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THE NEW BEGINNING

A MAN starts out by trying to understand his life, wondering, in the middle of things, about his job, his family, the future, and the feelings which press him to pursue one thing, then another. Conceivably, if all experiences brought fulfillment and delight, this attempt at understanding would not begin. Satisfaction is a condition which does not ordinarily lead to questioning. Any satisfaction, however limited, is a sign of wholeness or completion. Why should a sense of being complete raise questions? The problem has been solved.

But satisfactions wear out or are intruded upon by new happenings or desires which change our condition. We feel pain or frustration, and then, for many men, the project becomes one of science—devising means to eliminate pain and designing projects that will overcome frustration. Some individuals may take their questions further. There is the fact that human beings grow by asking questions and looking for answers. And if pain leads to questions, can it be that we need some pain? It may be recognized that pleasure or satisfaction would have little meaning to us without experience of its opposite. An outlived satisfaction, moreover, leaves us with boredom, a lingering sort of pain. But pain, we reflect, can hardly be good in itself. All living things recoil from pain. Still, it seems evident that some sorts of pain—including pain in relation to growth or discovery—are necessary and in that sense good.

Deciding what is good is a philosophical undertaking, and involved is the fact that pain or discomforts should very possibly be cheerfully endured, since they may be part of a process of discovery. How do we know that "discovery" is a good thing? Well, if knowing is the defining characteristic of human beings, and if discovering is the beginning of knowing, then knowing and discovering are more than "good"—they give us a standard for saying what is good.

As we think along these lines we find ourselves considering the thoughts of other men. Isolation is impossible. We cannot think alone, for the reason that our being is partly defined by our relationships with others. We are born into a world at a particular time—a time characterized by certain assumptions and judgments about men and the world—and for long years before it occurs to us to try to think independently we have been absorbing and living by the opinions of our time. We cannot strip ourselves naked of *all* these assumptions, even if attempting it would be an exercise worth a trial. We need to consider the thoughts of other men, if only to recognize what influence they have had on us, without our realizing it. There is also the possibility of conscious learning.

When a man decides to try to understand his life, he needs to look for a principle of explanation. He may realize that figuring things out simply by exploring his own consciousness is much too difficult and may be impossible—even the Buddha explored the world for many years before he sat under the Bo tree, to reach, finally, to both the rim and the depths of existence by the intensity of his introspection. Since we are in the world and part of it, we need to understand the world. "I," said Ortega, "am myself and my circumstances."

There is the question of *how* to look at the world. Well, why do we need to look at the world? The answer is simple. We need to look at the world in order to understand it, so that our relations with it become the means of human fulfillment. We have a *purpose* in looking at the world. Does, then, the world have a purpose? Is

there such a thing as "fulfillment" for the world? Can we and the world collaborate?

If, after asking this question, we review even briefly the thoughts of other men about the meaning of the world, we may hesitate and draw back, realizing how hard it is to find an answer, and how easy it would be to deceive ourselves with simple answers, or even complicated ones. Yet some sort of answer, even a tentative one, is plainly needed, and what, then, would be a first step toward study of the world? Is there a way of studying the world that has built-in protection against self-deception?

Historically, there has been one clear and emphatic answer to this question. We need, the founders of modern science argued, to consider what the world does—how it behaves—and never mind what it "means," since that is obscure and probably unknowable. Perhaps the meaning of the world will become apparent when our knowledge of what it does is comparatively complete; meanwhile, let us get on with our research.

This is the classic position and justification of the scientific outlook. It has been repeated thousands of times, as the foundation of the modern security against self-deception, and of progress in a knowledge that always remains open to criticism (you look at the world to see if what some scientist says is right); and the foundation, also, of practical, material advance in dealing capably with the world. It is a position now subject to attack on two major grounds: First, it is said, this way of finding out about the world is of no help at all to the ordinary man who wants to understand the meaning of his life; and, second, a knowledge of the world in terms of how to use the forces of nature, obtained in deliberate neglect of the possible *meaning* of the world, has proved to be dangerous if not self-defeating. The attack asserts, in other words, that scientific knowledge alone does not really work either for man or for nature, in the long run; and that it may be bad for human beings even in the short run, since it establishes a ground for continuous self-deception.

Where does this attack come from? At root it grows out of the renewal of deep longing to know both ourselves and the world. This outpouring of feeling overflows rational criticism of the failures of both religion and science, pressing countless people to adopt simplified philosophies and faiths. At the same time there is intensely concerned inspection of ancient teachings, old mysteries, including tribal metaphysical systems along with profound spiritual philosophies of archaic origin. There is a great movement toward starting again, going back to beginnings, to reform our intellectuality and to recreate our cultural life.

