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SYMBOL AND MYTH

WE live in an age when the external solutions for external problems no longer seem to work. Accordingly, there is a much greater interest in what are regarded as internal solutions for external problems—such measures as prayer and magic—than there has been for many years. Less sensationally, a new spirit of philosophic inquiry is in evidence, seeking understanding of the relation between the internal and the external; of the priorities, if any, which should order or relate these two areas of experience; and of the synthesis of meaning which may result from finding out the answers to such questions.

In this informal essay, no attempt will be made to be "systematic," for the reason that the questions raised cover too much territory—material for discussion is everywhere. We don't know enough to have "organized" knowledge on such questions. We plan, then, little more than a random sampling of the considerations involved.

Human thought about meaning spontaneously takes the form of symbols. They are the vital currency of speech in the dialogues we hold with ourselves and others. In his foreword to the New Directions edition of *Camino Real*, Tennessee Williams speaks of this in connection with his play:

> I say that symbols are nothing but the natural speech of drama.
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> We all have in our conscious and unconscious minds a great vocabulary of images, and I think all human communication is based on these images as are our dreams, and a symbol in a play has only one legitimate purpose which is to say a thing more directly and simply and beautifully than it could be said in words.
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> I hate writing that is a parade of images for the sake of images; I hate it so much that I close a book in disgust when it keeps on saying one thing is like another; I even get disgusted with poems that make nothing but comparisons between one thing and another. But I repeat that symbols, when used respectfully, are the purest language of plays. Sometimes it would take page after tedious page of exposition to put across an idea that can be said with an object or a gesture on the lighted stage

Since no man's experience is exactly like another man's, how can there be accurate communication through symbols? Well, all men's experiences are *something* like those of others, so that we understand one another pretty well through the use of imagery or symbols. Then there are myths or mythic forms of symbols which generalize the typical modes of human feeling. These myths are enriching, not reducing, abstractions. They provoke associations of ideas, with the result that the sense of meaning increases with the spreading resonances of the myth. We grow through octaves of meaning. We have only to recall the terms Promethean, Dionysian, Apollonian to recognize how indispensable to us is this wonderful cipher of motive and feeling. The figure of Sisyphus, crouched in tension against his rock, enables us to recognize an endlessly repeated aspect of common human experience—his plight is hopeless but he will not give up. Add the figure of Prometheus, chained to *his* rock, enduring with only occasional outcry a pain which also seems endless, in punishment by Zeus—

> For that to men he bare too fond a mind . . .

and a more inclusive generalization of the human condition appears, uniting the bitter confinements of life with an independent, altruistic daring which risks, then makes, and then *endures* confinement—out of courage gained from the vision of liberation in some far-off age or day.

Such words may help our understanding a little, but the *impact* remains with the preternatural mythic figures themselves, through which we generate in ourselves the feelings for

which they stand. The gods, surely, are psychological projections of the classic forms of human selfhood; yet the gods are not only imaginative creations, since they have human embodiment in heroes who realize in their lives the content of the highest human longing, and who go through, with both actual and symbolic symmetry, the ordeals of achievement. It is not inaccurate to say that the hero is a living generalization of the human spirit. In philosophy we call this transcendence—a conception we "know" only by subjective experience, but partially feel in effective illustration.

The hero may be a rare exception, yet in dream or vision he is Everyman. The myth of the Hero accomplishes its purpose without disposing of such paradoxes. The paradox is dissolved by the feeling we induce in ourselves through identification with the myth. Vision is the germ of human greatness.

Ortega wrote well on this in *Meditations on Quixote*. First he notes: "The men of Homer belong to the same world as their desires"—which illuminates Plato's opposition to the poets. Then he says:

> In Don Quixote we have, on the other hand, a man who wishes to reform reality. But is he not a piece of that reality? Does he not live off it, is he not a consequence of it? How is it possible for that which does not exist—a projected adventure—to govern and alter harsh reality? Perhaps it is not possible, but it is a fact that there are men who decide not to be satisfied with reality. Such men aim at altering the course of things; they refuse to repeat the gestures that custom, tradition, or biological instincts force them to make. These men we call heroes, because to be a hero means to be one out of many, to be oneself. If we refuse to have our actions determined by heredity or environment it is because we seek to base the origin of our actions on ourselves and only on ourselves. The hero's will is not that of his ancestors nor of his society, but his own. This will to be oneself is heroism.
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> I do not think that there is any more profound originality than this "practical," active originality of the hero. His life is a perpetual resistance to what is habitual and customary. Each movement he makes has first had to overcome custom and invent a new kind of gesture. Such a life is a perpetual suffering, a constant tearing oneself away from that part of oneself which is given over to habit and is a prisoner of matter.

