

THE STUDY OF MAN

IDEALLY, the study of man is a dialectical investigation, playing back and forth between man as subject and man as object. We look at other people, watch what they do, hear what they say, report on their history, describe the patterns of their acts, both singly and in groups, and then interpret what we have seen by what we as individuals feel, and from introspection think we know, about being human, attempting explanations of why people think and act as they do. But all this is ineffectual unless prepared for by *impartial* studies of why we think and act as we do.

The science of this inquiry is commonly held to be bounded by the accuracy of the account of men as objects. Among the humanistic psychologists, however, a new view of the study of man is emerging. It proposes that while accurate knowledge of men as subjects may be difficult to obtain, it is neither impossible nor negligible, and that, conceivably, rules may be developed for getting it. This amounts to a contention that the primary assumptions of philosophy can be put into recognizable terms and examined and elucidated in a scientific spirit. It argues that something more can be done about knowing ourselves from the inside than waiting and hoping for flashes of intuition.

The humanistic psychologists are probably right, although in what sense or *how* they are right remains to be seen. In their work, as in all other studies of human beings, the most precious element still seems to arise from intuitive insights, although these may be slowly gaining a natural order or hierarchy. Yet there is a sense in which the representation of subjective knowledge can never *be* that knowledge, and the best psychologists are always men who protect their readers from supposing that it is. In short, the second-degree objectivity which may be possible

for introspective psychology is a very touchy affair.

It is in this projective character of all statements about the self—whose root is *never* projected—that we encounter the basic difficulty in the study of man. And the greater the sensibility of the writer, the more wary he is of going on record about the self. If he sets out to tell you something about it, first he writes a preface; then he writes a second preface; and then, as his words shrivel visibly before him, he compromises by letting a little objectivity into the picture. He wants to have a few things to say. Then he hurries on to a conclusion and finishes with relief.

Art and history are legitimate sources of objectivity for assistance in meeting this problem. For there are carriers of human subjectivity in art and history that can be drawn upon to space out the dialectic. Would we be deeply affected by Hamlet's soliloquies without the play? There isn't much scenery in Plato's dialogues, yet what there is, plus the activity of people talking to one another, certainly helps. These things preoccupy the human hunger for the object, the longing for concrete events and other what-where-how appetites that get in the way of the pure idea.

Usually the people who work in art and history in order to pursue the study of man don't tell you what they are doing. Some of them don't quite realize what they are doing, and others know that talking about it might be a distraction from getting it done. But the good ones all do it—they are intensely concerned with the study of man. Their work, that is, has a revelatory subjective counterpoint, and it is this second line of discourse that grips and holds our attention. Why, for example, is Hannah Arendt so highly valued as a writer about history and human affairs? Because

of the underlying theme which lights up how people feel as they act out their lives. The reader can reality-test, himself, on every page. People come alive when you begin to comprehend them as selves. The wiry strength of Dr. Arendt's work is in this awareness of subjects, and its excitement grows out of the contradictory claims of subjectivity in relation to familiar ideas based on objective chronicles. The French Resistance fighters, for example, *felt* free and exhilarated while working in the underground against the Nazis; then, after the war was over, they felt confined, useless, unengaged. Evidently, the occupation of France by the Germans produced an effect—for these men—the reverse of what a military occupation is supposed to do. So you have to say that they weren't really defeated. In short, the dialectic between the subjective and the objective aspects of human life spins out endless ambiguity, and while you are following its flights and assaults on normal expectation, you are saying to yourself, this writer *understands*.

There are of course more direct approaches, involving disclosure by the writer of what he is doing. In the *Meno*, Socrates will allow no evasion of his questions about virtue. He batters at Meno. Don't give me nice little illustrations, he says. Tell me what virtue *is*! I want to hear about it in its purity! And Meno says to him:

Socrates, even before I met you they told me that in plain truth you are a perplexed man yourself and reduce others to perplexity. At this moment I feel you are exercising magic and witchcraft upon me and positively laying me under your spell until I am just a mass of helplessness. If I may be flippant, I think that not only in outward appearance but in other respects as well you are exactly like the flat sting ray that one meets in the sea. Whenever anyone comes into contact with it, it numbs him, and that is the sort of thing that you seem to be doing to me now. My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to reply to you. Yet I have spoken about virtue hundreds of times, held forth on the subject in front of large audiences, and very well too, or so I thought. Now I can't even say what it is. In my opinion you are well advised not to leave Athens and live abroad. If you behaved like this as a foreigner in

another country, you would most likely be arrested as a wizard.

