

## TO MAKE THINGS GO RIGHT

IF you turn away from the sometimes confident pronouncements and conclusions of the professionals who have assumed the task of explaining the world to the rest of us, and give attention to what ordinary people are saying—about how they feel, what they hope, and how things look to them—you soon realize that the vague suspicion that this is not the best of all possible worlds has grown into a settled conviction. It is as though people are saying especially the young—"We have been fooled, conned, misled." They don't see in their own experience any confirmation of the general belief, so universal forty or fifty years ago, that the human race is on the right track. The "upward and onward" spirit which both Americans and Europeans inherited from the Enlightenment is no longer spontaneous and taken for granted.

It is like coming in on a performance of some play or film, expecting to make sense of what is happening, but seeing instead a monotonous succession of meaningless misfortunes, sometimes disasters—a flow of disorders that would be completely uninteresting were it not for the fact that we are all increasingly involved in them. Things just keep on going wrong: they lead nowhere, and give little promise of improving, even if we make heroic efforts to change them for the better. Our troubles don't have handles. We mostly watch them coming our way, wishing there were something we could see to do. Forlorn is the word for the way many people feel.

Back of these anxieties is the usually unspoken impression that we were *supposed* to understand the play—the scene and action of our lives—and be able to find something we can believe in, get into, both enjoy and contribute to. But the fact is, we don't. We don't understand the meaning, if any, in what is going on. There seems a continuous malice behind the messes occurring

all around. Consider the following from a letter (not written for publication) by a person in the middle twenties who happens to be in Paris, but might have had much the same impressions in any modern city:

We live in our individual box and are gradually acquiring all the essential "appliances" well, it keeps our industries busy and gives employment, doesn't it? As I go to work each morning—commuting on a suburban train, then taking the metro in Paris, traveling a total of from two to two-and-a-half hours a day, a fair average for the Paris area—I see the docile mass that we are a part of going to work at the same time, and I am increasingly struck by the absurdity of the whole thing. Here we are, all swept up in the machine to produce things we don't need, just in order to earn the money that will enable us to buy them. And all this at a faster and faster rate. The real tragedy is that as individuals—except for the few who are really teachers or practice "creative" activities—we don't have much of a choice; either you work, and thereby accept the imposed consumption of your life by schedule, or you don't have the money to eat. It's as simple as that. And no one seems to have realized (or at least the realization is not widespread) that the industrial nations now certainly produce enough to give us all a decent living (if the output were more intelligently planned and evenly distributed) and ample leisure as well. As it is, inequalities seem to be increasing, not only within the Western industrialized democracies, but also between them and the poor countries.

Two more paragraphs:

It is not particularly original to suggest that this is the time to re-examine the very basis of our industrial societies, yet the solutions toward which most of our political and economic leaders are tending go completely against common sense in human terms. Rather than trying to spread the work, produce fewer useless things, everyone seems to be attempting to save the production monster. I suppose all periods of historical transition have been painful—and only *ex post facto* does it become apparent that the way could have been made smoother but now, in fact, many people are aware that we could, and

should, take conscious decisions to shape our own history. The Club of Rome didn't need the oil crisis to come to its conclusions—and neither did Ivan Illich—and yet, such leaders or spokesmen don't seem to be effective in influencing public policy or social consciousness. Do we really need Maoism to force us to go in another direction?

One's own troubles, which may seem urgent, are overshadowed by those of humanity. The real problem is our inability to do anything about them. Somehow, the futility of what we are doing, and what we might conceivably do, seems greater than ever. I mean, there are people with good ideas who are writing "good" things, but they don't seem to affect one bit the course of events. . . . I know that it seems arrogant to talk in these terms, but now that we are part of the "adult" working society, the absurdity of our productive system has become much more apparent and much more constraining. Except for a few voices in the wilderness (*Le Monde*, for example), public awareness of the fact that traditional liberalism is obsolete seems practically nonexistent. By "traditional liberalism" I mean the myth of "privacy"—the idea that every man must have his personal car, apartment, children, and so on. In reality, modern construction is so shoddy that in your private home you can hear the most intimate noises of neighbors all around. What has happened to our much vaunted individualism, when every isolated family living in its own box does exactly the same things at the same time, owns all the same gadgets, and too often repeats the same ineffectual opinions? . . . I exaggerate, I suppose, and such criticism makes us seem to forget that we are all about as good or bad as everyone else . . . and yet, and yet. . . .

Well, it is easy—all too easy—to make abstractly plausible suggestions of alternatives. This correspondent's point is that, very nearly whatever you do, the lethargy "out there" remains: Ortega's "mass man" is still shaping the ruling patterns of human behavior; and even as you recognize the intense humanness of people as individuals, the profile of what they seem constrained to do with their lives remains unchanged by all the little decencies and even occasional excellences you are able to see and appreciate.