Can the hero be "objectivized" and made the model of human behavior? No; for the hero is first a man determined to be himself and no other. Only at the level of undifferentiated primary motivation can the heroic element be the same in all men. To resist because other men have resisted, and because we want to be like them, is to be something other than a hero—a follower. But we might also say that as the primary motivation grows in an individual, more of the heroic is embodied in his life; but meanwhile he may nonetheless be pursuing patterns of action he does not fully understand, and here are the sources of conformity, of fanaticism, of self-righteousness and sectarianism—ills of mind and of social formation that beset human efforts and hopes on every hand.

Are there symbols and myths which would help us to grasp the meaning of these contradictions? Probably so. It would be ridiculous to assume that no one has learned how to overcome such difficulties, which must belong in some form to every age or cycle of human development. But doubtless something of the quality of the hero is needed even for understanding myth and symbol. We have to understand them ourselves, not have them explained to us. An "explained" meaning is not ours, but something that can be given to us—or taken away. If we could really tell the difference between what we believe and what we know, we might have little difficulty in such matters.

A great myth, then, or a marvelously contrived symbol, is like a scientific hypothesis—we may find it appealing or reasonable but still not *know* it. Not knowing it—although believing it, or in it—the myth or the theory may sometimes be used as a tool for our manipulation, as well as by ourselves as a platform for inquiry, or as the design of an experiment.

Thus Northrop Frye remarks in *The Stubborn Structure:*

> The language of concern is the language of myth, the total vision of the human situation, human destiny, human inspirations and fears. The mythology of concern reaches us on different levels. On the lowest level is the social mythology acquired from elementary education and from one's surroundings, the steady rain of assumptions and values and popular proverbs and clichés and suggested stock responses that soaks into our early life and is constantly reinforced, in our day, by the mass media. . . .
>
> One reason why our myth of concern is not as well unified as that of the Middle Ages is that all myths of concern are anthropocentric in perspective, and physical science, at least, refuses to have anything to do with such a perspective. . . . Naturally the main outlines of the scientific picture of the world are a part of our general cultural picture, and naturally, too, any broad and important scientific hypothesis, such as evolution or relativity, soon filters down into the myth of concern. But scientific hypotheses enter the myth of concern, not as themselves, but as parallel or translated forms of themselves. An immense number of conceptions in modern thought owe their existence to the biological theory of evolution. But social Darwinism, the conception of progress the philosophies of Bergson and Shaw, and the like, are not applications of the *same* hypothesis in other fields: they are mythical analogies to that hypothesis. By the time they have worked their way down to stock response, as when slums are built over park land because "you can't stop progress," even the sense of analogy gets a bit hazy. If a closed myth like official Marxism does not interfere with physical science, we have still to remember that physical science is not an integral part of the myth of concern.

Northrop Frye is saying in effect that this process by which "science" becomes part of the mythic, motivating, or "feeling" structure of our lives inevitably does violence to the original scientific theory or idea. Why should this be? Because, we might say, science is self-limited to a value-free description of the external world, while we *live* in a world of feeling and value-charged ideas. Science *must* be translated into "myth" in order to become a basis for human action. There is no way around this necessity. In our individual lives, we make this sort of translation in small ways constantly, calling what we do "rational" behavior. We take a reading of the way we think things are and how they work, and then we relate that reading to goal-oriented action. There is in our lives, then, a constant production and flow of the fusions of feeling with knowledge of the external world. In society, these fusions become cultural; they are collectivized and institutionalized, and are fashioned and altered much more slowly. These patterns of common understanding become myths, sometimes great and inspiring, but sometimes vulgar and trivial in consequence; and in the terms of social life they include all the "binding observances" of which Ortega speaks in *Man and People*. Educationally speaking, these myths anon save and anon damn, since they may be structures with openings allowing for innovation and growth, or they may be closed systems which forbid originality and rely on conformity and mediocrity for the maintenance of "order."

Could there be another kind of science which *includes* the subjective realities and would not, therefore, lose its scientific or rigorous character when it becomes the basis for human action?

The obvious question is: How would we "check" the findings of such a science? For it would have to include the motivations or feelings of the hero, or the potential hero, and these are individualized in the single human being in order to be truly his—or "heroic."

We can have only vaguely suggestive answers to this question, since we are hardly ready to understand much more. Answers, after all, require the resources of comprehensive background relating to the reality-framework of the question. However, those who have worked at building up that background often have definite views and occasionally express themselves with what may seem to us a high degree of clarity. One example of this would be in portions of the *Enneads* of Plotinus. Another would be William Blake's contention: "A Spirit and a Vision are not,

as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce."