So, besides the intrinsic difficulty encountered by Meno there are other reasons for not making a direct attack on the secrets of subjectivity. One finds an intermediate and more protected approach in art.

Yet if anyone pursues the study of man, he has an obligation to distinguish somewhere, to someone, what he is really about. And there is art, too, in this. Sooner or later it becomes plain in Plato that being a man means finding out how virtue and knowledge are identical and that both can be taught—in a manner of speaking—and it means, as well, learning the obstacles to this task of self-realization. But putting the mission of man in a sentence or two is practically useless. Anyone who reads it might say, "Oh *that!* I've heard that before. What's for dinner?"

So serious men who pursue the study of man are filled with reticence. But since they don't care about anything else they saturate everything they write with intimations. They compose Eloise-Abelard letters to themselves. They experiment with solvents that at the right moment might suddenly dissolve objectivity, bringing the reader into one of the vestibules of the Holy Grail—or where he can see its gleam through the trees. Incantations? Of course. What other magic of importance is there? A spell is a means of closing, temporarily, the gap between symbol and reality. You say the word and the thing happens. Or it will happen, some day, somehow. In the Beginning was the Word.

There are rational spells called analogues. An analogue is used for its inductive power. If you can't talk about the thing itself, you talk about its analogues, to create a field. If you can't see an electron you watch its path in a cloud chamber. If you can't tell what man is, you illustrate by some analogy the choices he has of being or not being a man. You use every trick you can think of. But you try not to vulgarize the matter. You let the analogues break down. A man who wants to cash

in on analogues alone is an image-maker, a contributor to the pulp literature of philosophy. He practices a betraying art, which in time conjures up scavengers and iconoclasts.

You can see why the champions of Objectivity get so impatient and irritated. You are asking them to understand *good taste* in the name of truth. Naturally, they send you to those tribal encyclopedias which prove that taste is only the *mores*. Fact is what people do, not what they dream. Grammar is what people say. Taste is not important. You can't calibrate it. Don't pollute science with nonsense.

So you have to be cat-footed if you are going to study man and still outwit people like that. They'll stone you with precise definitions. They'll tell you about their cast-iron defenses and guarantees. They won't allow you any credit. They are responsible for guiding the human race and you are a bad risk. They have the authority of people who know how to make atom bombs. They are the practical men. Oh sure.

Let us look at some of the analogies provided by Ortega in one of his direct approaches to the study of man. In *Man and Crisis* he writes:

If history, which is the science of human lives, were or could be exact, it would mean that men were flints, stones, physiochemical bodies, and nothing else. But then one would have neither history nor physics, for stones, more fortunate, if you like, do not have to create science in order to be what they are, namely, stones. On the other hand man is a most strange entity who, in order to be what he is, needs first to find out what he is; needs, whether he will or no, to ask himself what are the things around him and what, there in the midst of them, is he. For it is this which really differentiates man from a stone, and not that man has understanding while the stone lacks it. We can imagine a very intelligent stone; but as the inner being of the stone is given it already made, once and for all, and it is required to make no decision on the subject, it has no need, in order to go on being a stone, to pose and pose again the problem of self, asking itself "What must I do now?" or, which is the same thing, "What must I be?" Tossed into the air, without need to ask itself anything, the stone which we are imagining will fall toward the center of the

earth. Its intelligence, even if existent, forms no part of its being, does not intervene in it, but would be an extrinsic and superfluous addition.

The essence of man, on the other hand, lies in the fact that he has no choice but to force himself to know, to build a science, good or bad, in order to resolve the problem of his own being and toward this end the problem of what are the things among which he must inexorably have that being. This—that he needs to know, that whether he likes it or not, he needs to work to the best of his intellectual means—is undoubtedly what constitutes the human condition.

There are moments when Ortega is as unequivocal as Socrates in the *Theatetus* as to what must be done:

Men, every man, must at every moment be deciding for the next moment what he is going to do, what he is going to be. This decision only he can make; it is not transferable, no one can substitute for me in the task of deciding for myself, in deciding my life. When I put myself in another's hands, it is I who have decided and who go on deciding he will direct me; thus I do not transfer the decision itself, but merely its mechanism. . . .

Man is the hunger to be—the absolute passionate desire to be, to subsist—and the desire to be as he is, to realize his most highly individual "I." . . . Whence it happens that in order to live man needs, whether he likes it or not, to form convictions for himself—or, what is the same thing, to live is to react against the basic insecurity of life by constructing the security of a world, by believing that the world is like this or like that so that we may direct our lives with due regard for it, so that in view of it we may live. . . .

Remember that life is no other thing than what we have to do and have to make, since we must make ourselves in making it. . . .