It may be initially clarifying to go back into history and biography as a way of getting behind

the polemical judgments of social movements—to find that individuals who have been held responsible for many of our troubles were nonetheless thoughtful, kindly persons who believed they were saying and doing the right things. You can't read men like Adam Smith and Herbert Spencer without developing a wholesome respect for their human qualities. The same applies to, say, Galileo, whose mechanistic piety—he wanted to make all things *measurable*—has made him a whipping boy in recent years; yet he turns out to have been a personally admirable man, a victim of theological prejudice and fear. This sort of review of history is useful in demonstrating the folly of basing theories of progress or reconstruction on the dynamics of blame . . . but then what?

If we can eliminate moral condemnation from our social analysis and criticism, the next step quite possibly would be to stipulate that the benevolent simplifications of good men may become the intellectual and societal prisons of succeeding generations; and that, indeed, this seems an inevitable aspect of the human condition and not something we can correct with a bold revolutionary stroke or a purge or two.

Quite obviously, there are two problems: the individual situation and the social situation. It sometimes happens that individuals pretty much solve their personal problems by throwing themselves into the social struggle, since the person who finds something to work at that he believes in with all his heart often develops a strong personal harmony. His *action* has a generative power which creates a field for the expression of his capacities. Being committed, he is no longer at war with himself. This becomes true at every level. The teacher in a one-room school house may have a transforming influence on both his pupils and himself, and it becomes exciting and even inspiring to read about his accomplishments.

But someone will say: If this is how the mills of the gods work, then they grind so slowly that

we can't notice any progress at all! Such persons want to see general sense as well as personal sense in the living of a life. And so, we may ask, is philosophy any help? What do we actually know that might help us to think more clearly about the whole human situation?

Well, the part of philosophy which deals with what we know and how we know it is called Metaphysics. Can metaphysics help us? Metaphysics, on a common-sense basis, is supposed to teach us, first, to eliminate the contradictions in our thinking. What happens, for example, if you decide to "believe in God"? What are the consequences of making this assumption? If you pursue the question seriously, you find that ultimate realities such as the word "God" is meant to represent are really beyond ordinary definition, and that stipulating some theological version of the nature of Deity can create endless confusion. You may decide that only a pantheistic conception will stand critical examination; some of the greatest minds of the past reached this conclusion. However, so brief and bald a statement hardly results in increased understanding. The pantheistic view suggests that deity is somehow all-pervasive, in everything and everybody; yet if this is the case why are so many things in an ungodly mess? And what are *we*, who are locked fast in these dilemmas, yet able, at the same time, to think such momentous thoughts—momentous as abstract ideas, but largely ineffectual as illuminators of the human condition?

If you go to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, you find that metaphysical inquiry has diminished a great deal during the past fifty years. For example, in the 1911 (eleventh) edition of the *Britannica*, the article on Metaphysics occupies twenty-eight pages (large pages, small type, enough to make a modest book), while in the 1953 (fourteenth) edition there are two and a half columns on the subject, or something over one page. The extent of the article in the eleventh edition ought not to be a discouragement, but we suspect that very few inquirers would survive

reading it through. At least four or five years of collateral study would be required to understand clearly the history of thought involved in this essay, and its fruitlessness for human betterment is indicated by the reduced space given to metaphysics in the *Britannica* of forty-two years later. Conceivably, the reason for this decline is suggested by the conclusion of the eleventh-edition article, which argues that we should go back and start all over again, beginning with Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. We must then, this writer says,

go forward from Aristotle to Bacon and modern science and even pass through the anarchy of modern metaphysics, in the hope that in the future we may discover as complete an answer as possible to these two questions:—

1. What is the world of things we know?
2. How do we know it?

What seems evident is that knowledge of the things in the world and even a comprehension of the grounds of our knowing leaves out the most essential element in human life—*who or what is it that does the knowing?*

For, manifestly, since there is so much variability in the knowing individuals called human beings—so many differences in what they know, and in what they think they know, and also in how they use their knowledge, and in their ends—a single, vast, encyclopedic account of the world and of the mechanisms of gaining awareness of all this information is *not* what human beings mean, spontaneously and longingly, when they speak of knowledge. They seek, not a complete and detailed inventory—which is after all hardly possible and would probably prove useless if it were—but a sense of meaning and promise for their own lives. This is something that modern philosophy does not provide and does not even try to provide.

