

## THE KNOWLEDGE MEN NEED

THE present is a time of the dissolution of old "realities." There have been other periods in which wornout idea-systems have broken up and given way to new ones, with consequent disorders and new beginnings, but the present comes close to being unique in the variety of beliefs which are simultaneously dying away. Most of these waning beliefs are internally related. There is a close connection, for example, between the scientific idea of isolated, empirically discovered "facts" and the idea of the independent, sovereign nation-state, separate in its interests from all others. And clearly related to these two ideas is the conception of the tough-minded, independent, aggressive individual who overcomes obstacles and makes his way in the world, relying on the rule of the survival of the fittest.

These ideas came into prominence during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As operative conceptions, they began their rule of men's lives with extraordinary vigor, doubtless because they had the moral backing of revolutionary ethical principles. The sovereign state and the independent individual were the means by which the Rights of Man would be achieved and Equality established. The world of "objective facts" was out there, awaiting the claims of the energetic explorer, inventor, and entrepreneur. All men could have the knowledge they would work to get, since Truth was a matter for scientific investigation. Progress would come from the application of industry, and enlightenment would automatically result from the spread of knowledge among all men as they took advantage of the opportunities which were now laid before them. There would be no more hereditary power, supernaturally granted to a minority of decadent bluebloods. The laws of nature, progressively revealed by science, would take the place of an arbitrary order dispensed by arrogant and

tyrannical men. Common intelligence guided by the will to decency and humanity would be sufficient to prevent the return of all such evils. With universal education, men would soon learn to rule themselves. Religion, shorn of temporal power, might serve to keep alive useful moral precepts and traditions, while knowledge would be found through scientific activity and put to work for the common good.

Apparently, there is a limit to the time during which such ideas can remain productive of what men expect of them. Already the nation-state has become a devastator of the planet and a continuous threat to the peace of the world. The more powerful the state, the more reason all men have to fear it. The aggressive managers of industry and commerce have grown so influential and their enterprises become so large that they cannot possibly be taken as symbols of fulfillments and satisfactions within the reach of all men. The transformation of the advanced societies from agricultural into industrial nations has bureaucratized whole populations, which are now organized in the service of a vast technological organization, part economic, part political, devoted to maintaining the functions of the total assemblage. It is becoming increasingly difficult for any individual to separate himself from the homogenizing tendencies of this organization, by reason of the increasing similarity of the demands made upon all who share in this work. Freedom, the dissenting individual finds, is defined as the right to participate in these system-defined tasks, with only marginal possibilities for making a living in other ways.

What about "science"? If we by-pass the obvious consideration of the change in popular attitudes toward science as a result of bombing of Hiroshima and the development of nuclear weaponry since then, there is this to be said: the

scientists of today who give thought to the meaning of their activities take a very different view of science from that which prevailed in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. In other words, science no longer supposes itself to be dealing with "pure objects" which are found in nature. There are no pure objects. Anything at all, simply in order to be an object of observation, must have an idea attached to it. The world of nature with which science works is actually a world of abstractions formulated by scientists as a means of naming and in some measure creating those parts of the world it chooses to place under observation. The world of science, in other words, is a world created by ideas and shaped by preconception. The truths of science relate to that world. It follows that a very different set of truths might be generated by another approach to nature; in fact, the great revolutions in science are accomplished in exactly this way. A quotation from Einstein is appropriate here:

The eyes of the scientist are directed upon those phenomena which are accessible to observation, upon their apperception and conceptual formulation. In the attempt to achieve a conceptual formulation of the confusingly immense body of observational data, the scientist makes use of a whole arsenal of concepts which is imbibed practically with his mother's milk; and seldom if ever is he aware of the eternally problematic character of his concepts. He uses this conceptual material, or, speaking more exactly, these conceptual tools of thought, as something obviously, immutably given; something having an objective value of truth which is hardly ever, and in any case not seriously, to be doubted. How could he do otherwise? How could the ascent of a mountain be possible, if the use of hands, legs, and tools had to be sanctioned step by step on the basis of the science of mechanics? And yet in the interests of science it is necessary over and over again to engage in the critique of these fundamental concepts, in order that we may not unconsciously be ruled by them. This becomes evident especially in those situations involving development of ideas in which the consistent use of the traditional concepts leads us to paradoxes difficult to resolve.