I take note of a stone and manage not to trip against it, or else I make use of it by sitting down on it. But the stone takes no note of me. Also I take my neighbor into account as I do the stone; but unlike the stone, my neighbor also takes me into account. Not only does he exist for me, but I exist for him. This is a most peculiar coexistence because it is mutual: when I see a stone, I see only a stone—but when I see my neighbor, another man, I not only see him, but also I see that he sees me—that is to say, in another man I always meet myself and myself is reflected in him. . . . To the degree that I know that I am in you, my being, my presence, my existing, is fused with

yours; and in that exact degree I feel that I do not stand alone, that within myself I am not alone, but that I am with you, that I have my being with you; in short, that I am accompanied or am in a society—my living is a living with.

Well, these are the bare bones of Ortega's study of man, torn from the organism of his thought, from his play.

There will be those who find things wrong with Ortega. And someone is sure to point out that consciousness in man, like intelligence in the stone, stands condemned by Behavioristic psychology as "an extrinsic and superfluous addition." It would be most remarkable if these people found nothing wrong with Ortega. It is their principle to reject the discoveries and mandates of subjectivity. But we are not, in this consideration of the subjective being of man, asking help from infallible people whose certainty comes from remaining stationary. A science—in this case of introspection—with only low probability in it, as Maslow points out, is still a science. Every science has an embryo stage. And in the land of the prone, a man who can crawl just a little bit is a priceless companion. On the whole, we find insight about the subjective reality in man only in the work of a very few people, and only when they are at the top of their game. It is not against science to accept the reality of these conditions.

The most important thing about these insights is that you can apply them. A man can say to himself, I am going to start thinking about what I must do next, no matter what. I am going to separate my idea of what I am and ought to do from the pattern of acts I have been shaped by until now—that I have lived by without ever asking myself whether I can develop a pattern of my own. A man can do this with what Socrates says, with what Ortega says, and with what some other people say.

We began this discussion having in mind some reflections on an article by John Lear in the Sept. 7 *Saturday Review*. It is called "Public

Policy and the Study of Man." Well, you can read the article over and over again and not make much sense of it. Naturally, it is about organizations. "Public" things are all highly organized. These organizations are talking about getting ready to study man for practical purposes. The article reports on committees and consultants and budgets and proposals "to bring social science knowledge to bear on complex problems which the physical and life sciences have proved unable to solve alone." There is some agreement that there ought to be a forum for exploring "the theoretical and methodological problems of applying knowledge to social action," with the hope of finding "an alternative to the frustrating process of analyzing social and economic crises after they have taken their toll."

Nobody is in a hurry. Eleven years ago, when the *SR* inquired into "The Knowledge We Need Most," the "social scientists," as Mr. Lear recalls, "were split three ways" on what they ought to be doing. One faction held that scientists should pursue research and not get mixed up in "partisan political issues." Another group said that they might advise after establishing "solid documentation," but feared that "not very much was available." The third group felt that if trained specialists didn't enter into public affairs, unqualified people would bend the conclusions of social science to their purposes, and mess things up. Mr. Lear now says that a current report, after three years of study by a panel brought together by the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council, offers some "deliberately vague" recommendations and summarizes the present resources and situation of the social sciences:

Much of the knowledge of the behavioral sciences is fragmented, and much based on limited verification. Many propositions are only approximate explanations of complex social and behavioral phenomena. The behavioral sciences are, nonetheless, an important source of information, analysis, and explanation about group and individual behavior, and thus an essential and increasingly relevant instrument of modern government. The gaps

between the present level of knowledge in the behavioral sciences and the needs of government, moreover, do not deny the relevance of existing knowledge to government programs or the opportunities to gain new understanding of social . . . phenomena.

Well, it was probably ingenuous to expect that anything at all would be said about Man in this article. The Government has its own subjective priorities to consider, and the obligations of power are at the top of the list. As the report of the National Academy panel puts it, "a low value has been placed on research as an instrument of planning in the Department of State." Yet one keeps hoping, and the heading looked pretty good.

Must we conclude that Government is the sort of enterprise which always outlaws the subjective element in the Study of Man?

Plato's *Republic* appears to be an attempt to answer this question. Could there be an "objective" study to develop an answer? How do you get an incommensurable like subjectivity into an objective study? Staughton Lynd, for example, is a historian who studies the past with a view to finding out what might be better courses of action in the future, and this suffuses what he writes with humane value-judgment; and it also points to possible avenues of action—and for him personally, actual paths of action. Yet a critic said recently (*August Commentary*):

Lynd's position cannot be universalized without a lapse into barbarism. Let him and like-minded scholars stay in the present; but also let others continue the effort of communication with what has gone before. . . . Citizenship means action; action means partiality and some degree of fanaticism.