What is wanted is a realizing sense of what we are doing here, what our lives are for, where we came from, and why, and where we may be going. Then, if we can get some workable

answers to these questions, we may be in a better position to understand the world we live in, and to find out what *it* is for, and why our relations with the world and with each other are in such scratchy condition.

One thing is apparent: We are not able to obtain answers to these questions—working hypotheses, that is, which may conceivably be verified—without making some far-reaching assumptions and perhaps taking some risks.

One assumption we might make is that *some* men have found answers to these questions. This assumption is justifiable on intuitive grounds. That is, we have this word *wisdom*, standing for a quality in human life, and we believe that it has meaning and application. There have been men who lived lives that were great and good, and some of them attempted to communicate their understanding to others. The conventional way of identifying these persons is by calling them religious teachers or saviors.

However, this first assumption requires a second—assumption or admission—by reason of the facts of history. It is that most men, while they may admire the great teachers, have not been able to take their wisdom and make it their own. Wisdom is evidently not transferable in the same way that ordinary information is. In short, there is a growth-process in gaining authentic understanding that is not immediately plain. Even so, there are possible explanations of this difficulty. Some say that they want "better evidence" that the truth of religious philosophy is indeed true; others propose that the evolution of the soul takes a long, long time—many incarnations, perhaps, must be gone through, many courses of enriching experience, and the will to know must be sustained throughout this extraordinary odyssey. (We adopt the doctrine of reincarnation as our hypothesis for a number of reasons, although here, taking it as a metaphysical proposition about the nature of man, it may become acceptable for the reason given by the greatest of skeptics in Western thought, David

Hume, who said that it is "the only system to which philosophy can hearken.")

The doctrine of reincarnation is logical enough. It was taught by Pythagoras, embodied by Plato in myth and suggestively indicated in his dialogues. It became the keystone of the Neoplatonic philosophy, and presents itself, as Schopenhauer said, "as the natural conviction of man whenever he reflects at all in an unprejudiced manner." This teaching is of course the rational ground of the philosophy of soul in both Hindu and Buddhist thought.

It is a teaching which lends support to the conception of man as a Promethean spirit, laying the basis for thinking of ourselves as "eternal pilgrims" who gather the experiential fruition of many embodiments, gradually growing into the intellectual and moral stature for which in the West Prometheus is symbol and archetype, and represented in the East by the sublime ideal of the *Bodhisattva*, the perfect Buddha who rejects Nirvana in order to be of continued service to a bewildered, ignorant, and frustrated mankind.

As a doctrine, this view of ourselves has much to recommend it, although there remains much, also, to reconcile with such a splendid conception of human potentiality. But the teaching of rebirth also brings confirmation of our deepest hopes and longings—of those wonderful intuitions which come unbidden, filling our dreams with wondering ideas about breaking loose from the confining circumstances of earthly existence. Are we then, as human beings, collaborators of both heaven and earth, a unifying juncture of spirit and matter? Are the labors of Hercules no myth, but an account, in ancient allegory, of the tasks to which we have set ourselves as spiritual beings? Are we truly children of the gods—even as Hercules, with both a mortal and an immortal parent?

Musing on such possibilities, W. Macneile Dixon wrote in *The Human Situation*:

According to Plato's theory of reminiscence, our present knowledge is a recollection of what was learnt or known by the soul in a previous state. You will say, it has no knowledge of its previous lives. But what man remembers every day of his life? And lost memories, as the psychologists will tell you, are recoverable. For the memory appears to be but a palimpsest, from which nothing is ever obliterated. If we have forgotten most days and incidents of our present lives it is natural that memories of previous lives should fail us. Yet from infancy every forgotten day and hour has added to our experiences, to our growth and capacity. All that a child was and did, though unremembered, is still a part of him and is knit up into his present nature. Every day and hour had its value and made its contribution to the mind and soul. So it may be with former lives, each of them but a day in our past history. The universe is wide, and life here or elsewhere might on this view be regarded as a self prescription, a venture willed by the soul for some end and through some prompting of its own, to enlarge its experience, learn more of the universe, recover lost friends, or resume a task begun but not fulfilled. The time has not come to close any of the avenues of thought into the mysteries surrounding us, and unless death finally triumphs over life it may never come. There may be choices open to the souls in their eternal quest for the highest good.

It is time, at any rate, to give some thought to conceptions and teachings which speak to the best in us and the highest we feel, instead of being totally preoccupied with the stuff and tools of material existence. Galileo was fascinated by the measurable, and began a cycle of physical inquiry that made modern man the master of gadgets and manipulating devices, but left him irresponsible and without principles or rules for their intelligent use. We *know* all this, today, since for proof we have only to look around. Descartes, tired of religious extravagances and fascinated by the clarity of his own mathematical thinking, split man into body and soul, but left soul with only the flimsiest of rationales—the "will of God," which no one has been able to make coherent without committing comprehensive heresies.