How does this analysis apply to the more general dissolution of old "realities"? It applies by

calling into question what has been termed the "naïve realism" or claims to absolute "objectivity" of much of modern thought. The entirety of the argument for empirical method, as the sole reliable approach to experience, rests on the claim to objectivity. The assertion is that the world out there is the world of fact and truth, waiting to be discovered by impartial methods of investigation. You don't need "theory," it is said, to find out the facts. You just collect the facts, and then, when you have enough of them, the pattern in the facts will disclose the truth of their relationships and meaning will begin to emerge. Einstein is saying in effect that you don't recognize any facts, at the outset, except by the use of conceptual tools. Even the collection of them *as* facts presupposes certain theories or assumptions about them. Thus the "pure object," as was said, is nonexistent. The empiricist is an unconscious metaphysician with a large collection of assumptions about meaning and relevance; armed with these assumptions, he goes out to look at the world, choosing for study facts that seem worth collecting because of preconceptions of which he remains more or less unaware.

This habitual practice makes the empiricist the worst sort of dogmatist, because he naturally disclaims that he has any assumptions. Only he, he says, is a man without prejudice. Einstein's prescription is for the researcher to become aware of the assumptions in all his conceptual tools, so that he will not be "unconsciously ruled by them."

The importance of this criticism of empiricism lies in its refutation of the claim that the practice of empirical science makes both philosophy and religion unnecessary. Empiricism disposes of philosophy only by smuggling into its practice a few crude philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world and the ways in which it can be understood. In the eighteenth century, after more than a thousand years of theological assertion, including accounts of the natural world untarnished by any sort of supporting fact, the promise of empiricism had every reason to be

welcomed and embraced with emotional enthusiasm. The glamor of the idea that every man who would do the work, perform the experiments, could know the truth about the world and nature, was almost irresistible. By contrast with the inaccessible sources of priestly authority, this was indeed a common man's way to truth, a means of becoming truly independent. So the objectivity of the natural world, there to be studied, learned about, understood, became equalitarian gospel, the means to practical salvation for a self-reliant citizenry. Meanwhile, Galileo and Newton had shown that the world was no more than a great machine, operating according to mechanical principles. Now the way to progress was indeed opened up, since machines were not so difficult, after all, for the common man to understand.

If we count from the days of Copernicus and Galileo, then the time for all these developments to come to their present maturity has been nearly four hundred years. We know the scope of the energies which these ideas released, and only during the past decade or so we have begun to get intensive instruction in the effect their misdirection and excesses have had upon our lives and upon the earth itself. So it is that today, these ideas, so long believed and lived by, are being questioned and challenged. Thoughtful scientists no longer speak confidently of the splendors of scientific objectivity. Fewer and fewer men insist that science can replace philosophy. It never could, or did, but during the period of the supremacy of the empirical approach the subordination and neglect of philosophy weakened it almost beyond repair. During the same period, the rise of the nation-state was taken as evidence of greater freedom for the individual, and progress in industrial achievement and political power was identified as "national greatness," even though a point had been reached where the wielders of that power were sometimes aghast at the destruction and slaughter they accomplished, and spoke piously of seeking alternatives to war. Today, however, the individuals held to be the beneficiaries of all this

are becoming increasingly aware of their role as mere cogs in the machinery of national power and industrial productivity. And although there has been a substantial gain in individual wealth, the cost of this prosperity in nervous tension, loss of a sense of community, and in anxiety about the coming generation comes very close to making people think longingly of less affluent but more wholesome years in the past.

What then are the ideas which we are becoming uncertain about—which we might very well be willing to replace? They are the ideas of the self, of knowledge, and of the social community. These ideas are of course related, but require separate consideration. First, then, the idea of social community. The nation-state is clearly on the way out. As an organization for the manipulation of power, it does nothing but get us into trouble, and is incredibly expensive in the process. From a cultural point of view, the functions of the state seem blown up to a ridiculous importance. The better magazines are obsessed by vulgar politics and must not be able to think of much else to write about, since they give so many of their pages to men who are intellectually second- or third-rate, and whose only claim to distinction is political activity.