How can a commitment to truth survive very much active citizenship?

This is one horn of the dilemma; the other is in Prof. Lynd's reply:

What needs to be demolished is the assumption that concern for living human beings is inherently in conflict with concern to know the truth.

This is the dilemma behind the ambivalence of social scientists in relation to what they ought to do. It can't be resolved without another kind of light.

Behind the dilemma are certain broad assumptions. Prof. Lynd's critic, for example, seems to think that significant "action" is inevitably action in the political arena, where all human decisions, as we know by clear, objective determination, are distorted by the requirements of party or mass support. On the other hand, a universalizing of Mr. Lynd's position would not lead to barbarism, but to its opposite. For this would mean that people would be concerned as individuals to know the truth before they act—bringing an alchemical change, indeed, to the data of social science. The only way to reconcile the conflict between subjective attitudes and objective findings is to maintain an uninterrupted dialectic between them. A serious study of man would soon detect this simple truth.

REVIEW

WEAVING A DESTINY

THE GREAT MEADOW, by Elizabeth Madox Roberts, is a story of the settling of Kentucky during the Revolutionary War. First published in 1930 by Viking, it is now available in a 50-cent Signet paperback, with an afterword on the author by Willard Thorp. Written by a woman who grew up in Kentucky, who heard daily the unchanged speech that later became dialogue in her tale of pioneers, the book seems a perfect union of legend and fact. The reader is led to wonder, as he savors the story's homely resonances, why they also ring so majestically. How was Miss Roberts able to saturate this simple account of danger, adversity, striving, and rude necessity with high intensities that make its imagery unforgettable?

The story is told through the eyes of a young woman—she seems almost archetypal, and yet entirely real. So with the others. They are People of the Earth. Were many of the early Americans *really* like that? It hardly matters. Even if you can't tell how much of the book is a work of the idealizing imagination, it is filled with necessary truth. The "glorious" past—the "good old days"—may often be only our imagination resounding to visionaries of long ago, but from such transmissions the dignities and aspirations of mankind gain their continuous life.

Yet we also read of those days as distracted Epigoni. We are made to feel the force in something said by Huizinga: "It is not in the least paradoxical to say that a culture may founder on real and tangible progress."

The year, at the beginning of the story, is 1774. The place is Albemarle County in Virginia. Diony Hall is a girl of seventeen. Her father, lamed by an accident, is dependent upon his sons for the harder work on the plantation. He is a scholarly man devoted to the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley, which, by casual osmosis, becomes Diony's religion.

There are no newspapers. Brief echoes of Washington's struggles with the British reach the family through travelers who stay for a meal and the night. Later the Indians, put into the scalping business by the British commander at Detroit (\$50 for a scalp, \$100 for a prisoner, and prisoners were a bother), made the revolution an ugly reality on the Western frontier. Travelers also told of a wonderful country to the West—the land of Caintuck beyond the great mountain barrier of the Appalachians, where Daniel Boone and James Harrod had built forts. Good land was already scarce on the eastern seaboard, and "Caintuck," having the Indian name for meadowland, was rapturously described by hunters and surveyors. "It was," writes Willard Thorp, "a demi-Eden, watered by many rivers, fabulously rich in soil, in fur-bearing animals, fish and useful trees, and in the tall cane which needed no cultivation and could be used for fodder."

The plot is simple. A young man claims Diony for his bride and they set out for Kentucky—along five hundred miles of difficult trace through the mountains, following the way chosen by Daniel Boone. They reach Harrod's Fort and Diony's husband, Berk Jarvis, begins to build a house in fields a few miles away. Then his mother, Elvira Jarvis, is killed by Indians while defending Diony outside the Fort. In time, the settlers hear of an Indian who displayed the scalp of a fighting white squaw. Berk is finally driven by his need to avenge his mother to look for this Indian, or even his kin. Before Berk's son, Tom, is born he sets out upon an angry Odyssey which lasts three years, during which time Diony hears several times that he is dead. When he returns, Diony is married to another man and has a new baby. Berk's story of his travels and sufferings brings a kind of calm to the tortured three, and with the Greek chorus of a handful of settlers to remind them of the traditional solution—the woman decides—the story comes to an end.

It is difficult to describe the quality of this book, which emerges by slow generation. It

brings a sense of immediacy in living that one can hardly obtain, today, without having learned to peel away many rinds of insulation. It is as though in each simple act of daily frontier existence the reader vicariously thrusts his own hands into wet clay and makes forms necessary to life. Yet the wilderness was no pliable stuff. It is just that these people do practically no meaningless things.