This suggests that both discipline and precision, along with intuitive discovery, are involved in mastery of the language of myth—and also the probability that to understand that language faithfully one would need to be able to read subjective meanings direct from the natural "signatures" of things throughout nature—both outer and inner. Anything else would be a reduction to "doctrine" and therefore at second hand. (Doctrine may be either clues or just information, depending on its reception.) What other true meaning can there be for the word "esoteric"?

Interestingly, Theodore Roszak recently made a suggestion for a beginning in our training in understanding the language of myth. "Imagine," he suggested, "an entire specialization in science devoted to studying the nature poets and painters: biologists sprinkling their research with quotations from Wordsworth or Goethe . . . astronomers drawing hypotheses from Van Gogh's 'Starry Night'."

There is clear consensus of meaning among these writers. And we might recall Thoreau's ending of his essay on "The Natural History of Massachusetts":

> We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method; the Baconian is as false as any other and with all the helps of machinery and the arts, the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom.

Who is bold enough to say that Blake and Thoreau were merely fantasizing when they spoke so confidently of the *discipline* of inside knowing—that they did not "know" what they were talking about? What *is* the measure of human excellence and knowledge? Or, if we think we have not the cultural maturity to say—which may well be—then: What are the unmistakable signs of the presence of knowledge in a man, even though we are not able to tell what it is or how it was gained?

These are ideas which are in the air today. A writer in *Material for Thought*, a Far West Book issued this year in San Francisco, has this passage on the "two lessons" he learned from a study of the symbolism of the temples of Angkor Wat:

> The first lesson is that such symbolism can be understood on different levels, in different ways at different times by the same person. It is not the symbols that change, but a person's ability to see what they convey. The second lesson is that a whole or living meaning of a symbol cannot be found by piecing together different interpretations. For a symbol to be understood as a living whole, as a unity, there must be a corresponding search for unity within the man who attempts to explain it. In short, the search for meaning in outward religious symbols must mirror the inner spiritual search. For such symbols to be real, and not merely intellectual fantasies, they must have relevance to life and its meaning, and they must be studied as an organic whole.
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> Religious symbols are keys that can help unlock the doors that separate us from a meaningful contact with life. But the desire to look for such keys can only stem from a deep-felt need to find out what life is all about. If a man tries to observe himself, to know himself, then he will find the right keys to open new doors at the right time. Because this is such a personal matter, no other person can give him the key. It has to be his own discovery. A pupil once observed to the Sufi teacher, Bahaudin Naqsheband, "You relate stories, but you do not tell us how to understand them." Bahaudin replied: "How would you like it if the man from whom you bought fruit consumed it before your eyes, leaving you only the skin?"

In this last consideration are implicit all the questions about finding the truth and helping one another, about learning and teaching, about knowing and being. Here are involved the subtleties in the relationship between brotherhood and self-reliance, between freedom and hierarchy, between solidarity and independence. There is a sense in which we are parts of one another, but

also a sense in which we cannot be "told" this truth but must discover it for ourselves. What is too easily told, we know, has little value. What is too easily accepted has no leverage in human life. It but repeats the past, exploiting ancient conquests. It does not get us off the ground. The badges of yesterday's honorable achievement can be turned into pretentious frauds.

And yet we do help one another; we do obtain good suggestions, have inspiration in the example of other people. There is a *collective* aspect of human life. We have strengths and weaknesses in common. There is not only the madness of crowds, but the exhilaration of common vision. There is in some communities "the atmosphere of getting well." There is sanctity of place and dignity of office, and a clear public utility in half-truths for those who, at the moment, can understand no more.

It is an art of little practice, this learning how to rely on ourselves, and learning it without vanity or self-deception. The world we have known, the world of external knowledge, of mechanical certainty is the world that is failing before our eyes; this world has not taught us the art of self-reliance, or even noticed its importance. So there is a sense in which we are now beginning at the beginning, as little children. And, like children, we easily become the captives of doctrines and promises which suggest or hint that there can be reliable external authority about symbolic truth or interpretation; that the hard homework has already been done by others; and that now there is, if not an easy, at least an "easier" way. As a reviewer in *Material for Thought* puts it:

> Yet the followers of the new religions may feel a shock upon reading these catalogues to see that nothing of force comes through the promotionalism. Not a single description of the groups or methods communicates the struggle with oneself that is said to be necessary for the birth of a new understanding. Not that the ancient systems always expressed this requirement in so many words, but it was a fact made even more real by existing in the conditions through which these teachings were transmitted—perhaps in the difficulties of making first contact, or in grasping the ideas, or in accepting the view of oneself, or in shouldering external deprivations, or in abandoning hope of psychological progress, or in a combination of these and other factors.

