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ANOTHER LANGUAGE

THE quest for self-knowledge is a delicate, uncertain, and contradictory affair. That such knowledge exists and can be obtained seems beyond question. Its reality is attested not only by the deep longings of those who seek it, but also by the historical record of men whose balance, serenity, and insight gave evidence of preternatural wisdom. What but self-knowledge could supply these qualities? Then what, we must also ask, is the connection between this wisdom and what we speak of as self-knowledge?

The answer to this last question is not obscure. Self-knowledge naturally includes awareness of the purposes of the consciously active agent within the human being—an awareness which grows into a realizing sense of the meaning of the multiple relationships which make up human life. Self-knowledge, then, involves a sure feeling about what is real; it provides verifiable certainty concerning how things work; and, most important of all, includes self-validating understanding of the meaning or purpose of existence. It may be virtually impossible to give unambiguous definition to this sort of knowledge, since it is essentially preverbal, and may suffer procrustean mutilation by being conceptualized; yet it is nonetheless real, as knowledge, since men *live* by it. In the eternal dialogue each human holds with himself, the feelings called self-knowledge preside over the court of highest resort.

So, while we can hardly say what self-knowledge is, save in the elusive language of rarefied abstraction, we know that it exists.

Religions and philosophies embody the perennial attempts of men to give an account of self-knowledge—to generalize concerning what, in the nature of things, is uniquely individual—or to create acceptance for a single (narrow or broad) approach to the processes of self-discovery. Inevitably, then, many of the statements of religion and philosophy, simply by being uttered, diminish or time-bind the meaning of what is said. There is no help for this save in the releasing effect of paradox or the counterpoint of metaphor.

Couldn't we devise a language that would avoid finitizing definitions or modes of description? Probably not. This hardly seems possible since there are degrees of individual self-knowledge, and each step of advance rearranges the increments of meaning gained in all the previous steps. What you see in a weak light has the truth content appropriate to that light, but later on, with brighter illumination, you see much more, so that the object of knowledge may radically change. We say "object," but need to remember that in self-knowledge the *object* is also the *subject;* and that there may be a sense in which the knowing subject is altered by the act of knowing more about itself, as well as a sense in which it cannot be altered at all. Knowing what is unchanging in the self, as well as knowing both the stuff and the ranges of possible change, may be the heart of the matter, in self-knowledge.

We have been suggesting, in effect, that *any* statement about an incommensurable reality represents a bias, a confinement, a partial view. Yet the entirety of great literature is the result of efforts to transcend this limitation. We might say that the essential characteristic of the human being is this attempt—this irrepressible longing—to break out of the prison of finite experience, to reach beyond the terms of ordinary knowledge. And here, perhaps, we have the element of the universal which is present in every uniquely singular reaching after self-knowledge. In other words, the striving toward transcendence moves all men. History gives us a conditioned,

collectivized version of this striving, while what the striving is, in itself, remains obscure. The farthest reaches of the mind are strainings to give an account, in terms of itself, of this conatus of the human spirit.

One example of these expressions—which recently became available—is the report of an experience by a young man of twenty-one, set down in 1916 when the writer was a medical student in Zurich. It was published in German in 1972 by Editio Academica (Zurich). The author, Dr. Hans C. Syz, a psychiatrist associated with the Lifwynn Foundation (Westport, Conn.), has supplied an English translation. His German title, *Vom Sein und vom Sinn*, can be rendered "About Being and Meaning," but Dr. Syz heads the English version simply "Notes."

He tells of an inner ordeal in which a "sudden insight into the total relativity of all existence" brought almost overwhelming terror. It was, he says, as though thinking became capable of dissolving itself. But the experience had another aspect:

> One could also say that suddenly I sensed deeply the question of the meaning of life in its entirety. Or the question arose, what is the real nature of man, of consciousness and personality? For I have always been occupied with these problems; I simply could not live life as it came. I had to give account to myself for what I did, sought to discover my real self in order to guide my actions according to my true nature. Thus many of the things of practical life did not interest me very much. I was not sociable; that is, I could no longer really or fully enjoy the simple things of life as long as the one big question remained unanswered. Faced with this one great question everyday life seemed of very little value, and I was unable to understand how a man could be content to be, for example, a coachman, I was amazed at the lack of meaning of such a way of life. And now the full realization suddenly descends on me that the question cannot be answered at all that the various solutions are merely external formulations without any corresponding content in reality.

If he could choose one existing system of explanation, the pain would disappear, the emptiness be filled. "Were I able," the young man wrote, "to embrace one form unconditionally, I should be saved." But he could not accept this short-term redemption. The unreality of all life and experience, in its endless complexity, remained. All identity seemed only a temporal construction, part of the flux. "Often it appears to me that I have lived in a dream thus far and that other people live in a sleep-consciousness, which cannot be abandoned, however, without despairing." The situation is that while all the world seems unreal, all the reference points of familiar knowledge are in the world, and outside of these, what can we know? Such feelings seem to threaten the dissolution of the self.