But what is the practical alternative to the nation-state? This is where thinking tends to break down entirely. It is difficult to imagine oneself without any nationality. Of course, a sense of "place" and a fondness or love for one's native land is not the same as devotion to the nation-state. Recollections of the community of one's childhood are something like early memories of family life. Even large cities have in them places which can be thought of in this way, or used to. These feelings do not diminish in persons who begin to think of themselves as "citizens of the world." There are probably a dozen or more groups working faithfully to spread the consciousness of world community, some having set up skeleton organizations which provide unofficial "world citizenship papers." All this may

help a little, but the simple fact of being human ought to be enough to qualify people as members of the world. The realization that we all belong to the whole human family will doubtless have to grow gradually, affecting all levels, spreading in the same way that the ideas of the eighteenth-century revolution spread, from continent to continent and country to country. Education, not necessarily formal, is bound to have a large part in any deliberate influence along these lines, which means, of course, a new way of writing history, with less and less national emphasis. The idea of independence and individual worth, along with the universal equality of man, obviously needs balance from ideas of interdependence, definition of role by assumption of obligation, as distinguished from assertion of rights, and recognition that individuals are born within social wholes and achieve the highest individual excellence through service to the larger community. None of these ideas is new, but several of them have been overshadowed and forgotten as a result of the corruptions of both political and religious authority in the past.

It is evident that the conception of the social community can not really be considered in isolation from the idea of self. No one knows the extent to which the disorders of the present are due to a far-reaching psychological upheaval which affects human beings at many levels of their lives. One of the best summarizing descriptions of this transition was provided by Carl Jung in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, published in 1939. Jung wrote:

The rapid and world-wide growth of a "psychological" interest over the last two decades shows unmistakably that modern man has to some extent turned his attention from material things to his own subjective processes. Should we call this mere curiosity? . . . This psychological interest of the present time shows that man expects something from psychic life which he has not received from the outer world: something which our religions, doubtless, ought to contain, but no longer do contain—at least for the modern man. The various forms of religion no longer appear to the modern man to come from within—to be expressions of his own psychic life; for him they are to be classed with the things of the outer

world. He is vouchsafed no revolution of a spirit that is not of this world; but he tries on a number of religions and convictions as if they were Sunday attire, only to lay them aside again like wornout clothes.

A similar comment might be made today, with increased emphasis on the rejection of orthodox beliefs and the "trying on" of a large number of more or less improvised faiths. The restlessness and hungering of the human spirit have increased, while the traditional restraints on behavior are rapidly disappearing, and the "experiments" in both psychology and religion often seem frothy and even dangerous. What is really needed may be a profound religious reform of the intellectual depth and moral dimensions brought by Gautama Buddha some twenty-five hundred years ago, since nothing shallow or involving rational weakness will be able to attract the sharpened mental capacities of many modern Westerners who, now, at the same time, are beginning to acknowledge the inner vacancy of their lives and might welcome a religious philosophy that would give comprehensive order to the confusion which is overtaking the age.

The decline of faith in empiricism and the increasing recognition of at least the possibility of transcendental reality may open the door to such a cycle of enlightenment, especially since only the hardened shells of inadequate and failing institutions provide what unity remains for the societies in the throes of disillusionment.

The question of knowledge is a difficult one to deal with. If, indeed, what we call "scientific knowledge" is actually a combination of forgotten metaphysical assumptions, which are taken to be the ground of scientific activity, with the results of observation of nature, then we have little choice but to go back over the history of scientific inquiry and examine critically those assumptions, one by one, to see if they ought to be retained. This is an extremely unsettling situation for the man who until now has been wholly confident that the elementary principles of scientific knowledge are the very foundation of all future knowledge,

and under no circumstances to be questioned. If even science moves from philosophical premises, then there is a mysterious subjective element in all knowledge, and no objective certainty or finality anywhere!