Must we then go on logic-chopping with this mutilated intellectual inheritance? Freud happened to make his formulations in the days of

European decadence and decline; he studied the economy of but half of man's psychodynamics, and looked at it in the dark. He is the depressed sage of our hungers, accountant of our appetites, and the stiff-necked advocate of stern father-images to guide us. As he said to Binswanger, "Man has always known that he is spirit; it has been for me to show him that he is instinctual." Are we fated to think only of our "instincts," because of the precedent set by a brilliantly analytical but very pessimistic mind?

It is surely time to begin the formation of a culture, of a self-education and civilization which has the reach and press of vision. Such longings are already in ourselves, but they need more voice. Today they bubble up in the hungerings of the young, in the metaphors of poets, in the dreams of rebels, and in all of us when we raise our eyes and hold up our heads. But these gestures are not enough. The generation of a new philosophical environment for our thinking will surely have to precede the building of a society in which things begin to go right.

## *REVIEW*

### THE TWAIN ARE MEETING

CURIOSLY, Frederick Franck's latest book, *Pilgrimage to Now/Here* (Orbis Books, 1974, hardbound, \$6.95, paper, \$3.95), while meant to be an emancipation from time-bound thinking, is also a rather comprehensive "sign of the times." Dr. Franck is a Holland-born oral surgeon and dentist who draws, paints, and writes; who established a dental clinic as part of the hospital at Lambaréné, and came to know Dr. Schweitzer well; and who has turned his rare ability as a draftsman into an instrument of philosophic search and brooding reflection.

This book achieves a rather remarkable synthesis of generous Western Romanticism with Eastern dispassion and Buddhist serenity. For this reason it seems both a symbol and an embodiment of the rapidly increasing unity of mankind—of East and West—in the common search for truth and enlightenment. Suffused with the feeling of a mind reaching after ultimates of religious meaning, the book is also rich in critical comment, delightfully quirky asides, and an interesting reversal of fields in that the Easterners Dr. Franck talked to often revealed their mastery of Western sophistication, while he, as a Westerner, seems quite at home among the subtle conceptions of Eastern metaphysics and ideas of mystical realization. The author tells about his visits to India, Ceylon, and Japan, of the men and women he met and talked to, and what was said. While the eye and hand of the artist give the background of exotic surroundings, capturing the vivid, living quality that pervades the "torrents of flesh" in these thickly inhabited areas, Dr. Franck's journey is really a pilgrimage through shoals and constellations of ideas—a quest after resonances, harmonies, and identities in the longings and partial realizations of human beings.

Dr. Franck began life in an agnostic family, an island of intellectual independence in a sea of Catholic belief; yet his visual awareness as an

artist joined with what can be inadequately called a strong religious instinct led him to investigate Buddhism and, later, to try to find behind the façades of Christian dogma and belief the same psycho-religious verities. In this pilgrimage he talks to various Christian dignitaries, some of whom reveal searching insight into the changes that are now going on, and to a number of Buddhist thinkers, including the Dalai Lama, nearly all of whom displayed that combination of intellectual grasp and intuitive awareness which is characteristic of persons who have educated themselves in the aspiring rationalism taught by the Buddha.

We spoke of there being an element of romanticism in Dr. Franck's work. This is usually a double-edged quality. While it brings the warmth and enthusiasm needed for rich and sympathetic communication, it may also blur the edges of important distinctions. In the case of this book, it seems extravagant to identify Pope John XXIII as a *Bodhisattva*, whatever the excellences of that much-admired pontiff, since to be on the verge of Buddhahood represents a degree of human development and perfection that will hardly be encountered in any worldly institutional association. Actually, when it comes to the use of such superlatives, the practice of a careful restraint seems peculiarly desirable, since speaking too easily—or generously—of unimaginably high attainments can reduce the possibility of understanding what they in fact represent. And when it comes to the quality of mystical union, the verbal tendencies of Western thought may also be misleading. Better to see through a glass darkly, leaving to those with Plotinian genius the metaphors of the Nirvanic state.

But "liberation from the toils of existence" does not convey the feeling that Dr. Franck brought with him on his Eastern pilgrimage. As one schooled in Buddhist conceptions, yet a Westerner, he is drawn to the "socially engaged" or Promethean course of decision, entering into friendly debate with monks of the Theravada

persuasion. There was this dialogue with one whom he met near the statue of the Aukana Buddha, in Ceylon:

"Our ideal is to become an Ahrat, to succeed in reaching enlightenment by meditation," says the monk.