The account continues:

> I felt that I had penetrated as deeply as man can, that the end-point of all my striving had been reached not by discovering some final fundamental thought but by having arrived at the nature of thought itself beyond which all thought ceases. This recognition was not intellectual recognition but altogether experience, complete reality. It therefore is extraordinarily difficult for me to express these ultimates in the usual form of interchange whose purely formal significance was just what I experienced. I know with certainty that no philosophy can take me deeper than this, as my experience took place in a sphere which cannot be contained within a section of any science, but rather encompasses within itself all philosophy, or better, the possibility of all philosophy.
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> My experience concerns not only the nature of reason and its functions, but encompasses life in general, all of existence. In a sense it contains all of reality, and in whatever way I may express myself, it sets limits for men's possible knowledge regarding thought, consciousness, life, personality, soul, and the meaning of life.
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> I recognized clearly that all thinking finally is feeling. This again can be said only in forms of thought and hence it becomes very questionable whether one will be understood.

There is enough here for volumes of reflection or discussion, but let us look more closely at the last-quoted paragraph. Feeling provides the platform, the terra firma, of thought. Thought divorced from feeling is energyless,

ghostly. Thought encountered without prior experience of the feeling which gave it substance is a pale dance of categories, conveying no impact, without the leverage of meaning. Even the brief passage quoted here from Dr. Syz is sufficient to demonstrate this, for understanding its content is obviously dependent on the reader's own prior experience of the order of meaning with which the writer deals. We read what he says but know what he means from within ourselves. Feeling is what we know before we begin to speak of what we know. Feeling also stands for the things we know which are beyond speech. That such things are real is undeniable. Who, for-example, on reading the first sentence of a rendering of the *Tao Te Ching*, has failed to feel deep confirmation of its import: "The Tao which can be expressed in words is not the eternal Tao; the name that can be uttered is not the eternal name"? Yet, as Lao tse says, "it is the Mother of all things."

This outlawing of definition, we feel, is profoundly right, yet we go on writing, formulating, describing, despite growing awareness that there is no "last word" about anything, and that the most important meanings are likely to hide in the silences between the words. We do this because we know that communication may have an inductive effect. Things said are never knowledge, yet for some hearer or reader, somewhere, what is said may call out resonances of the knowledge he seeks, or is ready to realize. Universal meaning is not so much in conclusions derived as in the symmetry of those resonances, for they are somehow beyond the limitations of an age. Not without reason did Socrates declare in the *Phaedo* that the soul is a symmetry.

So, beside what Dr. Syz has said, we should like to place a quotation from Lafcadio Hearn, to illustrate a common symmetry. The youthful medical student writes, we might say, in existential terms. He offers no metaphysic, save the inescapable idea of a core of reality in every human being—an awareness which has the power to persist beyond time and space, which originated outside the circuit of life and death.

Schooled during his years in Japan in Buddhist doctrines, Hearn uses the language of the Mahayanaist, but the power of his thought intensifies what he says to the point of correspondence with Dr. Syz's expression. The following is the opening paragraph of the last chapter of Hearn's book, *Gleanings in Buddha Fields* (Harper, 1898), titled "Within the Circle":

> Neither personal pain, nor personal pleasure can really be expressed in words. It is never possible to communicate them in their original form. It is only possible, by vivid portrayal of the circumstances or conditions causing them, to awaken in sympathetic minds some kindred qualities of feeling. But if the circumstances causing the pain or the pleasure be totally foreign to common human experience, then no representation of them can make fully known the sensations which they evoked. Hopeless, therefore, any attempt to tell the real pain of seeing my former births. I can say only that no combination of suffering possible to *individual* being could be likened to such pain,—the pain of countless lives interwoven. It seemed as if every nerve of me had been prolonged into some monstrous web of sentiency spun back through a million years,—and as if the whole of that measureless woof and warp, over all its shivering threads, were pouring into my consciousness, out of the abysmal past, some ghastliness without name,—some horror too vast for human brain to hold. For, as I looked backward, I became double, quadruple, octuple;—I multiplied by arithmetical progression;—I became hundreds and thousands,—and feared with the terror of thousands,—and despaired with the anguish of thousands,—and shuddered with the agony of thousands; yet knew the pleasure of none. All joys, all delights, appeared but mists or mockeries: only the pain and the fear were real,—and always, always growing. Then in the moment when sentiency itself seemed bursting into dissolution, one divine touch ended the frightful vision, and brought again to me the simple consciousness of the single present. Oh! how unspeakably delicious that sudden shrinking back out of multiplicity into unity!—that immense, immeasurable collapse of Self into the blind oblivious numbness of individuality!