Other factors? Caring and attention to the needs of others is by some said to be the first step. Then learning to recognize the needs of others would surely be the second. These are qualifications not often referred to these days.

REVIEW
BUCHNER AND BOETHIUS

HEARING from a friend that a San Francisco theater group recently put on *Danton's Death*—a remarkable play written by a German who lived a hundred and fifty years ago, and who died at twenty-three—we got from the library the small volume published by Hill and Wang (1963): *Georg Büchner—Complete Plays and Prose.* For several reasons this turned out to be worth doing. As the translator, Carl Richard Mueller, says in his introduction:

> In *Danton's Death* we have undoubtedly the finest first play ever written. It is powerful, relentless, inexorable, passionate, and personal—it is as bitter a philosophical statement as anyone since Sophocles has had the courage to put on a stage—and finally, despite much critical assertion that it lacks drama, it is dramatic in spite of itself.
>
> *Danton's Death* is pervaded by one single concept, the leading obsession of all of Büchner's works, in his daily life and correspondence; he is never tired of reiterating that there is no free will, that Man's destiny is determined. In *Danton* he takes the direct and easy way of declaring this doctrine: by preaching—but, after all, it was his first play; in *Leonce and Lena* it has been hidden beneath the deceptive surface of quite literary, derivative, but in the final analysis highly original parody; and in *Woyzeck* it is ingeniously unstated, but always present in its implicit dramatic manifestation.

Büchner wrote *Danton's Death* when he was twenty-one. Having studied the history of the French Revolution, he was overwhelmed by the impotence of individuals to change the course of events. He wrote to his sweetheart: "The individual is no more than the foam on the wave, greatness mere chance, the mastery of genius a puppet play, a ludicrous struggle against a brazen law, which to acknowledge is the highest achievement, which to master, impossible." The critical claim that the play lacks "drama" is based on the fact that Danton, in Büchner's characterization, *knows* he can do nothing—that he is only a spectator. Yet to say that the play "preaches" seems misleading. Danton is spokesman for Büchner's bleak conviction, yet as the playwright's creation Danton is *alive,* a man of depth and sagacity and strength. He is more than a pawn of fate; while grimly conscious of his "nonexistence," he remains a man.

> He is the only one in the entire play (save for his young comrade Camille, who has premonitions of it) who fully and tragically comprehends the human condition. Yes, Danton is a hero; not because he *does,* but because he *would do* if he knew that his doing would have any efficacy whatever. But life and all life's actions are futile, doomed to destruction, without meaning or reason. Each man exists in himself and is unable to break that impenetrable shell. Man is isolated. He knows no real communication with his fellow men. He is adrift on a sea of impersonal blindness.

Long before Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, Büchner made Woyzeck say, in what Mueller calls the first wholly successful tragic representation of the common man on the stage, "When God goes, everything goes." He means that the evidence for the existence of God is simply not there. The omnipresence of pain in the world abolishes the possibility of any divine or benevolent oversight. Yet the endurance of the agony of meaninglessness is the greatest pain of all, and Büchner and his characters resist it. Mueller says of Danton:

> His anguish is so great, as well as his desire to communicate, to experience real love and friendship, that we must see some part of him in his vision of the universal force (be it what it may be) when he says to himself on the night preceding his death on the Guillotine: "The stars are scattered through the night like glistening teardrops; what a terrible grief must be behind the eyes that dropped them."

Danton preaches the senselessness of it all, yet his speech is filled with the metaphors of those who have found or felt transcendent meaning; he dies with a stoic splendor; his last moments show a casual kindliness to others: *he* is a heroic, existential refutation of the logic he has learned from events. And so the play has power; its characters—some of them—are real.

Such works seek, but do not find, the consolations of philosophy. How the human heart is contradicted by the facts of life is the theme. So, quite rightly, Mueller calls Buchner the true ancestor of the Theatre of the Absurd. In his book on this subject, Martin Esslin says:

> In most dramatic conventions, the audience is constantly asking itself the question, "What is going to happen next?" In the Theatre of the Absurd . . . the relevant question is not so much what is going to happen but what is happening? "What does the action of the play represent?"

Büchner explores the moral environment of Man in all his works, finding it non-moral, without human meaning. One could say that his plays are a controlled and modulated *scream*—a protest felt, spoken, acted out at all levels of awareness, in all the nuances of feeling and response of which human beings are capable—and in Danton, the man of consciousness, becoming highly articulate.