"That is Theravada, of course. My own sympathies are drawn to the Bodhisattva, the ideal of Mahayana, the Great Vehicle. The Ahrat enters into the bliss of Nirvana. But the Bodhisattva at the point of enlightenment refuses to enter. He has vowed to forgo this bliss as long as a single creature remains unredeemed, unliberated, enslaved to delusion and ignorance. He turns back, descends into the marketplace in order to bestow blessings on all men. He uses his attainment of self-nature, of the fullness of human potentiality in order to reawaken man's hope, to encourage him, give him hope of reaching his own fullest potential, thus bringing salvation to all."

Dr. Franck's hope of joining Christianity and Buddhism together gained varying response, depending, it seems, upon whether the idea was understood in institutional or philosophical terms. There was this interchange with a distinguished Buddhist scholar of Ceylon, in which the author asked:

"Do you see any chance of integration of Christian and Buddhist values and meanings, Narada Mahathera? Could not Eastern introversion and Western activism complement one another? Isn't it high time for a synthesis?"

"The differences are too fundamental! Better leave Christianity Christianity and Bud&ism Buddhism! First there is your Judeo-Christian God. When I was once lecturing in a church in London I was asked about our Buddhist denial of God. I answered: 'How could I, sitting under the very roof of God, have the discourtesy to deny him?' But as you know, we reject the idea of a personal God, who creates the world *ex nihilo* and is to be feared and obeyed. Hence the sonship of Christ makes no sense to us at all, neither his role as Savior of an immortal soul, for we do not believe man has an immortal ego-soul.

"The Buddha does not pretend to be a savior. He is a teacher who exhorts his disciples to depend on themselves in reach liberation. He does not condemn men by calling them wretched sinners, but he

gladdens them by showing them that they are potentially pure in heart."

"Isn't there here a parallel to the Christian's 'glad tidings'," I asked. "Jesus showed in his words and especially in his manner of life and death his fullest acceptance of what you call karma. He 'demonstrates' as it were the full potentiality of man, the Kingdom that is within."

"Christ is a Savior, he said vehemently. "To believe in him is to achieve salvation. Nobody is saved by believing in the Buddha. A man is saved by following his teachings, by living the Dharma, by living according to the law of reality, the truth. Buddhism does not deal in superstitious rites and ceremonies, dogmas, sacrifices, and repentance as the price of salvation."

When Dr. Franck said, "I see Christ as the one who discerns the structure of Reality, recognizes it within himself as his ground, as his deepest self, and who empties himself of the delusional ego," the monk replied:

"Buddhism denies the reality of the self. There is no *atman*, no self."

"That is not the whole of Buddhism, is it?" I objected. "That is Theravada. Mahayana does not see the self as mere illusion. The True Self, according to this view, is the empirical psychological self minus its egocentric, narcissistic imagination. The True Seif, after this discounting of ego, is as rich in content as ever before, even immensely richer, because it no longer stands pitted against the world but contains the world within itself. *Anatta* (litt. the 'absence of *atman*'), according to this view, means that there is no psychological substratum corresponding to the word *self*. May I continue? Christ lives his identification with his ground, with the structure of reality to the point where he can call it 'father.' 'I and the Father are one'." . . .

"You give an extremely Buddhist interpretation of Christianity. Or a Christian interpretation of Buddhism! You would have trouble selling it at All Saints!"

The debate goes on, with give and take. When Dr. Franck asked about the idea of "transcendence" in Theravada Buddhism, Narada replied:

"There is Nirvana. The Udana sutra says: 'There is a not-born, not-become, not-created, not-

formed. If there were not this not-born, not-become, not-created, not-formed, then an escape from the born, the become, the created, the formed could not be known'."

There seems clear philosophic weakness in the Theravada claim of *Anatta*—that there is no immortal soul, that only a constellation of *skandhas* or personal, earthly traits, generated through karma, is reborn, life after life—since its result is that there is no core being to suffer the karma, or to be enriched by it. Westerners who resist this negating doctrine of Theravada Buddhism naturally incline, as Dr. Franck inclines, to the Mahayana teaching of the *Bodhisattva*, who is the climactic flowering of a continuing spiritual identity, completely shorn of egotism, and even egoism, yet still an identity, although one which, paradoxically, has realized its unity with the totality of Self. This problem of identity seems to arise from the difficulty with which embodied beings like ourselves distinguish between external or material individuality, accomplished by separation, and spiritual individuality which is attained by the will to conscious union with the All. One must suspect that the Theravadic doctrine began as a sort of insurance policy against materialization of the idea of spiritual egoity, since this conception is easily degraded by those who have no notion of a selfhood which is not achieved by isolation. How, indeed, can those who recognize only the false self of desire and ambition conceive of a self which loses itself in the whole?