But a longing is not a realization. A hunger for meaning is not understanding of meaning. We want to start all over again, but we want also to take both our technical skills and our critical sophistication with us. Is this really possible? Responsible thinkers are asking: How can we change our assumptions about the ground of human knowledge—especially modern scientific knowledge without losing or abandoning both that knowledge and its fruits?

This is a painful question to consider, since we find ourselves blocked in the attempt to institute reforms by very nearly all the methods and habits that have brought us to our present situation. If we want to establish a sense of meaning for ourselves, we need to see meaning in our circumstances—to make the natural world humanly intelligible. But the basis of scientific knowledge has been the rule that nature is *not* humanly intelligible, that what goes on in nature does *not* represent a fulfillment of purpose, that it has no meaning as we understand meaning. We are told that looking for meaning in nature is primitive, superstitious, anti-scientific, and destructive of the certainties acquired by great effort during the modern age.

In *The Phenomenon of Life* (Harper & Row, 1966), Hans Jonas traces the effects in thought of the great change in assumptions which set modern

times off from earlier ages. Before Galileo and Descartes, he shows, it was the habit of thinking man to regard the world as a universe of *life*. The happenings of the world were interpreted as living processes, with remote celestial phenomena at least analogues of living processes. Life and meaning, then, were the realities, however imperfectly understood, while death was only negation. Then came the great reversal in thinking accomplished by the assumptions of physical science:

> Modern thought which began with the Renaissance is placed in exactly the opposite theoretic situation. Death is the natural thing, life the problem. . . . The tremendously enlarged universe of modern cosmology is conceived as a field of inanimate masses and forces which operate according to laws of inertia and of quantitative distribution in space. . . . What remained is the residue of the reduction toward the properties of mere extension which submit to measurement and hence to mathematics. These properties alone satisfy the requirements of what is now called exact knowledge: and representing the only knowable aspect of nature they, by a tempting substitution, came to be regarded as its essential aspect too. . . .
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> This means that the lifeless has become the knowable par excellence and is for that reason also considered the true and only foundation of reality. It is the "natural" as well as the original state of things.

It follows, as Jonas says, that in our habitual way of looking at things, "it is the existence of life within a mechanical universe which now calls for an explanation, and explanation has to be in terms of the lifeless."

> That there is life at all, and how such a thing is possible in a world of mere matter, is now the problem posed to thought. The very fact that we have nowadays to deal with the theoretical problem of life, instead of the problem of death, testifies to the status of death as the natural and intelligible condition. . . .
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> Only when a corpse is the body plainly intelligible: then it returns from its puzzling and unorthodox behavior of aliveness to the unambiguous, "familiar" state of a body within the world of bodies, whose general laws provide the canon of all comprehensibility. To approximate the laws of the organic body to this canon, i.e., to efface in this sense the boundaries between life and death, is the direction of modern thought on life as a physical fact. Our thinking today is under the ontological dominance of death.

One may note, here, the virtual reverence in which is held the second law of thermodynamics—that principle of physics under which all differences, all signs of "life" or design, are erased by reduction to a uniform energy level. We are certain about death, not about life. We follow the rule that our knowledge must be based upon what we know in physical terms. Jonas adds:

> One may object here that we speak of "death" when we mean the mere indifference of matter, which is a neutral character, whereas "dead" has an antithetical meaning applying only to what is (or could be, or once was) alive. But in fact, though this is forgotten, the cosmos once *was* alive as perceived by man, and its more recent lifeless image was built up, or left over, in a continuous process of critical subtraction from its fuller original content: at least in this historical sense the mechanistic conception of the universe does contain an antithetic element and is not simply neutral. Moreover, that "subtraction" was set in motion and for long sustained, not by the critical understanding, but by dualistic metaphysics which has demonstrable roots in the experience of mortality.