We may shrink back, even as Arjuna shrank, in the eleventh discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*,

yet we shall always reach out again, pursuing the intimation of a reality beyond the relative and the finite, for this promise, once felt, continually attracts the now fertilized mind.

Describing what years later A. H. Maslow was to call a peak experience, Hans Syz wrote:

> I might express it as an inmost feeling of infinity or of the general relativity through which the appearances and things of life that usually are taken for granted suddenly appear quite foreign and in essence incomprehensible. My experience was in a sense what under different circumstances is designated as ecstasy. There too man has a different attitude toward existence. He gets an intimation of the merely relative nature of what usually passes as reality, but then gives this intimation a particularized interpretation related to established religious forms.
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> The intimation in question actually stands above all religion in so far as religion purports to be more than inexpressible feeling, namely a demarcation, a specific conceptual formulation. The experience I had, after all, contains the nature and limits of concept and thought and thus of what is real for us (also in the sphere of religion). It cannot be expressed and transmitted to others directly but only through these forms. This naturally poses extraordinary difficulties, as the verbally expressed trends of thought primarily have a cognitive-rational effect and only rarely manage to convey the feeling, the inner and wholly real life from which they spring. It is quite impossible for "normal" man who is completely adjusted to prevailing forms—and who usually is the thoroughly average man—to see the world from the other side. All too long has he uncritically absorbed reality as his surroundings see it. His being is already too habituated to and absorbed in a particular form to even conceive of, let alone experience its symbolic nature. Therefore he will not be able to understand a view differing from his own or he may even relegate it to the realm of pathology which is the most convenient but also very narrow way of action.

This idea of seeing the world "from the other side" is a metaphor for the transcendent self, which we feel to be real but cannot summon as a presence. Yet the gleam of that presence fills us with compulsive longing, sometimes bringing the horrors of the void experienced by Syz, or the overpowering multiplicity described by Hearn, or a sense of the limitless power of creation and destruction which reduced Arjuna to trembling.

In an essay written by Edward Bellamy at the age of twenty-four, certain feelings similar to those recorded by Hans Syz have striking expression. In this paper—which Bellamy, like Syz, had no wish to alter much later in life—the youthful author also spoke of the relativities of human knowledge:

> All human knowledge consists in the apprehension of differences and resemblances, discords and harmonies of the universe, in analysis and synthesis, in distinction and generalization. The former or analysing faculties pertain peculiarly to natures strongly developed on the individual side. The latter, the synthetical faculty, the disposition to perceive harmonies and unities rather than discords and differences, is characteristic of natures more open on the side of the universe, in which the instincts of solidarity are more vivid. What we call talent exists with characters in which the individual side is prominent; but genius, which is but a vivid realization of the universal, is the dower only of natures dominated by impulses from that side. The genius is never self-conscious while the afflatus is upon him. He is beside himself and thus delivers his oracle of the universal, himself a priest of the infinite. . . .
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> There is a conscious solidarity of the universe toward the intuition of which we must struggle, that it may become to us, not a logical abstraction, but a felt and living fact. As individuals we shall never be complete. The completest man lacks the completion of the rest of the universe. Part, then, with the feeling of the externality of the universe, which, coupled with the sense of utter ignorance and powerlessness is so full of despair. Believe that your sympathy with infinite being, infinite extension, infinite variety, is a pledge of identity. Above all, disabuse your mind of the notion that this life is essentially incomplete and preliminary in its nature and destined to issue in some final state. For this notion there is no warrant in reason nor in proper interpretation of intuitions. Time is not a vestibule of eternity, but a part of it. We are now living our immortal lives.

In this brief essay, *The Religion of Solidarity*, Bellamy, too, wrote of the pain which comes with limitation of the idea of self:

> It is this vicious habit of regarding the personality as an ultimate fact instead of a mere temporary effection of the universal that at times overcomes the mind with a sense of utter and unnecessary isolation, of inexpressible loneliness of a great gulf fixed between the successive personalities of a single individuality and all others. It is this instinct which lends its horror of quiet darkness to death, for death is the dissolution of the individuality and the enfranchisement of the atom of the universal which has been segregated in it. On the other hand it is the instinct of solidarity however misconstrued or unconfessed, which lends mere consciousness of greatness, otherwise unaccountable, a sense of majesty, utterly, nay ludicrously, beyond that which is warranted by the proportion of his personality to the sum of personalities. It is this which makes a man, however good his will, unable to isolate himself from the general frame of things, or to conceive of the universe going on without him. The universe never did and never will go on without him. It is this which renders it all-essential for his comfort, to feel that he is acting a part of some universal plan or frame of things, thus making some sort of religion or philosophy indispensable to him, and rendering the notion of unconnected, isolated action abhorrent to his soul.