It is instructive to read through the play omitting all speeches save those of Danton. Virtually every one is a philosophical comment or reminiscence of past actions, a descant on existing circumstances, the laments of a tormented mind. And yet the anguish of these statements, the bitterness, the pathos of them, makes Danton a truly remarkable figure. He *lives* his thoughts. He has made of his life the mirror of his mind.

And this is the drama—what is happening—in Büchner's play.

If, attempting criticism, we take Danton out of his historical confinement and preach to him, demanding that he recognize and admit the reality of human freedom, we do violence to the form and substance of the play. And this would be wrong, since Danton was a child of his times, an actor in a bloody drama of history which made Büchner say:

> I have grown accustomed to the sight of blood. But I am no guillotine blade. The word maJt is one of the curses with which Mankind is baptized. The saying: "It must needs be that offenses come; but woe to him by whom the offense cometh" is terrifying. What is it in us that lies, murders, steals? I no longer care to pursue this thought.

The bounds of Büchner's thought are marked out by the polarities of angry action followed by bitter resignation. Yet he oscillates. He wrote his parents that "if anything in our time can help us, then it is force," but later declared that every revolution is "a vain enterprise."

> And through the figure of Danton he says that force is ineffectual, and to act, futile. Yet Danton says in the prison scene just before his death that he and his friends may die but it is possible that their bones, washed up by the flood of the revolution, will be picked up by the people and be used to bash in the heads of kings.

Of his own role, Büchner said in 1835, two years before his death:

> The dramatic poet is, in my eyes, nothing but a writer of history, except that he stands above the latter in that he creates history for the second time; he transplants us directly into the life of another time, instead of giving us a dry account of it; instead of characteristics, he gives us characters; instead of descriptions, he gives us living figures. His greatest task is to come as close to history as it actually was. His book may be neither more nor less moral than history itself. . . . The poet is no teacher of morals; he invents and creates characters, he brings the past back to life, and from this people may learn as though from the study of history itself and the observation of it, what happens in human life around them.

But Büchner had a theory of history. He believed it to be meaningless for man, and so, as artist, he made his selections of events and characters to emphasize this outlook. There is, after all, no "impartial" or "objective" view, except in terms of an explicit declaration of what has been chosen as evidence of "reality." The world is not a *scene* except to some observer, and there is no observer without a point of view.

Many of the scenes in *Danton's Death* are in the Luxembourg where Danton was confined by the Committee of Public Safety while he awaited execution. Another man in prison, awaiting execution many centuries before, wrote *The Consolations of Philosophy* to deal with the same

question: Whether or not man is "free" to choose or act. But the ruthless and ungrateful dealings of Theodoric did not make Boethius' theory of history: he took his idea of meaning from Plato. W. P. Ker says in *The Dark Ages:*

> The end of man is to see that there is nothing in the world that is not divine—nothing absurd, nothing unintelligible, nothing merely natural. Plato had said in the *Timæus*: "There are two kinds of causes, the Divine and the Necessary, and we must seek for the Divine in all things, and the Necessary for the sake of the Divine. The "necessary" here means what is mechanical or natural—the "second causes" of later popular philosophy. This is the doctrine taken up and expounded in the *Consolation*, and on this everything depends. Faith or vision—it matters little what it is called—is with Boethius the chief end; and from that comes all the rest; the man who has that is unassailable. Morality thus depends upon intelligence, on contemplation; the deadliest error is to misinterpret the world by means of second causes, corruptible, fragmentary things.

This would have been Boethius' reproach to Danton for his feeling of impotence—which was based upon a fragment of historical experience, its "second causes." But as we said—Boethius did not confront Danton, and both died at the hands of unjust tyrants. Plato could hardly have been made "believable" for Danton,—who was unprepared for such reflections—so that our notice of this other way of looking at the world and life has no relevance in criticism of either him or Büchner's play—a play which shows how the human spirit may still assert itself in extreme situations of both body and mind.

COMMENTARY
A MATTER OF HEALTH

NOT all the "facts" of history are fuzzy and problematic. Within the limits of a given cultural milieu, there are recurring patterns. For example, in the *Los Angeles Times* of Oct. 14, reviewing Michael Grant's *The Army of the Caesars,* Robert Kirsch remarks that this study of the Roman imperial standing army "is of singular relevance to an understanding of succeeding ages and, indeed, of our own." He comments:

> For the dilemma which occupied the Roman emperors of Rome has never disappeared: On the one hand, the army must exist, for purposes of external and internal security; on the other, it represents a power capable of being turned against its own rulers.