Prof. Jonas explains that the final form of the earlier dualistic metaphysics was established by Descartes, who proposed the two-substances theory—mind and matter, almost completely separated. Thinking reality (*res cogitans*) is the last representative in Western thought of the idea of *soul*, now reduced to impotent subjectivity, while material reality (*res extensa*), ruled entirely by external mechanical forces, is all that we need understand for complete knowledge of the world of nature. Even the organisms of living animals are to be studied by mechanical principles alone—and man's organism as well, insofar as it functions as an animal body. While Descartes retained the idea of the soul as *res cogitans*, he gave it nothing to do. As Jonas says:

> . . . what mattered was its *isolation*. . . . The isolation of the *res cogitans* was the most effective way of securing the complete ontological detachment

> of external reality from what was not extended and measurable. Thus, besides constituting this reality as a self-contained field for the universal application of mathematical analysis, the division provided the metaphysical justification for the all-out mechanical materialism of modern science.

Thus all living things, except for the private, functionless "souls" in humans, were machines—automata—and to be understood as such. Then, as Jonas shows, along came Darwin, and with the success of his theory the special position of man was abolished by evolution—for man, after all, is only an animal in this theory, and animals are automata.

Prof. Jonas is awed by the power to control thought of the mechanical theory of nature and life, which triumphed despite its manifest defiance of the everyday experience of all human beings. Every living creature strives for existence and some kind of fulfillment—exhibits evidence of vital purpose—yet our science has to this day insisted that the functions and activities of organic bodies be interpreted only in terms of non-purposive causes. Jonas finds this so ridiculous that he believes the time has come for a great awakening. The purposiveness of life is a part of common experience, and where, he asks, does it begin? It must have a part in even the lowliest of creatures.

Actually, all through the epoch of triumphant materialism, there have been even scientists who held this view, as for example William McDougall in psychology (see his *Body and Mind* and *Modern Materialism and Emergent Evolution*), and Albert P. Mathews in biology, who back in 1924 wrote in a text on general cytology: "We must leave out, because of our ignorance, the psychic side of chemical reactions. Our equations, therefore, will be as incomplete as if energy were omitted." Mathews likened this omission to "Hamlet with Hamlet left out."

How, then, are we going to get life, intelligence, and meaning back into the universe, after several centuries of effort to eliminate these realities in the name of exact science? And how are we going to do this without abandoning the notable virtues of scientific discipline, including commitment to impartial truth?

The reform—which must also be a regeneration and renewal—may be difficult and costly, yet there can be no doubt that it should be begun. Prof. Jonas is right in saying that the price we have paid for making matter and its motions intelligible in physical terms was loss of *"the intelligibility of life."* We can't afford this price. We cannot retain our humanity without a systematic effort to regain intelligibility for life.

How shall we begin? Conceivably, we ought to begin with ourselves—with the question of our own identity and meaning. In a chapter comparing Gnosticism and Existentialism, Prof. Jonas provides "a famous formula of the Valentinian school" which might be taken as a starting-point:

> What makes us free is the knowledge who we were, what we have become; where we were, wherein we have been thrown; whereto we speed, wherefrom we are redeemed; what is birth and what rebirth.

Simply from regarding this quotation seriously we recognize how far we are from a sense of reality about the meaning of our lives. Who we are depends in some measure upon who we *were*—and when, and where. "What was I doing," Bertrand Russell's son once asked him, "when the Pyramids were being built?" Russell reported that he had a difficult time persuading the child that there was a time when he did not exist. Did the child, perhaps, "know" more than the Father?

Is there really a drama of redemption involved in human life? Who, in recent years, has thought seriously about this question, in unhackneyed, non-theological terms? What is birth and what rebirth? Or, if a man dies, shall he live again?

Obviously, such questions have enormous possibilities for affecting the meaning of our lives. For this reason, perhaps, Prof. Jonas has a

concluding essay titled "Immortality and the Modern Temper." He begins by noting that the modern temper "is uncongenial to the idea of immortality." He is certainly right in this. A serious, unsentimental conception of immortality would have many questions to answer. The discussion in this essay is searching. He wonders how the requirements of justice can be a reason for immortality.

> For temporal merit or guilt calls for temporal, not eternal retribution, and justice thus requires at most a finite after-compensation for settling accounts. And as to compensation for deserved suffering, or denied chances, or missed happiness here, there applies the additional consideration that a *claim* to happiness as such (how much of it?) is questionable to begin with; and that missed *fulfillment* could only be made up for in *its original terms*, that is, in terms of effort and obstacles and uncertainty and fallibility and unique occasion and limited time—in short: in terms of non-guaranteed attainment and possible miss. These are the very terms of *self*-fulfillment, and they are precisely the terms of the world. To try them in our being, and to experience the vicissitudes of our try, not knowing the outcome in advance—this is our genuine claim.