What is the part of man from which such thoughts spring? Who is it that is pressed by irresistible yearnings to break out of the prison of relativities and finite fields? Whence the tropism of the mind which makes such immediacies of feeling the ultimate stuff of being? Bellamy says:

> This restless and discontented element is not at home in the personality, its union with it seems mechanical rather than chemical, rather of position than of essence. It is homesick for a vaster mansion than the personality affords, with an unconquerable yearning, a divine discontent tending elsewhither. . . .
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> On the one hand, is a little group of faculties of the individual, unable even to cope with the few and simple conditions of material life, wretchedly failing, for the most part, to secure tolerable satisfaction for the physical needs of the race, and at best making slow and painful progression. On the other hand, in the soul, is a depth of divine despair over the insufficiency of this existence, already seemingly too large, and a passionate dream of immortality, the vision of a starving man who dreams of full tables. . . .

Both Bellamy and Hans Syz evidently report on the same octave of inner experience; their language may differ, but the feeling which animates the thought had surely a common origin. Toward the end of his statement Syz wrote:

> Art, philosophy, science are attempts at making comprehensible to us the incomprehensible flow of events. This creative activity is not just occasionally evoked in supernormal man through misery and struggle but is a general necessity of life. The world around us and the life within us are simply not as fixed and demarcated as we habitually assume. It is the sameness and relative constancy of our forms of expression, particularly language, which mislead us to believe this. Reality is not exhausted by our normal modes of thought but merely expressed in fragments. Sensitive individuals feel clearly that available forms are insufficient for their inner life. They encounter an altogether different, deeper reality than most of their fellows and they have to master this as yet unapprehended reality. They have to make it comprehensible and usable in order to maintain the balance of their mental life, their consciousness. . . .

This, indeed, seems an order of discourse safe from the comforting counterfeits of sectarianism, and deeply appealing to those able to rely on confirming experiences of their own. The day may come when all expressions of inner longing and certainty will naturally gravitate to this level of reality-testing, as least distorting or confining of the truth to be conveyed.

REVIEW
WHAT PRICE IDEOLOGY?

SINCE Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*—an account of the Soviet penal system by a man who spent eleven years in Stalin's camps and prisons—has been so widely and so thoroughly reviewed, we hadn't planned to give it attention here. But then, reading in it, we came across a section that has not been much emphasized in the reviews. What the author says in the chapter on "The Bluecaps"—who are the security police, the NKV bears directly on the question: How can we *explain* the totalitarian horrors of the twentieth century?

First to face this question without flinching was undoubtedly Dwight Macdonald, whose essay, "The Responsibility of Peoples," published in *Politics* for March, 1945, sought to understand how and why concentration and death camps became the national policy of a progressive modern nation—Germany. *Who*, and *how many*, were responsible for all this? Insofar as he can find an explanation, Macdonald blames the political theory of the Organic State, going on to show that the sanctions invoked for crimes in behalf of the State were not unique to the Germans, who only went farther than other peoples. He wrote in his conclusion:

> The common peoples of the world are coming to have less and less control over the policies of "their" governments, while at the same time they are being more and more closely identified with those governments. Or to state it in slightly different terms: as the common man's *moral* responsibility diminishes (assuming agreement that the degree of moral responsibility is in direct proportion to the degree of freedom of choice), his *practical* responsibility increases. Not for many centuries have individuals been at once so powerless to influence what is done by the national collectivities to which they belong, and at the same time so generally held responsible for what is done by those collectivities.
>
> Where can the common peoples look for relief from this intolerable, agonizing contradiction? . . . .

While Solzhenitsyn addresses his book to Russians—he is calling his countrymen to account—he also speaks to the world. He claims no personal innocence. Yet among a people too much given to conformity he could not help but speak out. In the chapter on the security police he tells about his own arrest. He was a Soviet officer in command of an artillery battery fighting the Germans near the Baltic Sea during the last three months of the war. Sent for by the brigade commander, he was suddenly stripped of his officer's insignia. While waiting for the first interrogation he began to wonder about his own moral role. At first he felt a certain inner security:

> I smiled in pride that I had been arrested not for stealing, nor treason, nor desertion, but because I had discovered through my power of reasoning the evil secrets of Stalin. I smiled at the thought that I wanted, and might still be able, to effect some small remedies and changes in our Russian way of life.