The tale of the Buddha's encounter with the monk Vacchagotta, and his refusal to reply to the question, "Is there the Ego?", shows the reticence of the teacher, but reticence is not denial; reticence is simply evidence of the profundity of the question and the need for growth into what lies behind it, instead of an "answer."

The most notable thing about this book by Dr. Franck, it seems to us, is the natural way in which such problems are considered, together, by men of the Far East and the Far West. Kipling, apparently, was wrong. The twain are now

meeting and beginning to understand each other well. The result will surely be mutual growth and a new beginning in both practical and theoretical religious philosophy for all the world.



## **COMMENTARY**

### **THE CIDOC APPROACH**

WHILE the correspondent quoted in this week's lead links the Club of Rome and Ivan Illich, as both pointing to conditions which require radical change, there is an important difference in the *level* of the criticisms involved. The ominous generalizations of *Limits to Growth* gain their impact largely through computer-assisted calculations, but Illich dramatizes the self-deceptions which underlie both psychological and physical disaster.

For example, in a recent CIDOC paper, "National Health Insurance and the People's Health," Illich, John McKnight, and Robert Mendelsohn show that the present preoccupation with "health insurance" overlooks the fact that actual health results chiefly from factors quite independent of professional medical services. Bodily well-being, these writers point out, comes from "self-activated behavior" such as the breast-feeding of infants, "walking rather than riding, not smoking, temperate use of food and drink." Contributing is the attentive care of family and neighbors, along with basic environmental conditions such as sanitation, air pollution, transportation, lead poisoning, unemployment, and conditions of work. The medical care that health insurance brings cannot modify or change the influence of these foundation factors of health. Health, in short, is *not* a commodity that can be "delivered" by a class of professionals. For this reason, belief in the efficacy of health insurance becomes "basically health-denying and reactionary."

Health is also confused with "terminal life-extension technologies," which claim an increasing share of the taxes allotted to health. These writers say:

Serving the death-denial market will require a complex industrial research and professional support system. Increasing percentages of the health dollar will promote public-relations-oriented research

extravaganzas designed to create "breakthroughs" that appear to delay death by a few weeks or months.

In summary, we predict that national health insurance will stimulate the delivery of disabling medical services, intensify reliance on useless preventive measures, and radically exaggerate the death-denying tendencies of the existing system.

By such means people are persuaded to ignore the positive sources of human health and to continue trying to "buy" what they can only produce themselves. (The address of CIDOC is Apdo. 479, Cuernavaca, Mexico.)

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves "REFLECTIVE ATTENDING"

LIKE many others, we have always felt some withdrawal in relation to "psychoanalysis," probably because of the resemblance of this activity to the authority-role established in the confessional box by the priest. An authority figure can hardly contribute to the kind of learning which leads to equality between teacher and learner, which Tolstoy esteemed the goal of education. Yet it is at least possible, on the other hand, that *any* meeting between two human beings, regardless of institutional framework, will be educational. A real teacher who has concern for the autonomy of the student can always reject the presumption of his authority, no matter what the system he is obliged to work under, and so, even if tacitly, move toward the Tolstoyan ideal.

So also, no doubt, with psychoanalysis. Years ago, A. H. Maslow remarked that in the natural course of its development psychoanalysis would be transformed into simply an educational function. This seems logical, and a task that will be performed by persons who reshape the therapeutic relationship from their own discovery of the crucial importance of psychological independence to health.

There is the further consideration that certain distinguished psychoanalysts have been responsible for many of the insights that have become a part of the wisdom of our times. You don't acquire insight by being an authoritarian, or listening to one, so that the traditional externals of the analyst/patient relationship by no means necessarily define what is going on. It is perhaps natural that the cultural distortions (authority roles) which are characteristic of an epoch should have a bad initial effect on even the processes which may eventually contribute to reform! Thus, the elimination of domination by authority may begin with the revolt of those who start out by assuming authority roles, and then, by reason of

individual awakening, institute radical changes. The rapid spread of "non-directive therapy" can be recognized as a confirmation of Maslow's prediction of the growing-up of psychoanalysis into a purely educational activity.

Again, years ago, in a paper written in 1940, Henry Murray pointed out that while academic psychologists were performing experiments in physiological psychology, psychoanalysts were talking to really sick people, feeling their pain, trying to help them, and meeting together in the evening to compare their experiences and make their theories more adequate; and who, then, asked Murray, is more likely to gain actual knowledge about the human psyche, its qualities and possibilities—the academics or the analysts? Compassion can be discerned as a spontaneous ingredient in the really successful therapeutic relationships, and this alone is a decisive consideration.