This is not really an argument against immortality, but rather some account of the *kind* of immortality that would be consistent with an understanding of justice and the means of progress for human intelligence. One might submit that the vulgarization of the idea of immortality was in fact a basic cause of the materialistic monism raised to supremacy by Descartes: Materialism would make certain that we put away unworthy promises of a future life, reject the shabby deals made possible by a corrupt clergy. It seems entirely right, therefore, for Prof. Jonas to say:

> Without those terms, without the anxiousness of chance and the zest of challenge and the sweetness of achievement under such terms, no bliss gratuitously granted can be anything but a counterfeit coin for what has been missed. It would also lack all moral worth. Indeed the here cannot be traded for a there—such is our present stance.

This seems an excellent basis for thinking about immortality—seriously. A mulling of the Gnostic questions—What is birth and what rebirth?—would focus directly on the conditions set.

REVIEW
THE ART OF CITIZENSHIP

DURING the war, in 1943—a good time for a book on self-government to appear—Viking published Charles A. Beard's *The Republic*, a series of conversations on the Constitution of the United States. It is a book that deserves rereading about once every five years, even though one may occasionally tire of Mr. Beard's incomparable sagacity, which regulates the weekly discussions of a small group of people he invented for educational purposes. The sagacity, however, is real, and Beard's skill in dealing with the half-truths of politics and history is likely to be welcomed by most readers. It seems that, in the area of politics, half-truths are about all we can have. Beard attempts to show that the art of citizenship lies in making responsible use of those half-truths.

A reading of this book suggests that most Americans do not think about philosophy except as it filters into political conceptions. This amounts to saying that most Americans believe that their only access to principles lies in politics—a judgment which, if true, may account for basic weaknesses in American life. Why should this follow? Mainly for the reason that politics is concerned with the use of power, and thought focused on the means of the application and restraint of power tends to neglect almost entirely the areas of human action in which power plays no part. It is a common assumption that nothing good can be accomplished without the exercise of power. Yet there have been those Tolstoy and Gandhi among them—who maintained the opposite: that the only lasting good men can do results from action which does not compel. It may invite, but it does not compel. The Socratic maxim, It is better to suffer than to do wrong, suggests reflection along these lines.

Beard's reproduction of a conversation about the Preamble to the Constitution illustrates the common tendency. The Preamble reads:

> We, the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States.

Commenting, one of the participants says:

> After all, the Preamble is really no part of the Constitution, is it? I am no lawyer, but my father was a lawyer and he warned me, in my youth, when he was coaching me on the Constitution for a high-school test, that the Preamble was just a pleasing introduction not binding on anybody in government or outside.

Beard replies by pointing out that the Preamble declares the "purposes and the underlying spirit" of self-government, adding that while it confers no particular powers upon Congress, the President, or the judiciary, it nonetheless "fixes and expresses sentiments and aspirations cherished by multitudes of citizens, by the people."

Two of the members of the Constitutional Convention, Edmund Randolph and John Rutledge, apparently felt that general statements of purpose were out of place in the Preamble, and objected to any "display of theory." The Preamble, they argued, should simply point to the inadequacies of the Articles of Confederation, which were to be cured by the Constitution.

What, asked one of Beard's conversationalists, "is the use of talking about justice in the abstract?"

Beard replies, showing the sources of all social conceptions and ideals in general ideas. Discussing justice in principle, he said, helps to develop moral awareness:

> The human race would be meaner in character and poorer in spirit if such grand ideas as justice, mercy, truth, beauty, and goodness, and the sentiments associated with them, were banished from our lives. The ideals we profess are certainly inconvenient to us and make us look like hypocrites more often than we like. But suppose we had no ideal standards at all, suppose that every person were a law

> unto himself; then surely the right to rule would go to the persons who have the strength of the lion and the cunning of the fox. Power without ethical restraints is, in sum and substance, just what Mussolini and Hitler have taught and acted upon. So have some Communists, while deriding bourgeois justice. . . .
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> Our knowledge and our practice of justice are seldom, if ever, perfect. Moreover the concept of justice grows with time and perhaps will never be perfect. Still, without standards of justice and a mental feeling for justice widely distributed among the people, society would go to pieces. Appeals for the realization of better things would lose much, if not all, of their force.

It would have been valuable, at this point, for Beard to have asked *why* the application of justice in concrete situations always seems to fall short of the ideal. His conversationalists are well aware of this failure, and one of them jeers at the Preamble's reference to justice:

> You mean Federalist justice. I remember some of my Democratic history—party tradition, at least. If I am not mistaken, a lot of men who voted early and often to establish justice later voted for the Sedition Act that sent Jeffersonians to jail for criticizing John Adams and his Federalist party administration.