A few days after defeating McClellan for the presidency in November, 1864—an election he thought he might lose—Lincoln gave an address (Nov. 10) showing full awareness of this dilemma:

> It has long been a grave question whether any government, not too strong for the liberties of its people, can be strong enough to maintain its own existence in great emergencies. On this point the present rebellion brought our republic to a severe test, and a presidential election occurring in regular course during the rebellion added not a little to the strain. . . But the election was a necessity. We cannot have free government without elections; and if the rebellion could force us to forego or postpone a national election it might fairly claim to have already conquered and ruined us.

The election, he added, was not only a necessity, but a benefit:

> It has demonstrated that a people's government can sustain a national election in the midst of a great civil war. Until now it had not been known to the world that this was a possibility.

In this address by Lincoln, we have recognition of both the determinism of history and the human capacity for transcendence. Because of *relative* determinism we are able to learn from the past and chart a course into the future. But advance is obviously dependent upon the capacity for innovation, while *recognition* of that capacity is no small element in historical change.

Why are there so few psychological studies examining the relationship between transcendence and determinism, in comparison with a vast literature on "behavior modification"? (See Maslow's *Toward a Psychology of Being,* "Health as Transcendence of Environment.")

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
VARIOUS SCAPEGOATS

BOOKS like Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* bring home to us the horrors which result from determined application of ideological solutions for social problems. We learn from these books, but if we find their disclosures salutary only in relation to political systems, failing to look deeper into human motivation, there is strong likelihood that the horrors will all be repeated under new labels.

In what basic human tendency is the passion for and reliance on ideology rooted?

Karl Popper has given one answer to this question:

> . . . it must be one of the first principles of rational politics that we cannot make heaven on earth. The development of communism illustrates the terrible danger of the attempt. It has often been tried, but it has always led to the establishment of something like hell. Those who are inspired by this heavenly vision of an angelic society are bound to be disappointed, and when disappointed, they try to blame their failure on scapegoats, on human devils who maliciously prevent the coming of the millennium, and have to be exterminated. . . . Communism has reintroduced slavery, terror, and torture; and this we must not condone and cannot forgive. Yet we must not forget that all this happened because the founders of communism believed in a theory which promised freedom—freedom for all mankind. We must not forget in this bitter conflict that even this worst evil of our time was born out of a desire to do good.

This is a way of saying that men—by and large, all men—have ideals, but that they err in the means chosen to realize them. And they err most of all when the solution is formalized in a coercive, corporate choice.

Yet surely the longing for a "heaven on earth" ought not to be abandoned. Finding out how to work for this utopian vision without making a "hell" is the real problem. If we are honest, we admit that we know very little about the consequences of what we do. Even in science and technology, where we are acknowledged experts, specialists confess that the "assessment" of technology is extremely difficult. Only "after the fact" do we discover what we have done wrong.

Are there certain common habits of mind which lie at the root of ideological excess? One may be the assumption that "society" can either make us better human beings, or, conversely, ruin us entirely. Without this assumption ideology would be powerless to institute its crimes.

While it seems impossible to draw a line between individual responsibility and the shaping influence of environment and heredity, that line—that margin of dramatic change in the polarity of causation—*must exist,* or our feeling of freedom, our longing to be more fully ourselves, is a fraud in the texture of life. Unless that line is real, Dr. Glasser's Reality Therapy would not work at all, and it *does* work, whatever the framework of initial limitation in which the individual starts out to reconstruct himself. Dr. Glasser was midwife of self-reliance for the girls in the reformatory at Camarillo, just a, Socrates prescribed and demonstrated the birth of ideas in Plato's *Theætetus.* Knowing the line is there, and relying on it, is more important than knowing *where* it is, although experienced teachers often seem to hunch its general location.

But the Socratic art is highly individual. What about the "social" approach? Since, except for Plato and a few others, people think about "society" with only a part of themselves—being preoccupied with more engrossing matters—we tend to simplification and summary judgment A painful illustration of this is given by Dr. Herbert C. Modlin in an article, "Society and Drugs," in the Summer 1974 *Menninger Perspective.* He begins:

> From a psychiatric viewpoint, the reaction of society to the current drug problem has been disappointing—predictable, but disappointing. Social reactions have been for the most part, inappropriate, maladaptive and irrational, making them a proper subject for psychiatric study and comment. When common sense fails to improve understanding of and

> aid in solving a given problem, something further is needed—a kind of "uncommon" sense born of familiarity and specialized awareness concerning the nature of distorted thinking, surging emotions and aberrant behavior.

Project: Make a list of the occasions in history when an organized society adopted and put into practice "uncommon" sense for the solution of a given problem; and then study the attending circumstances and the quality of the human beings who were most effective in getting the uncommon sense before the people and generating a frame of mind which led to its adoption.

