to turn out technicians, but "can we educate ordinary people and, or importantly, the most ingenious and clever people to be virtuous?"

Plato's question is still the most important one to ask, and still the most difficult to answer.

Nobody has ever defined virtue to the complete satisfaction of anybody else, and certainly nobody has ever devised a formula for creating it. Aristotle had a reputation as a teacher, but as a pupil Alexander of Macedon must be considered no more than a partial success. Seneca had worse luck with Nero. And in American folklore and history no one stands higher than Abraham Lincoln who taught himself.

It might have been better if *Dædalus* had just published two papers—the one by Robert Coles and the one by Mr. Adams; while various other papers are good, too, their impact is lost in the crowd of words.

Toward the end of his discussion Mr. Adams says:

We need to admit our failure. We have created a truly wondrous technological society. And we do not know what to do with it. We have not even half tried to tackle the critical task of developing citizens of virtue. . . .

## *FRONTIERS*

### Peace and Justice

WORKING for peace and opposing war sounds simple enough, but anyone who takes this idea seriously is sooner or later confronted by perplexing issues. Can one work effectively for peace without reaching a firm decision about the sort of social system that would make war more unlikely, or even impossible? This is a question that comes up again and again.

The question arises because there is no established certainty about how people change in their attitudes toward war and peace. This is a problem of moral education, and it is basically mysterious. Socrates had no answer to it, Buber had no answer to it, and those who think they have answers are probably self-deceived. All men desire peace, said Thomas à Kempis; but few men, he went on, desire those things that make for peace. What, then, are the things that make for peace?

There are one or two political ideologies which claim to know something about the things which make for peace. This means that they have adopted a theory of human nature—about human attitudes and how they are shaped. The socialist ideology broadly suggests that people are shaped by their environment: establish an environment filled with constructive influences and good decisions by individuals will naturally result. There is some truth in this view—obviously; but now another problem emerges: *How* do you establish a better environment? The design and creation of an environment requires extraordinary cooperation among large numbers of people, and when you speak of large numbers you are including people who haven't even considered the idea of social change; indeed, you are including people who are suspicious of anyone who proposes changes. There is, then, the problem of determining the *right* changes, and then the problem of getting others to agree that they are right. These difficulties suggest that a wariness

toward advocates of change has some justification. Meanwhile, a righteous eagerness for change often leads to careless neglect of such problems and somewhat cavalier indifference toward the uncertainties felt by a great many people who have read some history.

There is of course historical evidence on both sides of the argument, but this evidence is far from being decisive. If you read again the big debate between Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke, your heart may be with Paine, but your head cannot ignore Burke. There are many versions of this continuing dilemma. Seeing the form it takes for the peace movement seems of the first importance; not giving in to the longing to sweep the dilemma out of sight may be equally important.

A recent and well-presented recurrence of this argument appears in the *WRL News* for November-December in an interchange between Roy Kepler, a Bay Area (California) member of the War Resisters League, and David McReynolds, field secretary of the League. Kepler's position, one could say, represents the determination to work for peace in a way that does not commit anyone to problematic social solutions. He says:

I am skeptical as to the validity of the programs of the socialist and anarchist "revolutionaries" and ask if the diminishing impact of the WRL doesn't lie, at least in part, in the doctrinaire jargon and rhetoric of the self-styled pacifist leftists?

Even assuming the programs to be logically valid, it seems unlikely that the present clichés of socialist pacifism have much meaning or attraction for any significant number of Americans. It seems unlikely to me that a tiny minority can bring salvation to a majority until or unless the majority begins to significantly understand and accept some of the basic assumptions of the minority. . . .

I want the WRL to address itself not only to the left but also to the millions upon millions of ordinary people who don't even recognize the categories. . . .

Commenting as a socialist, David McReynolds says:

I see a real war waged against the poor, the elderly, the blacks and the Puerto Ricans. Unemployment is—in my mind—direct violence. Men commit suicide because they can't care for their families. Women go mad because they are driven from the job market. Blacks engage in crime because they cannot find work and must find a way to eat. Thousands and tens of thousands walk the streets of New York as broken people, alcoholics, addicts, prostitutes—because they cannot find work. That violence is as real to me as napalm falling on Vietnam—and it is much closer. It is on my block, my street.

Will socialism put an end to all this? Yes, one might say, if you look at recent reports of what the Chinese have accomplished in about twenty-five years. But not without violence and war. Large questions of conformity and thought-control are also involved. . . . The issue comes down to an admission that Pacifism is not a "total" reform and does not, or should not, pretend to be. Its recognition of the prime and extreme evil of killing in military operations does not disclose the secrets of altering human nature. It stands rather for an outlook which is deeply consistent with certain fundamental changes in human nature.

It might be remembered, here, that a kind of socialism is implied or explicit in the teachings of great religious reformers. Jesus proposed that humans should have all things common, and the ethics of Buddhism suggest a non-possessiveness that can be read as meaning the same thing. So, you could call Jesus and Buddha socialists. But if you do, it becomes obligatory to point out that the change of heart, of attitude and values, comes *first* in these religious philosophies.

The ideal social conditions envisioned in this sort of socialist community or society are a result of self-reform, not the outcome of a successful ideological achievement of political power.

Most of the arguments of present-day political socialism rest upon two things: a recitation of evils and a vision of goals. The evils are obvious, the goals desirable, but the means of reaching them stubbornly obscure. Nor is it at all certain that the definition of goals mainly in terms

of economic justice is the best way to identify the ends of human life. Economic justice may be a result, not a cause, of the good life. Justice, here, hardly means more than "plenty," and having plenty is by no means associated in our experience with a high degree of human development. The din of argument about economic conditions shuts out awareness of the priorities of desirable social change.

Since all these uncertainties are involved in political solutions, Roy Kepler's concern for not involving work for peace in such obscurities has its justification.

Was not Gandhi "political"? Well, he was and he was not. No conventional ideology can lay claim to Gandhi's allegiance. He was a kind of socialist, but he believed that state power is worse than capitalist power. He advocated trusteeship of wealth. After the liberation of India he wanted to dissolve the Congress Party. Study of Gandhi on this recurring question may be the best way to keep the issue open and alive.