Solzhenitsyn had been recruited while he was going to the university in 1938. Because he belonged to the Komsomol (Communist youth organization), the officials tried to persuade him to enter the NKVD school. The privileges of the security force were attractive, but he and his Komsomol comrades couldn't accept them. The idea made them *"feel sick."* Later, lying in a prison bunk, he thought this instinctive rejection was a small enough virtue. The NKVD officers wore blue uniforms, but he too had been an officer with the prerogatives of rank. He enjoyed his privileges at the expense of the common soldiers.

> And that's what an officer is even when his shoulder boards aren't blue!
>
> And if they are blue? If he has been indoctrinated to believe that even among other officers he is the salt of the earth? And that he knows more than others and is entrusted with more responsibility than others and that, consequently, it is his duty to force a prisoner's head between his legs, and then to shove him like that into a pipe.
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> Why shouldn't he?
>
> I credited myself with unselfish dedication. But meanwhile I had been thoroughly prepared to be an executioner. And if I had gotten into an NKVD

school under Yezhov, maybe I would have matured just in time for Beria.

So let the reader who expects this book to be a political expose slam its covers shut right now.

If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

During the life of any heart this line keeps changing place; sometimes it is squeezed one way by exuberant evil and sometimes it shifts to allow enough space for good to flourish. One and the same human being is, at various ages, under various circumstances, a totally different human being. At times he is close to being a devil, at times to sainthood. But his name doesn't change, and to that name we ascribe the whole lot, good and evil.

Could a man serve in the NKVD and remain human? Solzhenitsyn traces the lives of one or two whom he knew. What little he found out was not promising. The erosions of practice seemed stronger than initial character—in the few cases when good character had once been evident. After his pages on the crimes of these men—some of them "good" men, kind to children and dogs, and sometimes readers of Tolstoy and Chekhov—he asks:

Do such people really exist?

We would prefer to say that such people cannot exist, that there aren't any. It is permissible to portray evildoers in a story for children, so as to keep the story simple. . . . They recognize themselves as evildoers, and they know their souls are black. . . .

But, no; that's not the way it is! To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he's doing is good, or else that it's a well-considered act in conformity with natural law. Fortunately, it is in the nature of the human being to seek a justification for his actions.

Macbeth's self-justifications were feeble—and his conscience devoured him. Yes, even Iago was a little lamb too. The imagination and the spiritual strength of Shakespeare's evildoers stopped short at a dozen corpses. Because they had no *ideology*.

Ideology—that is what gives evildoing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors. That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland, the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis by race; and the Jacobins (early and late), by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations.

Thanks to *ideology*, the twentieth century was fated to experience evildoing on a scale calculated in the millions. This cannot be denied, nor passed over, nor suppressed. How then, do we dare insist that evildoers do not exist? And who was it that destroyed these millions? Without evildoers there would have been no Archipelago.

By what psychological mechanisms and self-justifications do ideologists become capable of such hideous crimes? In *The Tacit Dimension*, Michael Polanyi gave this account of the psycho-dynamics involved:

Its [Communism's] perfectionism demands a total transformation of society; but this utopian project is not allowed to declare itself. It conceals its moral motives by embodying them in a struggle for power, believed to bring about automatically the aims of utopia. It blindly accepts for this belief the scientific testimony of Marxism. Marxism embodies the boundless moral aspirations of modern man in a theory which protects his ideals from skeptical doubt by denying the reality of moral motives in public life. The power of Marxism lies in uniting the two contradictory forces of the modern mind into a single political doctrine. Thus originated a world-embracing idea, in which moral doubt is frenzied by moral fury and moral fury is armed by scientific nihilism.

The implications of this analysis need to be understood and developed, if books like *The Gulag Archipelago* are not to have been written in vain.

COMMENTARY
HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH

As explained in Review, it was not our purpose, at first, to take special notice of *The Gulag Archipelago,* since ample attention to Solzhenitsyn's latest work has been provided by other reviewers. There was, however, another reason for this planned neglect.

There is, it seems to us, a law of diminishing returns which sets in after extended discussion of the horrors of time and space, which originated outside the circuit of concentration camps and penal systems. As Dr. Lester Greenspoon remarked in his 1969 paper, "The Unacceptability of Disquieting Facts":

> Those who would have others know "the truth" must they would respond to it. The truth is relative in interpersonal affairs; it has meaning only in relation to people, and this meaning is often difficult to anticipate. The messenger of "truth" bears part of the responsibility for the results of his effort.

There are difficulties, in short, in dealing appropriately with reports of the hideous cruelties of the political powers of the twentieth century.