Well, there are a few people who manifest uncommon sense about drugs—see, for example, articles in MANAS about Synanon, and Henry Anderson's "Case against the Drug Culture" in the *MANAS Reader*—but not enough of them, and too many of the wrong sort of attending circumstances. Dr. Modlin lists "seven basic ineffectual social attitudes":

> (1) Indiscriminately tossing drugs, crime, rebellion, hippies, sex and violence together in one heap. . . . (2) The assumption that all drugs are powerful, dangerous, addictive and inherently capable of paralyzing the will. . . . (3) The belief that all drug users are mentally ill and therefore irrational and predictable. . . . (4) Applying the same legal procedures to all drug users; failing to differentiate among experimenters, users, abusers, addicts and professional pushers. . . . (5) Believing in the magic of legislation; assuming that the passage of laws will stem the tide and correct the evil. . . . (6) Prohibiting all drug use. . . . (7) Arbitrarily declaring a cause and effect relationship which does not in fact exist. . . .

What has been the result of these assumptions? Bewilderment, uncertainty, anger, and more "law and order" measures with heavier penalties which are "extended to include relatively nondangerous drugs." The educational system was mobilized to offer dozens of courses on the evils of drug use, but the young proved remarkably knowledgeable about the chemical, physiological and psychological effects of many different drugs and reacted with skepticism to the scare tactics of their instructors. "There is no evidence that education prevented any drug usage, but some evidence that the incidence of usage increased among the students." Then, when it became generally felt that "there is no cure for addiction, methadon maintenance was seized upon." Many observers regard methadon as no more than a method of social control—with ominous implications. Dr. Modlin says: "The chief purpose of methadon clinics is to reduce the crime rate associated with hard drugs." It might be added that the Nalline test, which makes it possible to detect heroin users, is basically a method of police control over former addicts out of prison on probation; and that ex-addicts who have freed themselves of the habit regard Nalline, which is administered by needle, as a psycho-emotional disaster for anyone trying to remain "clean."

Realities of the drug situation now gradually being recognized are listed by Dr. Modlin:

> Figures show that the heroin epidemic of the early 1970s has abated; new cases of heroin addiction appear only sporadically.
>
> Although it is true that 80% of heroin addicts start with marihuana, it is also true that only 2% of marihuana users have tried heroin.
>
> The effect of all but hard drugs depends more on the user's expectations and social setting where the drug is used than upon the drug itself.
>
> We find that the typical drug user is not mentally ill and has not been delinquent.
>
> We recognize that most drug experimentation and use by teen-agers is a phasic part of their adolescent testing. As they reach young adulthood the drugs are readily given up.
>
> We see that many young people disenchanted with the drug scene have rejoined the Establishment and are frequent users of alcohol and tobacco in emulation of their elders. . . .
>
> People are listening to statements such as this: The ultimate solution rests not in the suppression of drugs but in the development of human beings who are resistant to drug abuse.

> In conclusion I can do no better than to quote the late Lawrence Kolb, an internationally recognized authority on drug addiction. "In approaching the (drug) problem, we should keep in mind that this country (the United States) suffers less from the disease than from the misguided frenzy of suppressing it."

Now, what has Dr. Modlin told us? First, he has told us what "we," by means of social measures, have been doing that doesn't work at all, or works in reverse. Note that in considering the facts he marshals for inspection, we find it necessary to shift intellectual gears, away from the individual point of view—the Socratic and Glasser approach—and to look at statistics outlining gross tendencies in human behavior. This may be difficult, especially if the reader knows from personal experience—and as Dr. Modlin points out—that helping efforts must differ, sometimes radically, with different sorts of problems. So, in general, we learn from Dr. Modlin what to *stop* doing, as a society; and then, as a positive step, he proposes that we undertake "the development of human beings who are resistant to drug abuse."

What, then, should be "society's" role? Obviously, "society" should never pretend to accomplish what is utterly beyond its capacity. This is the folly which becomes the crime of ideology. And we, as members of society, should never *expect* society to do what it manifestly can't.

What is social intelligence? Most of all, these days, social intelligence means refusing to adopt institutional or legislative solutions for problems which are rooted in the philosophical and moral impoverishment of the times. And blaming "society" for our problems is surely quite as serious a mistake as expecting society to solve them.

FRONTIERS

More Convergences in Science

LAST week the notes on Allen D. Allen's explanation of why he thinks matter "doesn't exist" showed that ancient and modern cosmologies, if not yet wedded, may soon be friendly acquaintances. Matter, Mr. Allen says in effect, is a phenomenon which we arrange from readings and applications of the laws of physics—atoms may be literally "a dance of categories," since what they do seems largely a matter of how we look at them, and of the laws through which we recognize their appearance and describe their behavior. "In the beginning," these physicists are therefore saying, "was the Word."