Beards admits this as a half-truth, and counters with another, showing that Hamilton, a Federalist spokesman, said the sedition bill had "highly exceptionable" provisions and that he advised against establishing "a tyranny." Moreover, if we speak of "Federalist justice," we ought also to ask about bourgeois versus proletarian justice, and even about "fascist" justice. Then Beard reminds his friends of Trotsky's appeal before the court of world opinion, for defense against Stalin's accusations.

> He [Trotsky] cried aloud, with no little warrant I think for justice. A committee of Americans, headed by John Dewey, was formed to examine into the charges and the evidence in the case.
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> Now Dewey was, in the communist lexicon, a bourgeois. Trotsky wanted me—another bourgeois, according to the canon—to serve on that committee. He wrote a letter to one of my friends in which he appealed to my interest in truth and justice. I did not join the committee for various reasons. I had already studied the case enough to convince me that many of the charges against Trotsky were not only false but ridiculous, and I had said so publicly. Furthermore, I knew very well that such a committee could have no power to summon witnesses, demand papers, and hold a real trial. The point is that when Trotsky was in a jam with his old party he wanted to be tried by standards of truth and justice possessing universal validity among civilized people—and, in my view of things, he was right.

One member of Beard's group, a physician, complained not only of the abstractness of the ideals in the Preamble, but of the vagueness of the terms involved in historical studies. "In medicine," he said, "many of the words used have a fairly precise meaning." Beard said he was used to such criticism:

> A few years ago one of the most distinguished physicists in the United States, after hearing my lecture on "The Idea of National Interest," exploded during lunch in this fashion: "If you fellows in history and the social sciences generally would only catch up with us in physics and discover the *laws* of human evolution, it would be possible for humanity to get some sensible control over humanity's fate."
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> My answer was: "If you fellows in physics had to deal with the intangible and intractable data of human experiences, you would never be able to catch up even with Aristotle and you would lose your minds trying, unless you grappled with the methods of historical analysis."

This explanation serves as a reply to the physicist, but it tells only how ambiguous the facts of history are, not why they are as they are. It would have been useful to note the dualities of human nature and the puzzles of motivation. Why not compare at some length the *feelings* we have about justice and injustice with the finite actions taken by men to establish just conditions? It is certainly a fact that people are continually disappointed by the failure of legislation in behalf of justice to come up to their expectations. Are there ways in which this reality of experience can be better understood?

Years ago, in her introduction to Jim Peck's *Freedom Ride,* Lillian Smith gave this statement

as embodying the spirit of the civil rights movement:

> We are men; and as men we must declare our right to move freely in our search for meaning, we have a God-given right to be and to become. Sitting at lunch counters, riding the buses, are symbolic rights. They are small, but we need to claim them, not because they are enough or because we really need them, but because an unclaimed human right bars a man in his search for significance.

Here it begins to be vaguely apparent that justice is a subjective reality before it takes on objective conditions, and that the subjective reality can never be fully reproduced in any objective condition, however necessary it may be to attempt it. What Charles Hampden-Turner says about Equality—which is a prerequisite of justice—suggests the same subjective priority:

> Equality is a promise by men and women to all their fellows that the definition of excellence will never be closed. We should treat others as equals, especially *distant* others, because they may be discovered to have a value undreamed of in our philosophies, which qualifies our existing values in a way that transforms our symbolic universe.

This is a way of showing that justice cannot be ladled out in finite units or increments for the reason that its meaning changes with each alteration of human beings—who are all in a process of *becoming.* Yet the finite measures of justice improve as we recognize this truth.

COMMENTARY
THE MYSTERY OF JUSTICE

THE question of justice, discussed in Review, will probably never be satisfactorily settled in terms of human arrangements. One formulation of the idea of justice that may have hope of general acceptance is that justice would provide what each human being needs for his own growth and development. Not what he thinks he needs, but what he *really needs*—which may be pleasant or unpleasant in its effects. But even the wisest of men would have difficulty in making such arrangements. Some people seem to learn most from deprivation and pain, while others are reduced to helpless despair. Then, conceivably, one person may need to have what he thinks he needs in order to discover that he doesn't need it, while another, supplied with every want, will develop a ridiculously exaggerated conception of his well-being. Obviously, there will be little practical agreement on justice until such subjective factors are eliminated. But you *can't* eliminate the subjective factors. Our very sense of justice has a subjective origin.