We have a paper by Eugene T. Gendlin and several others which adds substantially to this general impression of what is happening, step by step, in psychotherapy. The paper is titled "Focusing Ability in Psychotherapy, Personality, and Creativity," published by the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., in one of a series of volumes titled *Research in Psychotherapy* (Vol. 3). Dr. Gendlin starts out by remarking that "intellectualizing" about one's psychological difficulties seldom leads to any recovery. What *does* help is what Dr. Gendlin calls "an activity of reflective attending" on the kind of feeling one has with respect to the problem. The useful sort of reflecting leads to a change in attitude, a *shift* in the way one looks at the situation. As Gendlin says:

At such a time the individual may exclaim "Oh! . . ." well before he has had time to formulate words for the shift which has occurred in felt concreteness. After a few seconds he may employ many words. It is *one* bit of felt shift, yet thereafter, *many* details of what he was wrestling with will appear different, new facets will now seem relevant, different things will occur to him. . . . When such a felt experiential concreteness is carried forward so that it shifts or

eases even slightly, all these thousands of implicit facets have changed.

As a practicing therapist, Dr. Gendlin is interested in generalizing this process, and he tries to get at it through conceptualization in various ways. Such inner transformations or illuminations are extremely difficult to describe. You almost need some "poetry," such as helps in telling about the "I am me" experience of children, which may come the first time they feel a strong sense of self or individual being.

Through the years we have noticed in Dr. Gendlin's writing a continuous effort to give a measure of "objectivity" to subtle inward processes, and it is hard to imagine a more elusive and complex form of discourse. The reader is called upon to use his imagination with some skill, to generate coherent concepts which match what Gendlin is talking about. If he would give more illustrations, it might be easier to understand him.

For example, a recent encounter with a six-year-old boy might exemplify the principle involved in "reflective attending." This child occupied a large room in his home where there were two beds, one his, the other used by a young friend who often stayed overnight. The room was crowded with too much furniture, and practically everything in it was ill-arranged. His parents figured out a way to make the room more habitable, and since this involved workmen (to lay carpeting) the boy had to stay out of the room until its transformation was complete.

He didn't like the idea of changing the room around at all. A mirror had to be moved, along with the dresser beneath, and this meant displacing certain favorite articles and pictures that were on the wall. "I like it just the way it is!", he stormed, frowning furiously. After a couple of hours the alterations in the room were finished, and from an adult point of view it seemed vastly improved. The beds had been located in different corners, the new carpet was down, and an attractive book-case for his toys and picture books was near the bed.

The extra furniture had been removed and there was now space to move around.

"Come on, let's go look at the room!" one of the parents said. The boy was happily playing in the yard, but the reminder of what had taken place in *his* room renewed his scowling mood. Cajolery was not going to work, it seemed clear. Parent and child went into the room, the one hopeful, the other grimly set to disapprove. The little boy looked around. "How do you like it?" the parent asked. His face was a study. Part annoyance from his previous feeling, but part puzzlement, too. Actually, the room looked a lot nicer.

So the little boy performed an act of "reflective attending." Without any change of expression, he said slowly, "I don't know what I was expecting." Sensing that he was half-way to reconciliation, the parent kept still. After a moment the boy said, "I guess I thought the beds would be closer together."

The parent said, "Well, I guess you did. It's nice to be able to talk quietly after the light goes out, and now it won't be so easy because the beds are farther apart. That's true. And you know, it wasn't really fair that we rearranged the room over your head. But there wasn't much time and we just *had* to do it."

The little boy kept looking around. Now there was plenty of space on the floor for playing the sort of games he liked to invent. Then he saw the tiny nightlight in the wall socket, right beside his bed. He liked to switch it on; it was his friend in the dark, a soft, kindly glow. "Oh boy," he said, "I can just lean over and put it on."

That was the end of the problem. It had been solved, essentially, by the boy himself, because, for some reason or other, he decided to look at himself and this changed the set of his feelings. The change made sense to him, so he made it. For the parent it was, as usual, more luck than management.

Dr. Gendlin's paper is directed toward the goal of making such acts of reflective attending as easy and natural as possible.

## *FRONTIERS*

### About America and Americans

A FEW years ago we added to our small collection a cartoon that seemed worth saving. Signed "Hilk," it showed a disconsolate man lying on a psychoanalyst's couch saying plaintively to the therapist, "I'm a white, middle-class Protestant of Anglo-Saxon origin and responsible for all the world's ills."