Through the years, we have given what attention seemed useful to these almost immeasurable offenses. We reviewed as well as we could the enormities described in *The Dark Side of the Moon,* a documentary account of the Soviet camps compiled by surviving Polish victims, to which T. S. Eliot wrote an introduction. Also reviewed was Tchernavin's *I speak for the Silent Prisoners of the Soviets.* Years later we described and quoted from *The Captive Mind,* Czeslaw Milosz' critical exploration of the mind of the Communist believer.

On the Nazi camps, we reviewed Bruno Bettelheim's "Human Behavior in Extreme Situations," which was probably the first documentary account of life in the camps; and we quoted at length from Dwight Macdonald's essay, "The Responsibility of Peoples."

On the whole, it seemed that enough on concentration camps had appeared in these pages. But then a copy of *Gulag Archipelago* arrived—gift of a friend; and, knowing what a good writer Solzhenitsyn is, we began it. We found reading this plump, 660-page Harper & Row paperback no chore at all. Probably everyone who hasn't read anything about the Soviet camp system should wade into *Gulag Archipelago,* if only to find out what can happen to the country of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Just as one ought to read, say, Viktor Frankl's *From Death Camp to Existentialism* to realize what happened to the country of Goethe and Beethoven; or Daniel Ellsberg's *Papers on the War* for grinding recognition of the changes in the country of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE ROMANTIC POETS

THE trouble with "literary criticism" is that it does not—or is not supposed to—take sides. The swings of inspiration and the lapses into convention follow one another, and the critic dispassionately chronicles these oscillations. Such studies have their interest, but these poets and writers, if worth reading, *believed* in what they wrote, and one learns little from a man's conviction unless there is some serious effort to share it. Literature, in short, should not be read as "literature." Werner Jaeger says in his Introduction of *Paideia:*

> The Greek trinity of poet, statesman, and sage embodied the nation's highest ideal of leadership. In that atmosphere of spiritual liberty, bound by deep knowledge (as if by a divine law) to the service of the community, the Greek creative genius conceived and attained that lofty educational ideal which sets it far above the more superficial artistic and intellectual brilliance of our individualistic civilization. That is what lifts classical Greek literature out of the category of pure aesthetics, in which many have vainly tried to understand it and gives it the immeasurable influence on human nature which it has exercised for thousands of years.

We are reporting here a brief enterprise in self-education. In Theodore Roszak's *Where the Wasteland Ends,* there is frequent reference to and quotation from the Romantic Poets. The phrase sticks in the memory, but its meaning is harder to recollect. It is easy enough to think of a Romantic poet or two—Blake, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats. But what *is* a romantic poet? The word, apparently, goes back to the Romans, their language and its European descendants, and no doubt a scholar could explain why the modern usage of "Romantic" has such little connection with its linguistic ancestry; but we are after other considerations. W. Macneile Dixon's in *Apology for the Arts,* which has a chapter on the Romantic Revival, is of some assistance. In English literature, the Romantic Revival, he shows, was a revolt against the "realism" of eighteenth-century thought. As Dixon says, "common-sense realism turns its back on truth by declining to investigate it." The thinkers of the eighteenth century were proud rationalists and they thought they knew. The prose of waxing science was their medium. Pope, the man of the hour in England, used verse because, as he said, "I could express ideas more shortly than in prose itself." For Pope poetry was only "a superior kind of prose."

> . . . the English writers of the Augustan age failed to reproduce anything of the Greek spirit in their work, and were successful only in reproducing something of the spirit of Latin literature, a literature imitative and disciplined majestic but measured, regular, orderly, formal, sober in subject and manner. Propriety of language, correctness and precision, restraint and moderation, these words express the lessons learned from the Roman authors by Dryden and his successors.

Dr. Johnson, Maecenas of his day, gave the final ruling:

> By perusing the works of Dryden, Pope discovered the most perfect fabric of English verse. . . New sentiments and new images others may produce; but to attempt any further improvement in versification will be dangerous. Art and diligence have now done their best, and what shall be added will be the effort of tedious toil and needless curiosity.

He was of course wrong, as would be any man who imagines his own generation to have reached the pinnacle of achievement. The Cartesian aesthetic, this devotion to the acceptably clear and distinct, was rejected by the romantic artist who, "seeking in his own mind for sentiments and ideas, presents a new world, composed of the world as it appears to sense together with another, the world as it *might* be, or *will* be, or *ought* to be, or perhaps, if all were known, really *is,* a world drawn from his ideals, and feelings, and desires."

Not the finished but the unfinished things are important to the romantic poet. Dixon also has an essay on Wordsworth, in which he says:

> Following Virgil, this poet saw "universal nature moved by universal mind"; like "the good Berkeley," he believed that the book of nature was written in an intelligible language. . . . Between the mind of man and the universal mind in nature that spoke this intelligible language (with the alphabet of which science is concerned) there existed and

> necessarily existed, a secret sympathy. The children of earth, themselves a part of the mighty whole, could not be out of touch with the Cosmos, for they were of it, and through a hundred channels of knowledge truth streamed to them. They were indeed one with all the natural elements they breathed the air and walked upon the soil, they ate and drank of the kindly fruits, their being was derived and nourished from the same hidden forces. And the crowning wonder was that the Cosmos was intelligible.