The best solution we have been able to devise is to set up general ground rules defining "fairness" that everybody is supposed to agree to and obey. But this works only for one set of circumstances and one set of feelings about them. The Trotsky who wanted, as Beard said, "to be tried by the standards of truth and justice possessing universal validity among civilized peoples" was the same Trotsky who declared in *Their Morals and Ours* that petty-bourgeois moralists "radiate all colors of the rainbow but in the final analysis remain apostles of slavery and submission." Justice, he maintained, is what serves "the welfare of the revolution—that is the supreme law!"

But will the revolution he had in mind really bring human good? What sort of revolution can satisfy Dostoevsky's requirement that not one innocent child will suffer from its necessities?

Then there is the puzzling fact, as Maslow has pointed out, that humans have two broad categories of needs: deficiency-needs and being-needs. Deficiency-needs are needs of the body; being-needs are needs of the soul. These two sets of needs are often opposed in practical experience. In theory they may work together; in life they get in each other's way. The main thing seems to be to keep down influences which twist people out of shape. But since we don't agree on the right shape for human beings, we fall back on the conventions we are familiar with, finding it necessary to change them from time to time, often at the cost of great injustice to the powerless. The most we can hope for, apparently, is that in time more and more people will acquire the *will* to do justice. Getting it seems out of the question, unless, perchance, there is truth in the old teaching of Karma, and we have been getting it all along.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE QUESTION OF PURPOSB

A COMMENT by George Woodcock on the new Pantheon edition of Herbert Read's *Education Through Art* (*Na*tion, Oct. 12) deserves expansion:

> Even among modern progressive educators, like Edmund Holmes and A. S. Neill, who went far beyond the doctrinaire anarchists in both theory and practice, Read felt the lack of truly inspiring purpose. It was not enough to set the student free from constraint; there must be a positive principle at work if children were to be equipped to change not only their lives but also their society. The difficulty, Read suggested, lay in the fact that, while all progressives agreed "that in a democratic society the purpose of education should be to foster individual growth," few of them in fact understood the nature of growth.

Read believed, Woodcock shows by quotation, that growth is "a very complicated adjustment of the subjective feelings and emotions to the objective world," and that on the success of this adjustment depends "the quality of thought and understanding." Basing his ideas on conceptions found in Plato, Read proposed what he termed *æsthetic* education as the foundation of all learning, to enable men "to live in tune with the harmonies of the natural world." The child, according to Read, needs to have his life filled "with the motives and disciplines of a creative civilization." There are, he said, "certain rhythms, melodies and abstract proportions which when perceived convey to the open mind a sense of pleasure." Through the arts we become aware of these rhythms, and if, says Woodcock, interpreting Read, we can associate this esthetic experience or pleasure *"unconsciously* with the sense of good, then we have a means to create in the lives of men a harmony and a proportion analogous to what exists in the natural world." Except for Wilde's *The Soul of Man Under Socialism,* Woodcock says, *Education Through Art* is "the first and certainly the main guide to the practical and political application of an æsthetic philosophy." In this work, he continues, "We are presented with a method that will nurture the child in his spontaneous searchings after form, whether they take the visible shape of artifacts or are manifested less obviously in the discipline of games; we are given a chart by which the passages of adolescence can be safely navigated, without the destruction of sensibility, by firmly maintaining the primacy of the aesthetic element."

This reliance on *unconscious* conditioning seems questionable in an age of heightened self-consciousness, and there is the further problem that the harmonies of the natural world are, indeed, only analogies, not direct correspondences to the goals of harmony in human life. Perhaps our resistance springs partly from the emphasis on *"æsthetic* philosophy," which becomes for Read "a utilitarian doctrine of art for life's sake, with some emphasis on its inevitable corollary, life for art's sake." The "æsthetic," as a category, began with Aristotle, not Plato, and for Plato the fundamental goal would be the pursuit of truth rather than the beautiful. While the truth has its æsthetic aspect, naturally enough, the beautiful is not an end in itself. This comment, however, is certainly no criticism or rejection of Read's conception of education for *children,* but applies more to æstheticism as a general foundation for growth.

In the quotation given at the beginning, Woodcock says that "Read felt the lack of truly inspiring purpose" in even the most progressive education. Freedom from constraint is not enough. This seems the basic question. After all, how do you inspire the young with a sense or conception of purpose? Or, more pertinently, how *could* a society which is itself without clarity of purpose do much to plant purpose in the young?