If you read the liberal and radical press it soon becomes plain that the Americans are experts at self-criticism; they may not do much toward correcting the things they find wrong, but they have at least enough self-confidence to feel no inhibitions about blaming themselves, and they are almost as good as the British at making self-deprecatory jokes.

A point is reached, however, at which all criticism becomes counter-productive. Even if we take full credit for all the bad things we have done and are doing, it seems necessary to practice a certain restraint; because, if you don't, it will seem that people haven't got the resources, even potentially, to do any better.

While thinking along these lines, someone gave us a copy of a little weekly published on the Pacific Coast (the *Malibu Times* for Dec. 28) which reprinted a recent broadcast over a Toronto radio station. The Canadian commentator, Gordon Sinclair, started off by saying that the American dollar had reached a new low on European exchanges, but stopped to notice the apparent pleasure some people were taking in the vicissitudes of American affairs. And then he said:

As long as sixty years ago, when I first started to read newspapers, I read of floods on the Yellow River and the Yangtze. Who rushed in with men and money to help? The Americans did.

They have helped control floods on the Nile, the Amazon, the Ganges and Niger.

Today the rich bottomland of the Mississippi is under-water and no foreign land has sent a dollar to help.

Germany, Japan, and to a lesser extent Britain and Italy were lifted out of the debris of war by the Americans who poured in millions and forgave other billions in debts.

None of those countries is today paying even the interest on its remaining debts to the United States.

When the franc was in danger of collapsing in 1956, who propped it up and their reward was to be insulted and swindled on the streets of Paris?

I was there. I saw it. . . .

Well, Mr. Sinclair goes on, speaking of earthquake disaster relief, the- Marshall Plan, then switches to our technological know-how, which doesn't really seem worth mentioning, if the idea is to encourage an appreciation of certain elementary moralities we seem to have been capable of in the past. Of course, the adolescent conceit and supremely annoying "success" of the Americans have been enough to try the patience of both saints and philosophers, to say nothing of ordinary folk, so gleeful "ingratitude" may not be so unnatural as the Canadian suggests. Perhaps the thing to say is that during recent generations when the Americans have had the historical initiative—the power to say yes, no, or maybe, about major international issues—their record has sometimes been not quite as bad as that of some earlier empires during their prosperous days in the sun.

But comparisons with an eye to harsh judgment or fixing blame are not really relevant, these days. The main thing to recognize is the need for the moral strength to get going on changes. Continuous scapegoating and faultfinding can only weaken us all. We still need to keep the record straight, and never ignore the hideous mistakes made by all the nations, but most of all to realize that so long as people allow "nations" to act for them, these mistakes, which seem to get worse every year, will go on and on.

It is a fact that the days of overflowing American abundance are over, although it is probably true that we waste more food and energy than any other people in the world. Yet there are reasons for this poor practice, some of which were

put by Norman Cousins in his Jan. 26 *Saturday Review/World* editorial:

A number of factors came together in magical combination to make America a stage for progress and abundance. First, the habitat. Unlike Europe, where the movement of people, goods, and ideas was blocked by numberless frontiers, America was an unencumbered domain. It was not merely a country but also a vast arena for new beginnings with an infinite capacity for absorbing the kind of mistakes that had pock-marked human history elsewhere. America had everything congenial to human existence—abundant land, abundant rain, abundant sunlight.

Americans also wrote a pretty good constitution, making an open society for various levels of enterprise—undertakings of the mind as well as of commerce and industry, along with general expansion and stretching out in all directions.

Well, things are different now. "Independence" is going to require a new definition or meaning. And as Mr. Cousins says, America's "manifest destiny" needs a lot of rethinking. "Abundance is no longer an assured way of life." And serious as our present and future economic problems may be, these are overshadowed by more crucial considerations:

A whole new set of problems common to all nations has emerged. These problems pertain to the world community and can be solved only at the world level. War, resource depletion, inflation, environmental poisoning, over-crowding—all these problems are beyond solution by any nation acting alone.

One sentence of this editorial tells the story: "The United States, like all other nations, has been de-nationalized geographically." Everything that is now written on matters of environment, economics, and world affairs makes the sense of what Mr. Cousins says inescapable. But is it altogether true that we can solve such problems "only at the world level"? We may have been de-nationalized geographically, but do we "know it"? Have we, in short, been de-nationalized *psychologically*? International action can hardly

be effective without a growing constituency of international people, able to think and ready to act without attention to the old "nation-state" idea of interest and progress. People will have to nullify the old ways of making policy before the new, humanized responses to human need can begin to direct and integrate the forms of common action.