But this conclusion is not so upsetting when it is realized that many scientists themselves, and especially the leaders in scientific thought, have been declaring for at least a generation that science deals only with the behavior of whatever it is that behaves—call it matter or energy or what you will. The issues of human decision, of problems of good and evil, of meaning, of history, of whether or not there is "progress"—these are not questions concerning which science has anything significant to say. Another sort of science, perhaps, unafraid of subjective reality, might be able to tackle these questions, but this science would participate in the same qualities that we find in literature and philosophy—for the truth-content to be discovered in these cultural riches of the human heritage reveals itself only to those who grow in stature to an independent confidence in the powers of the human spirit. Such literature, in short, does not constitute an "answer book," but a *key* that must be used.

Which is to say that the sort of knowledge men really need and hunger after is not the manipulative sort.

If this idea could be clearly established, science might then come into its own as an extremely valuable analogue of the quest for wisdom. Science has been and will always be a crucially important tool of the educator. The discipline of the scientist, his impartial spirit, his determination to find out, his sense of having a task that will never be finished, which goes on forever—these are attitudes and qualities which are needed by all men. Science is not a synonym of "materialism," nor ought it to be so regarded. It has had this role during the great contest with religious bigotry and pretense—a war which science won, but by the use of weapons which destroyed not only the corruptions of religion but

the rational basis for an inner or spiritual life. We may be long in recovering from this disastrous victory, since it had the effect of closing the minds of the great majority of people to all but what were proudly declared to be "facts" and objectively demonstrable truths.

Now we know that facts are never independent of ideas and that the objectively demonstrable truths are not the things that are important to know. They do not fill the void of human longing in the present. They throw no significant light on the disorder in our lives. They do not even fortify the practice of impartial science, to say nothing of support for the principles of a democratic society.

There are moral qualities which are an essential part of the nature of man, and which are prior to his political, economic, and scientific activities. These qualities give breadth and depth to the intellectual capacities, they are the foundation of any political philosophy we may require, and they ought to supply the rationale for all economic activities. They are not objective, and never will be, but what we do with our moral qualities, the attention or neglect they receive, and the meaning we attach to their presence, produce a great many objective consequences. The difficulty we find in tracing these consequences to their causes is a problem in philosophy as well as in social science. Making a new beginning in philosophy is likely to require all the resources we have.

## *REVIEW*

### A BOOK ON "MODERN PHILOSOPHY"

THE pursuit of philosophy is or ought to be an inquiry into the nature of truth and how it may be known, and this inquiry cannot be separated from what is good for human beings. Yet most current books about "philosophy" are not merely difficult to understand; they are also uninteresting. Things worth doing or books worth reading may always have some difficulty about them, but they ought not to be without invitation. And while philosophy, by reason of its objects, may be the most difficult of all undertakings, it is also the most universal—the least specialized, that is—for the reason that all human beings need the help of philosophy and do in fact practice philosophy of a sort. For the philosophic quest is an essentially humanizing undertaking.

What is basically wrong with the present-day practice of philosophy? Perhaps a book put together by Herbert Kohl will provide something of an answer. We got hold of Kohl's *The Age of Complexity* for reading and possible review for two reasons: first, he wrote *36 Children*, which is an extraordinarily good book about teaching in a Harlem ghetto public school in New York; second, he is the grandson of Morris Cohen, who has always seemed to us to be, and remain, the most distinguished American philosopher or philosophical thinker of the twentieth century. (His book, *Reason and Nature*, is one to return to again and again.) Yet *The Age of Complexity* was a disappointment, although not through any particular fault of Mr. Kohl. It didn't seem worth reading, at least not carefully. In some broad way, this may be an explanation of why Mr. Kohl is teaching children, today, instead of lecturing on philosophy.

The book is intended to introduce the reader to the philosophic thinking being done in the present age. On the first page of his introduction, the writer tells the story of a meeting in France of leading philosophers of that country, England, and

the United States, in which it became evident that the ways of thinking of the various "schools" were so different that these eminent professionals could hardly communicate with one another. At a final session, Gabriel Marcel did his best to explain his ideas to the English and the Americans, but encountered so much resistance that he finally exclaimed, "Perhaps I can't explain it to you, but if I had a piano here I could play it."