In atomistic and pluralistic cultures such as ours, questions about the general purpose of life are usually embarrassing. Any purpose less than a high transcendent aim seems unworthy, but we find high transcendent aims impossible to talk about except in vague platitudes. So the common practice is to avoid speaking of the Purpose of Life. Other ideals receive much attention, such as Freedom, Progress, Achievement, and Excellence. All these values need clarifying definition, but this is seldom attempted.

In respect to human life, "meaning" and "purpose" are practically synonymous. We might,

then, look at the idea of meaning in terms of common practice. When there is a common sense of meaning, it pervades the daily life and decisions of the people. Children absorb it from their parents by cultural osmosis. The young need no instruction in meaning or purpose, which they acquire from the countless examples they see all about in the adult world. No single expression will sum up this implicit sense of purpose, although, if we go back to the early days of American history, the goals embodied in the Declaration of Independence might serve, if we give the word "happiness" sufficient variety of meaning. Speaking of the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson said, "Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind." Its authority, he added, rested on "the harmonizing sentiment of the day."

The point, here, is that formulation of "purpose" was not a serious educational problem in those days. Only in the past twenty or twenty-five years has the agony of purposelessness been widely felt by Americans, and only recently has the question of meaning or purpose been raised as requiring a clear answer from education.

This is not to suggest that the age of the Founding Fathers provided us with an adequate answer, but rather that in the past people were confident that they knew what they ought to do. Their lives were engrossed in the pursuit of goals. They had objectives to reach, fulfillments to achieve, and no particular reflection was needed to regard them as "good."

As a result, when we look back on such periods of history, we recognize a harmony of life that we do not possess and don't know how to get. This nostalgic feeling is not evidence that our forefathers knew the truth about purpose, but only that they thought they knew it. Their common agreement nonetheless produced what seems to us a desirable cultural coherence, and the pragmatists would undoubtedly suggest that the people of that time did indeed have what truth was possible in their day, since it worked so well.

We might say, too, that the social coherence of common purpose made it possible for various lesser truths to operate in peoples' lives. An implicit sense of meaning enabled them to organize their energies usefully and cooperate with one another. Below the level of the question of ultimate meaning, there can be a great deal of spontaneous or natural understanding. This is evident in the way children were raised in the past. J. H. Van den Berg remarks that our grandparents had no books on how to raise children. "Didn't they need those books?", he asks—and answers:

> To me there is no doubt about it; they did not. They did not need enlightenment, they knew how to act because they acted in a continuity; the child was right next to them, he was part of their mature world. There was nothing wrong with a rap on his fingers or with a disapproving look. This and similar measures from adults could not harm the child he was mature in the first place. But all this belongs to the past.

Well, that past is gone, and with it the confident feelings about purpose. Now we feel required to make purpose explicit, and we are practically tongue-tied on the subject.

Moreover, an explicitly declared general purpose is only the first step, since for it to work in the old, harmonizing, integrating way, it must become implicit, too—part of the grain of our lives, and so regain spontaneity.

We are quite familiar with practical purposes—everybody has them and responds to them in fulfillment of needs—deficiency needs, Maslow called them. But there are also higher, transcendent purposes—Being-needs—and everybody has these, too, but not everybody feels them. How does one balance these two sets of needs? What are appropriate relations between them?

It would be quite enough if education could find a way to *set* these questions. Answering them, after all, is difficult and not only the business of teachers. Answering them is the business of human life—everyone's.

FRONTIERS

Sides of an Argument

IN *Harper's* for November, George B. Leonard contends that rigid language and lack of vocabulary bar the way to new forms of conscious experience—or, as he names it, "consciousness change." The phrase is one to conjure with, and therefore as liable to confuse as to inform, but this writer's critical points are well made.

First he shows that a thorough understanding of the Chinese treatment by acupuncture is hardly possible in the West, for the reason that the Chinese holistic conception of the human organism, involving the ideas of yin and yang, can find no basis in "the Western medical model," and is therefore dismissed. The result:

> Thus far, most Western attempts to explain acupuncture have dealt only with its uses in anesthesia. The applications of the art to maintaining good health have been generally ignored. Therefore, it seems entirely possible that acupuncture, in some reduced and disfigured form, can be shoehorned into respectable "scientific" medicine, and the Western conception of what is real in this area can remain much the same as before.

This sort of criticism is useful. It says, in effect, what Alexis Carrel said years ago; what Rene Dubos has said more recently; and what Ivan Illich, from another point of view, is declaring from day to day.