Now comes a graduate student at the University of California in Los Angeles who seems to go back to the ancient Hermeticists and alchemists for basic theory to explain extra-sensory perception. This young man, Barry Taff, according to the *UCLA Monthly* for May-June, has had accepted for publication by *Physics Today* an article in which "he views man, not as a closed system, but as part of an instantaneous communication system existing between biological organisms." Involved is "a concept in theoretical physics called imaginary energy." To Barry Taff's credit are admitted feats in telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition, and it is said that he "has succeeded in shaking the faith of more than a few skeptics."

He is interested in finding in theoretical physics a foundation for explaining what parapsychologists call "psi" phenomena—the data of ESP research. Not noticed in the article in *UCLA Monthly* is the important question of whether ESP phenomena are to be tailored to fit into modern physical theory, or the theory be enlarged—"psychologized," so to speak—to accommodate the extraordinary ranges of psychical phenomena.

Thus background considerations are important to this question. The conventional view of the scientific fraternity concerning these phenomena was clearly described years ago (*American Scholar*, Winter, 1938-39) by Joseph Jastrow:

> ESP is so contrary to the general scientific world picture, that to accept the former would compel abandonment of the latter. I am unwilling to give up the body of scientific knowledge so painfully acquired in the Western world during the last three hundred years, on the basis of a few anecdotes and a few badly reported experiments.

This hard-line attitude is wavering today, but resistance still exists, sometimes taking the form of mechanization of the phenomena of mind. In the *Denver Quarterly* (Spring 1974), Owen Barfield comments on the popular book, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*, remarking that the researchers whose work is there reported "are quite ready to abandon materialism, provided they can maintain and even enhance technology by doing so." This is not, of course, abandoning materialism, but raising it to a higher power. As Mr. Barfield says:

> Research into *psi* phenomena of all kinds, but particularly psychokinesis, far from being discredited as reactionary mysticism, is now being enthusiastically financed by the state. But the research is strictly technological and the aim is operational, not cognitive. What matters is, not the nature and highest function of mental energy but the problem of quantifying it as manipulable "psychotrons." In this way it is incidentally disinfected of all philosophical and moral implications. . . . We should do well to reflect that the presence among us of powerful impulse no longer to deny the spirit but to impound it, or rather no longer to doubt it but to deny it—to materialize as it were the immaterial itself, or in other words to turn from theoretical to practical reductionism, may be pregnant with the gravest possible consequences for humanity as a whole.

These strictures may not apply to Barry Taff's approach. Conceivably, he intends an expansion of physical theory to dimensions more hospitable to mind as a natural phenomenon (or noumenon, rather) throughout nature—in us and in everything

else, or every living thing. The *UCLA Monthly* summarizes:

> Perhaps the single greatest stumbling block to telepathy research has been that the mental imagery reported by psychics does not appear to be conveyed by the electromagnetic energy that accounts for communication received through the external senses. Contrary to electromagnetic-information theory, researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that the incidence of ESP is not affected by distance and is not inhibited by screening chambers.

Having studied and experimented with holography, a kind of photography in which information is distributed equally over the entire film, Taff proposes that this property of the hologram may be "a miniscule representation of how our universe functions, in that any tiny portion of space may essentially possess all the attributes of the entire cosmos."

> More simply, if an event is occurring at one particular point in space, it in reality may be informationally transpiring at all points in space at a level not yet understood.
>
> If this theorem is even partially correct, he contends, it would account for an instantaneous communication system between biological organisms regardless of the space or distance between them and would eliminate the expected energy wave or particle commonly observed in conveying information. "Perhaps," he says, "that is why if you sit in a Faraday cage, telepathy still seems to work. You aren't communicating through the cage, but rather locking into the space around your body, which may itself contain all the informational components of the world as we know it."

How does this parallel the conceptions of the hermeticists and the alchemists? Well, as Betty Roszak remarked (MANAS, Sept. 18) in her article on the alchemists, the idea that man is the microcosm of the macrocosm once pervaded all the ancient world. Her quotation from the *Zohar* may stand as decisive evidence for this comparison:

> For there is not a member in the human body that does not have its counterpart in the world as a whole. For as a man's body consists of members and parts of varying rank, all acting and reacting upon one another so as to form one organism, so it is with the world at large: it consists of a hierarchy of created things, which, when they properly act and react upon each other, together form one organic body.

If, as Mr. Allen says, there are physicists who look to the Word for the foundation of their science, the readers of *Physics Today* are now being invited to consider old alchemical and Kabalistic doctrine (dressed up in other language) as the basis of psychodynamics in nature and in man.