How is it, again, that from an account of necessities which transform people of parochial English culture—Diony's friends wonder if she is actually "married," since a Methodist, and not a Church of England priest, said the lines—into a new race, there can be so strong a sense of transcending harmonies? Berkeleyan idealism plainly has a part in it, but not as "scholarship" or intellectual philosophy. Diony's father had turned the Berkeleyan vision into a suffusing glow that lighted every cranny and oddity of decision on the plantation. After Diony had waited long for her family's consent to a marriage which would take her to a dangerous and distant place—so far that she might as well be thought of as gone forever—her father came one day to where she and Berk were sitting:

He asked Berk when he had designed to go into the new country beyond the wilderness, and Berk said he would want to go late in the following spring, after the flood waters had run down from the streams.

He talked again, making unconnected sayings that seemed to have no kinship. Men, he said, were the mouths of the earth, and through them the earth spoke in the general, but a man, in the particular instance, might understand and interpret and might see the signs put forth by the Author and Designer to reveal what lay under the outer show of properties and kinds. He told of one wonder after another, of deviations from the natural law, but he told again of how the kept law is a greater marvel than the deflected law, and how it, by its sufferance of the other, continually reveals a purpose beyond the knowledge of men. He would not stand in Diony's way, he said, smiling, although she had planned to take a long step and to go a long journey.

"It won't be said I hindered Diony," he said. He put the book back on his shelf, not having opened it,

and he walked briskly toward the door, turning then to speak again.

"For such a length of time as it staggers the mind to contemplate, Man has been marching outward. . . ." He told of many movements of peoples. "Civilized Man is forever spreading more widely over the earth, historic Man bringing such men as have no history to humble themselves and learn their lesson. It's a strong mark of the hidden purposes of the Author of all things. . . . It will never be said of me I hindered Diony."

A sharp-edged vision of foreshortened destiny inhabited these early Americans. They made their reference to principles, then acted. And when Diony's mother spoke from anxiety and her sense of loss of a daughter, saying,

"Hit's Indian property. The white man has got no rights there. Hit's owned already, Kentuck is. Go, and you'll be killed and skulped by savages, your skulp to hang up in a dirty Indian house or hang on his belt. Hit's already owned. White men are outside their rights when they go there." . . .

the men replied with the assurance of the Greeks before Troy:

"If the Indian is not man enough to hold it let him give it over then. . . . It's only a strong race can hold a good country. Let the brave have and hold there."

They *knew*:

"The most enduren will take" . . . "Strong men will go in and take." . . . "Strong men will win there."

On the road to Kentucky, Diony felt her way to what was happening to her, what it meant:

Suddenly, in the tinkling of the bells, she knew herself as the daughter of many, going back through Polly Brook through the Shenandoah Valley, and the Pennsylvania clearings and roadways to England, Methodists and Quakers, small farmers and weavers, going back through Thomas Hall to Tidewater farmers and owners of land. In herself then an infinity of hopes welled up, vague desires and holy passions for some better place, infinite regrets and rending farewells mingled and lost in the blended inner tinkle and clatter. These remembrances were put into her own flesh as a passion, as if she remembered all her origins, and remembered every

sensation her forebears had known, and in the front of all this mass arose her present need for Berk and her wish to move all the past outward now in conjunction with him. They went quickly along the road, the seven pack horses making a seven-keyed music that played about her choice and wrapped it in a fine pride. The air was pleasant, the hills vividly seen, the water in the creek being bright over the brown of the stones.

Then, weaving wool:

Her thought leaped then beyond articulations and settled to a vast passion of mental desire. Oh, to create rivers by knowing rivers, to move outward through the extended infinite plane until it assumes roundness. Oh, to make a world out of chaos. The passion spread widely through her and departed and her hands were still contriving the creamy fibers of a fleece.

COMMENTARY

CAN HISTORY BE USED?

FOR every human discovery, every determination of truth, and every decision, there has to be a control, a norm, a field of comparison. Truth has to have a bearing on something, and whatever else you know about that something enables you to recognize it as true.

Where shall we get controls for the truths about man? This is the question behind a dilemma discussed in this week's lead article (on page 8). Impartial truth about man, for Dr. Lynd's critic, can be only truth about the past. The past is determinable because it has already happened. It doesn't change any more. It just lies there. It is *history*.