It seems important to note that considerably more than a lack of "words" is involved in such limitations. To use new words before we have assimilated the meaning of the experiences for which they stand would be to go in for mumbo-jumbo. We already do too much of that. The verbal manipulation of concepts can take us far beyond the radius of our comprehended experience, giving the form and similitude of knowledge without its substance.

We should of course use our minds to reach out beyond immediate experience, but must be careful to distinguish between actual knowledge and the *possibility* of knowledge. Conceptual structures which include both what we know and what we theorize about are called metaphysics.

Mr. Leonard does not speak of metaphysics, but of a language parallel to it—symbolism. Symbols—and their use in structures called myths—may be thought of as colorful illustrations of metaphysical ideas. They put general or abstract conceptions into the forms of practical experience. Mr. Leonard says:

> On the deepest level, our language, our symbolic system, seems to resonate perfectly with All that Is. To approach the essence of the symbolic may be to approach the essence of the universe itself. Physicists are finding increasing wonder in the fact that purely abstract statements, totally disconnected from physical reality, can make such quick and powerful connection with the material universe. . . . Modern science seems to take us back toward ancient wisdom: "In the beginning was the Word." The physical universe is a mere shadow of the symbolic realm.

This possibility leads him to suggest that "the deep structure of language resonates with the deep structure of the material world, coexists with it." Well, there may be some "natural symbols" which occur to us spontaneously, but before there are symbolic structures there must be symbol-makers—minds which devise and elaborate symbolic representation. And when it comes to examples of the riches of symbolism, Leonard turns to poets such as Blake and Yeats, who help us "to sense again the shimmering connectedness between the trees, the flowers, the wind, the moss, and ourselves."

In other words, the evolution of symbolism and of rich symbolic language is something we need to undertake through our own conscious experience. In this poets may be pioneers, but true realizations of meaning cannot be left to artist-priests. And we probably ought to use very carefully other people's words that we have not yet personally understood—words too easily waved like flags or worn as badges, and which, through repetitious pretense, block the way to

understanding. Here, too, bad currency drives out the good.

Another side of this argument—also in *Harper's* for November—is presented in a review by Thomas Powers of Richard Kostelanetz's *The End of Intelligent Writing.* This book is a defense of "experimental" writing and an attack on the New York literary Establishment which, according to the author, refuses to publish innovators. Mr. Powers begins by asking what is at stake:

> Which writers does Kostelanetz think have been frozen out of the literary marketplace? . . .
>
> I . . . quote . . . the following passage from Toby MacLennan's "I Walked out of 2 and Forgot it," which Kostelanetz cites for its originality:
>
> *He was bombarded by various memories. An A and an Of, the toe of a shoe, a half of an apple. That night as he sat down for dinner, a stone dropped out of his ear.*

Then he quotes from Armand Schwerner's "The Tablets," admired by Kostelanetz "for its musical qualities":

min-na-ne-ne Dingir En-lil-ra
mun-na-nob-gi-gi
uzu-mu-a-ki dar-an-ki-ge
Dingir nagar Dingir nagar
im-man-tag-en-zen
mu-mud-e-ne nam-lu-galu
mu-mu-e-ed

While this method of criticism, the reviewer admits, ignores "Kostelanetz's fine passion for writing" and the fact that his defense of experimentalism is a polemic "worth paying attention to," he also says:

> I can't help feeling grateful that *Commentary* and *The New York Review* are at the gates, defending future generations of college freshmen from one-hour essay questions on stone symbolism in "I Walked out of 2." Kostelanetz cites 836 poets, playwrights, and "fictioners," all born since 1937, whom he considers to be embryonic giants of the age. This makes me feel, as it does the New York literary mob that the dams are about to burst, that literature of the heart and mind is about to be drowned by a formalist, experimental, manufactured literature of the head.

In his article, "Language and Reality," Mr. Leonard warns: "Jargon may proliferate when we try to pin down experiences not yet experienced by the culture as a whole." Something worse than jargon proliferates when the words used or invented are without meaning and alien to experience.

The kind of language we use now, Mr. Leonard concludes, makes possible "a powerful discourse of separation and instrumentality." Then he says:

> A language of union and being also exists. Only timidity and inertia prevent us from helping it rise to the common speech of this culture.

Well, something more than daring is probably needed. There are both licit and illicit unions, just as there are good and bad instruments. Therapeutic leaps are probably never accomplished without those "tiny, invisible, molecular forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world. . . ."