Ardor and aspiration are the qualities of the romantic poet. He is moved by the sense of something hidden, something yet to be known. The Romantic movement, Dixon says, arose out of much more than mere desire for "the new and strange." It had its origin in "a gradual recognition of the inadequate account virtually taken of human nature by the current mode of thought in the early eighteenth century."

The eighteenth century, let us note, was the period in which modern materialism gained ascendancy. The sensationalist hedonism put forward by the opponents of priestcraft in religion became the foundation of modern psychology. Baron d'Holbach mounted his campaign against all religion in the eighteenth century. Diderot declared that the human will was nothing more than "the last impulse of desire and aversion." And Lamettrie predicted that if Atheism could stamp out all trace of religion, then men would be free to follow their impulses, which "alone can lead them to happiness along the pleasant path of virtue."

Except for elaborate vocabulary, there is no great difference between the foundation of our until-now conception of civilization and these ideas. Our functional system of psychology is based on the dynamics of desire and aversion, as political propaganda and merchandising and behavior modification make clear. Our empirical method in science, linked with the Cartesian dogma of clear and distinct (unambiguous) ideas, dates from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Adam Smith's economics, based on the image of man provided by the *philosophes,* is with us yet, although its laws are pulled somewhat out of shape by the manipulations of the welfare state. Morally, therefore, we are still living in the eighteenth century, and only lately have begun to realize that, having armed its assumptions and their issue in methods and policies with scientific techniques, we are rapidly wasting if not destroying both our physical and psychic environments.

It was doubtless for this reason that Roszak took up the cause of the Romantic poets, since they were the ones who, a century ago, warned against "the excesses of our scientized culture that only now arise as issues of political concern." He says:

> Romanticism is the first significant antitoxin generated within the body of our society to meet the infectious spread of [mechanistic] single vision. It holds that uniquely paradigmatic place in the ancestry of the counter culture. . . . In the critique of science, there are, I think, richer traditions of thought and art to draw upon than romanticism; we are beginning to learn these from other cultures, other ages. But Romanticism is uniquely our own in the modern western world; and surely it takes its course from a fiercer struggle with the forces of secularization and single vision than any other society has experienced. Whatever we must leave behind of the Romantic style, we can scarcely afford to abandon its steady determination to integrate science into a greater vision of reality, to heal and make whole the dissociated mind of its culture.

We have no space to do justice to the "classical" poets, to whom Dixon also gives attention, but conclude with another of his passages on the mission of the Romantics, which was, he says, to say to the generation to which they belonged, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy." They "opened out of a conventional age a little wicket-gate into a world outside that of our own immediate and circumscribed experience, into a world that we cannot enter unless imagination and faith take us by the hand and make us free of its mysteries, its aspirations, its hopes, its sympathies, and its thoughts 'that do often lie too deep for tears'."

FRONTIERS

"Does Matter Exist?"

THIS is the question asked by Allen D. Allen in *Foundations of Physics* for December, 1973 (condensed in *Intellectual Digest* for last June). It seems a toss-up whether Mr. Allen is persuaded of the infinite divisibility of the atom or its infinite dissimulation; in any event, he doesn't believe in "matter" any more—for apparently good reason.

Before quoting Mr. Allen it is desirable to consider the importance of the question he raises. Generally speaking, only two sorts of cosmologies seem possible: those which start with matter and those which start with mind. Perhaps Eddington's "mind-stuff" would bring the two together, but we need some exercises in thinking about such questions before a conception of this subtlety is entertained.

All the present-day cosmological theories start with matter. Some men of science once believed that they knew what matter is, but after Becquerel's lucky discovery of radioactivity in 1896, this certainty disappeared in a cloud of equations about energy. It is exciting to trace the "evolution" of the idea of matter (perhaps "peregrinations" would be more accurate), starting, say, with our understanding (or misunderstanding) of the Ionians, or with Aristotle's vague notion of "inert stuff," tracking it through the theories of the Schoolmen ("God" printed form on this inert stuff, which seemed to be lying around, and thus creation proceeded), noting its adoption by the early scientists in more or less the terms of Aristotle and Aquinas; and turning, then, to the elaboration in nineteenth-century science of the theories of the Greek Atomists (both John Tyndall and Robert A. Millikan testify that they had worked out "almost all the qualitative conceptions of the atomic and kinetic theories thousands of years ago"); and, finally, reaching the most recent peak of scientific definition in Dr. Einstein's formulation: "Matter is where the concentration of energy is great, field is where the concentration is small," to which he added, but then "the difference between matter and field is a quantitative rather than a qualitative one."