On this basis, impartial truth for action in the present is simply impossible. "Citizenship means action; action means partiality and some degree of fanaticism. How can a commitment to truth survive very much citizenship?" Dr. Lynd ought to stop claiming support from history when he acts in the present. "Let him and like-minded scholars stay in the present"; let him, the critic says by implication, leave history alone.

Well, the critic has some grounds. There are no objective, historical reference-points for human becoming. There may be analogues, parallels, and suggestive models, but no nailed-down, sure-thing directions can be found in history. A man goes into any authentic future with incomplete information. His life is not a repeating decimal. Simply by being a man he is continuously adding something new.

It is Dr. Lynd's contention that the study of history may be of help in adding something good. But the real issue in this difference of opinion is that Dr. Lynd finds concern for living human beings and concern to know the truth to be different faces of the same coin, a view his critic sees as simple prejudice—"partiality and some degree of fanaticism." The critic insists that all the reference-points for getting knowledge of history

lie in history already made—reliably unchangeable—while Lynd proposes that humanistic vision, the fellowship of man, and concern for the living supply another order of reference-points for the study of the meaning of history. What sort of meaning? Meaning you can use. There is no other kind.

The great question for science—for the science of tomorrow—is whether or not it should open itself up to subjective reference-points. Can it risk its passive certainties for high intentions? Should science dare to investigate the dynamics of becoming? Can there be, in short, a scientific discipline in subjective readings of human life? It is Michael Polanyi's contention that there always have been such readings behind science, but that they have not been noticed. His book, *Personal Knowledge*, is an attempt to get these readings out in the open, where they can be recognized, studied closely, and made the foundation of a better science of man.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves THE BEAD GAME

A DITTOED extract from *Examining in Harvard College*—"A Collection of Essays by Members of the Harvard University"—deserves notice here. The extract is the contribution of William G. Perry, Jr., titled "Examsmanship and the Liberal Arts." It seems that back in 1947 a bright student named Metzger (a pseudonym), waiting in a corridor to take part in a play rehearsal, asked a friend what subject he was going to be examined in, in a nearby room. Told it was "Soc. Sci. Something-or-other," he inquired further. Mr. Perry reconstructs:

"It's about Modern Perspectives on Man and Society, and All That," said his friend. "Pretty interesting, really."

"Always wanted to take a course like that," said Metzger. "Any good reading?"

"Yeah, great. There's this book"—his friend did not have time to finish.

The examination session began, and Metzger was drawn into the event by "a surge of curiosity and puckish glee." He signed his blue book "George Smith" and filled it with words. (As luck would have it, another Smith was scheduled for the test, but was absent, so that certain administrative perturbations were briefly delayed.) While Metzger blew the "fact" questions, he did so well on the essay that he earned an over-all A- from an admiring reader, as compared to the bulk of students, who muddled their way to a C+. When the papers came back, Metzger's friend happened to notice the interloper's grade and the grader's comment, "Excellent work." The story was of course too good to keep:

There was a leak, and the whole scandal broke on the front page of Tuesday's *Crimson*. With the press Metzger was modest, as becomes a hero. He said that there had been nothing to it at all, really. The essay question had offered a choice of two books, Margaret Mead's *And Keep Your Powder Dry* or Geoffrey Gorer's *The American People*. Metzger

reported that having read neither of them, he had chosen the second "because the title gave me some notion as to what the book might be about." On the test, two critical comments were offered on each book, one favorable, one unfavorable. The students were asked to "discuss." Metzger conceded that he had played safe in throwing his lot with the more laudatory of the two comments, "but I did not forget to be balanced."

How did this student manage to earn his A- (Mr. Perry insists that he *did* earn it)?

I [writes Mr. Perry] do not have Mr. Metzger's essay before me except in vivid memory. As I recall, he took his first cue from the name Geoffrey, and committed his strategy to the premise that Gorer was born into an "Anglo-Saxon" culture, probably English, but certainly "English speaking." Having heard that Margaret Mead was a social anthropologist, he inferred that Gorer was the same. He then entered upon his essay, centering his inquiry upon what he supposed might be the problems inherent in an anthropologist's observation of a culture which was his own, or nearly his own. Drawing part from memories of table talk ["An important part of Harvard's education takes place during meals in the Houses"] on cultural,relativity and in part from creative logic, he rang changes on the relation of observer to observed, and assessed the kind and degree of objectivity which might accrue to an observer through training as an anthropologist. He concluded that the book in question did in fact contribute to a considerable range of "objective", and even 'fresh,' insights into the nature of our culture. "At the same time," he warned, "these observations must be understood within the context of their generation by a person only partly freed from his embeddedness in the culture he is observing and limited in his capacity to transcend those particular tendencies and biases which he has himself developed as a personality in his interaction with this culture since his birth. In this sense the book portrays as much the character of Geoffrey Gorer as it analyzes that of the American people." It is my regrettable duty to report that at this moment of triumph Mr. Metzger was carried away by the temptations of parody and added, "We are thus much the richer."