So far we have ignored psychological and therefore philosophical problems. Karl Pearson's *Grammar of Science*, despite the fact that it appeared in 1892, may still be the best book to read for discussion of such issues. Here, more than eighty years before Mr. Allen asked his weighty question, Pearson assembled quotations from nineteenth-century physicists to show that the best among them no longer pretended to know what matter is, with reflective comments (by Pearson) that seem to have application today. Pearson was well aware that the ideas with which science deals are isolating abstractions—never an expression of the fullness of natural reality. He said: "Conceptually all motion is the motion of geometrical ideals, which are so chosen as best to describe those changes of sense-impression which in ordinary language we term perceptual motion." Obviously, science is a Conceptual or Abelardian discipline. Pearson warned: "To no concept, however invaluable it may be as a means of describing the routine of perceptions, ought phenomenal existence to be ascribed until its perceptual equivalent has been actually disclosed." In other words, even if a theory about a "thing" works beautifully in the laboratory or on the production line, the theory is no proof of the reality of the "thing" until you really *see* it—demonstrate its existence. Pearson also said:

> It seems to me that we are ignorant and shall be ignorant just as long as we project our conceptual chart, which symbolizes but is not the world of phenomena, into that world; just as long as we try to find realities corresponding to geometrical ideals and other purely conceptual limits.

Then, concluding this chapter, Pearson somewhat proudly voiced the familiar limitations of scientific inquiry: "Strong in her power of describing *how* changes take place, Science can well afford to neglect the *why."* And, concerning both human awareness and what we are aware of,

he adds: "as to what consciousness is and why there is a routine of sense-impressions she is content for the present to say: 'Ignorabimus'."

This sketch of past scientific conceptions of matter has a bearing on Mr. Allen's "leap" in respect to thinking about what matter is or isn't.

What he is leaping toward? It seems to us he is moving (either forward or back) toward a cosmology which starts with mind. The oldest of these cosmologies—among those to which we have access—may be that recorded in the *Atharva Veda*, translated by Max Muller—

> The germ that still lay covered in the husk
> Burst forth, one nature, from fervent heat.
> Then came love upon it, the new spring
> of mind—yea, poets in their hearts discerned,
> Pondering, this bond between created things
> And uncreated. . . .
> Who knows from whom all this great creation sprang?
>
> * * *
>
> The Most High Seer that is in highest heaven,
> He knows it—or perchance even He knows not.

Another rendering may come closer to the archaic meaning: "Desire first arose in It, which was the *primal germ of mind;* and which sages, searching with their intellect, have discovered to be the bond which connects Entity with Non-Entity." Thus Desire—Eros with the Greeks—is at the root of all becoming, and gains its dimensions from Mind: the *Nous* which channels the motivating power of feeling into the diversity of Being, causing the elaboration of form. What is this Primal Desire? What can it be but the inner longing to be, to become, to know? Thus the question of *why,* which science is incompetent to answer, or even to consider, on its present assumptions, does have broad philosophical explanation in the cosmologies which start with mind.

Turning now to Mr. Allen: After a review of physical theory about atoms, up to the present recognition that protons and neutrons can be "split," and are therefore not "fundamental building blocks," he says:

> And so the search for the basic constituents of matter continues, centering today on finding a particle with the unlikely name of "quark." . . . Even if the quark does exist, however, there is no reason to believe that it, too, could not be split up into constituent parts, just like every other particle in the nucleus of atoms. So a number of physicists, including the author, have taken quite another approach to the problem of finding the basic unit of matter. We have decided it doesn't exist. . . . We call this new idea the "bootstrap theory," because it almost creates something out of nothing and physicists think of this as pulling yourself up by your bootstraps.
>
> The bootstrap theory says that rather than using *objects*—such as particles—for raw material, nature uses the fundamental *laws* of physics—such as the law of the conservation of momentum, which states that the faster you drive the harder it is to stop. So long as we obey these laws, we can produce any matter we have the equipment to create. This concept, that ultimately the world is constructed from principles rather than from units of matter, is almost theological in character. Yet it is now an established (if competing) theory in the mainstream of theoretical physics.

After presenting some logical proofs of the bootstrap theory, Mr. Allen concludes by saying that while the laws of physics "are far removed from theological and moral laws—nonetheless, theoretical physicists seem well on their way to agreeing with the Gospel of St. John that 'In the beginning was the word'." And this, it seems to us, is at least half way to adopting a cosmology that starts with Mind—which, in any reasonable system, should come before the Word.