Metzger, of course, was in serious trouble, but one assumes he soon got out of it—keeping a man like that down in academic surroundings hardly seems possible. (He was finally "admonished.") Mr. Perry's serious sympathies

are saved for the section man who gave the A-grade. "He was in much worse trouble." Much of Mr. Perry's paper is in defense of this grade.

After all, he points out, the student was profoundly at home with a fundamental truth of the humanities—that all facts are meaningless except in contexts, and that no fact can have serious evaluation until the shape and dimensions of the context lie revealed. Metzger moved around comfortably in the stipulated fallibility of the relation between an observer and his facts; he knew the details of the stipulation well enough to play it skillfully against the facts (in this instance quite unknown to him), thus proving his grasp of a *principle* of liberal education. True, in the case of Metzger, it was simply "bull," but, Mr. Perry maintains, it was *good bull*:

If a liberal education should teach students "how to think," not only in their own fields but in fields outside their own—that is, to understand "how the other fellow orders his knowledge," then bulling, even in its purest form, expresses an important part of what a pluralist university holds dear, surely a more important part than the collecting of "facts that are facts" which schoolboys learn to do. Here then, good bull appears not as ignorance at all but as an aspect of knowledge. It is both relevant and "true." In a university setting good bull is therefore of more value than "facts," which, without a frame of reference, are not even "true" at all.

Perhaps that value accounts for the final anomaly: as instructors, we are inclined to reward bull highly, *where we do not detect its intent*. . . .

In behalf of the bullster, Mr. Perry points to the terrible destiny of the student who never raises his head above his collections of "facts":

The moralism of sheer work and obedience can be an ethic that, unwilling to face a despair of its ends glorifies its means. The implicit refusal to consider the relativity of both ends and means leaves the operator in an unconsidered proprietary absolutism. History bears witness that in the pinches this moral superiority has no recourse to negotiation, only to force.

Well, there could now be easy comment on a scene where "bull" becomes a welcome respite

from the catechism of "facts." And one might inquire why a student should be embarrassed by his own power to generalize, identifying it guiltily as "bull." But the trouble, again, is in the framework, not in the hard work of the professors to liberate the young from their fact-saturated faith. There is not, alas, time for anything but transferring the skills of a packaged skepticism. Learning, in the university, becomes an academic bead game because of the pressures for production. It can be argued that one ought to be willing to fail in the university in order to gain some small and probably invisible success in life. In evidence is the following from F. R. Leavis' *Education & the University*:

"Nothing," says Dr. Meiklejohn, "is more revealing of the purpose underlying a course of study than the nature of the examination given at its close."

Judged in this light, the underlying purpose of the English Tripos is to produce journalists. Not that the reading for it doesn't give intelligent men opportunities for educating themselves. But distinction of intelligence, though manifested in a special aptitude for the field of study, will not bring a man a distinguished place on the class-list unless he has also a journalistic ability—a gift of getting promptly off the mark several times in the course of three hours, and a fluency responsive to the clock. Such facility is not the profit towards which a serious critical training—a serious education of any kind—tends, and the intelligent and the sensitive, having become more and more aware of the difficulty of thinking anything with precision and delicacy and of writing anything that they can allow to stand, have commonly formed habits that handicap them badly in the examination-room.

From worship of facts to the shallow, journalistic think-piece may be a kind of advance, but one has much further to go, as Mr. Leavis makes clear. Does each step, as now presented, erect a high fence concealing and denying the next level, so that negotiating it becomes a sly gamesmanship for bright students? Will these promising young men, winning their way, end by discounting the entire track as a series of farcical techniques in pseudo-progress?

FRONTIERS The World and the Self

THE difference between understanding the world and understanding the self is mainly that one can study the world without paying attention to the self—indeed, we have been doing this since the time of Galileo—while understanding the self means studying the self in *the world*, a much more difficult project. One might argue—and many do—that there is need to know more about the world before trying to think about the self, but this is highly misleading, since a world conceived without thought of self, as even physicists are beginning to realize, is a world opaque to the kind of understanding we need. The two projects, in short, ought to be not only concurrent, but interdependent, and they very seldom are.

One reason for this failure is the complex balance required by such twofold study—required of people who have been taught betrayingly easy answers in both fields. A betrayed man grows desperate for certainty, and this often leads him into a voluntary blindness. He says to himself: By being blind in this direction I can really see in that one; and the *Aha!* feeling he gets by this locally intensified seeing is often fortified by strong moral justification: now he *knows* what is right to do. And for him, seeing the world in a certain way may become not merely seeing it: he may think of himself as *making* it.

But an honest mistake contains the seeds of its own correction. Behind the idea of scientific objectivity hides a more generalized spirit of impartiality, and this, once felt, may turn against excessive preoccupation with the external world. So we begin to see that it was *feeling* which shaped the familiar requirements of "objective" and "real."

Since a man can lose his balance as much (or more) from disenchantment as from enthusiasm for a new way of seeing, in the general swing, now going on, to wondering about the self, the useful writer is a man with balance. An

illustration is the article by Dennis Wrong in the September-October issue of *Dissent*, "Identity: Problem and Catchword." The question is, how shall a man looking for himself recognize himself? In the terms of the world around him, or by some other—admittedly elusive—means? Mr. Wrong writes:

Why do people suffer from identity crisis or identity confusion in modern industrial society? One common answer is that society fails to provide them with stable social roles in which they can take pride and invest a large portion of their emotional energies and self-respect. . . . The diagnosis is familiar. In effect, it equates identity with *social* identity and delineates the features of modern industrial society that prevent the establishment of firm, preferably life-long, social identities.

In this analysis, Mr. Wrong points out, identity becomes virtually mere "identification." For contrast he quotes from Erik Erikson, for whom identity is rather a distillation from various specific identifications—a distinct psychic mechanism that "begins where the usefulness of identification ends." When the development of this psychic mechanism is consciously pursued, we are in the presence of some "soul-making," as Keats might have said. "Identity to Erikson means personal identity and is something more than mere social identity or the subjective reflection of a social role."

At the other end of the spectrum are the Existentialists. "Far from seeing identification with a social role as a prerequisite for identity, they see it as the ultimate death of authentic selfhood." It is a form of Sartre's "bad faith" to take refuge from independent responsibility in some socially approved role:

The square is he who fails to realize the arbitrariness, the humanly invented character, of all social codes. He is blind to the fact that his social role is truly a role in the theatrical sense—something one plays at, not something that exhausts the definition of what one is.

Writers influenced by existentialism complain that modern society, far from preventing identity-formation by failing to provide secure roles,

depersonalizes the individual by forcing him into standardized roles and treating him as an altogether replaceable integer in a mass. . . . Political propaganda, mass production, and the mass media presuppose a public that is merely an aggregate of identical consumers or "little men" and thus they promote conformism. . . . This tradition appears to be directly at odds with the sociologic critique that regards identity as a result of anchorage in a group or social role and condemns the atomization, rootlessness and anomie of modern life. Yet popular social criticism borrows freely from both perspectives, seemingly unaware of the contradictions between them.

Mr. Wrong now seeks the truth in both critiques, finding them complementary, and attempts some synthesis, but he can hardly improve on Erikson's idea of a "distinct psychic mechanism" as the growing-tip of selfhood. At the end comes a clear restatement of the problem:

Social identity no longer provides a protective barrier for personal identity. Nor does it destroy personal identity by eliminating choice . . . the absorption of individuality by the social role is not an irresistible process but one that depends upon the complicity of the individual. . . . even totalitarian regimes are less successful in reshaping men in their own ideological image than we once thought. The existential insistence that man makes himself by his choices has never been more apposite than to the situation of modern man. Yet the existentialist, while actively engaging himself in protests against social injustice and political oppression, usually describes only in negative terms the social order that might encourage men to make the most authentic choices. The sociologist, on the other hand, has been unable to advance much beyond specifying the formal requirements such an order must meet: minimal consensus, a degree of continuity in socialization, the regulation of potentially destructive group conflicts, etc. Can we create a society that does not mythologize its own processes of social control and allows men to choose their own identities without making life appear a senseless routine?

This last question seems the most important. Its answer may be: Only by adding substance to Erikson's intermediate "psychic mechanism"—which uses identifications but is not bound by them. How would one go about doing this?

Well, it seems almost certain that we shall have to give this growth-mechanism mythic dimensions, if only to get the mythic out of the social processes. Instead of our analytical abstractions—by which we have nonetheless understood the problem—we need an order of abstractions *about ourselves*, and in which authentic feeling plays a part. This is what all this criticism seems to leave out—a feeling of Promethean mission, characterizing the self and in behalf of the world. The motor of myth is feeling, and feeling, when cleansed of fear and acquisitive drive, comes very close to being compassion and Promethean urge.