Mr. Kohl attributes some of this obscurity in philosophy to the fact that the world has become extremely complex since the wars of the twentieth century, obliging philosophers to turn away from simplicities once widely believed in, and to work more modestly at limited problems. Yet after sampling a number of the selections from modern thinkers—which, together with Kohl's thoughtful introductions, make up the book—it seems to us that there is another, more important explanation. It is that these thinkers are intensely preoccupied with what men can know and how they know, as a technical problem, and give almost no serious attention to the question of the good of man. In short, they are technicians of inquiry, not largehearted helpers and teachers, which philosophers most certainly ought to try to be.

One consequence of becoming intellectual specialists alone is that every specialty invariably develops many complexities, and the field of investigation consequently becomes increasingly remote, and more and more inaccessible to everyone outside the ranks of the practicing specialists. There is only one means of keeping things simple in such undertakings, and that is by responding to the need to *teach* whatever is being found out to others, so that it may be made useful. Teaching is also a good way of testing the quality and value of what is being found out.

So, when philosophers limit their activity to "technical philosophy," they are able to communicate only to other technicians of the same persuasion, or the would-be technicians in graduate school, and what they publish is circulated only among other academic

professionals who have similar interests and concerns. This is not to suggest that no useful and interesting discoveries are made by specialists, or that they write nothing worth listening to, but only that such work, when it does appear, may get a cold reception from the professionals. The author may be regarded as a "maverick" and accused of unprofessional conduct in attempting to speak to a wider audience. The cultural odds, for such reasons, instead of being *for* the spread of serious philosophic inquiry, are stacked against it. In time, a kind of neo-barbarism tends to overtake popular culture when intellectuals behave in this way, since common folk sense the meaninglessness of this sort of academic isolation and find it reasonable to declare that philosophizing must indeed be a waste of time.

This is not to suggest, again, that method and rigor have no place in philosophic inquiry, which would be ridiculous, but only that the search for knowledge, not merely for itself, but in order to benefit others, establishes for the inquirer a clear sense of *limit* to the value of technical development; the man with the instincts of a teacher tends to believe or realize that technique is not really a means of finding light on ultimate questions, although it may be indispensable for clearing away the debris of past failures and mistakes.

There is a curious example of what happens when the reliance on "method" is permitted to rule out all other guidance in the determinations of thought. In the latter portion of his book Mr. Kohl includes an essay by Alain Robbe-Grillet, one of the "new" French novelists, in which this writer undertakes a justification of his point of view. By keeping their description free of metaphor and "metaphysical" implication, these novelists endeavor to achieve a "true" record of what men experience, apart from their expectations and assumptions about their relations with their environment. The new novelists hope in this way to avoid both despair and tragedy, which are not, Robbe-Grillet says, in the

experience of life itself, but in human expectations, which are seldom fulfilled. Objects are objects, separate and unrelated to man, he says, and should be described in this way. So, in the name of overcoming despair, Robbe-Grillet declares for the language of simple sensory images, purged of the ambiguities of metaphor and all traditions of unities between man and nature. In one place Robbe-Grillet says:

So it becomes clear to what a tremendous extent the idea of human "nature" is bound up with the vocabulary of analogy. This nature, common to all men, eternal and inalienable, no longer needs even God to support it. It is sufficient to know that Mont Blanc has been waiting for me in the "heart" of the Alps since prehistoric times, and with it all my ideas of greatness and purity. . . .

Such a nature, moreover, does not belong to man alone, since it constitutes the bond between his spirit and things, it is, then, a common essence for all "creation" that we are invited to accept. The universe and I have but a single soul, a single secret.

Belief in this kind of nature turns out to be the very basis of Humanism, as generally conceived. So it is not by chance that Nature itself—mineral, vegetable, animal—should be the original recipient of an anthropomorphic vocabulary.

All these linkages between man and nature must be expurgated from our language—

In this cleansing operation, nothing must be overlooked. On closer scrutiny, we perceive that it is not only anthropocentric (mental or visceral) analogies that must be attacked. *All* analogies are equally dangerous. Perhaps the most dangerous of all are those crafty ones in which man is not even mentioned.

For these analogues of man's nature with the world lead, he says, to ideas of a common nature in all things, which means "a superior nature." And—"Interiority always leads to transcendence." Nothing if not candid in this new stoicism of total alienation, Robbe-Grillet concludes:

A common nature, to repeat, can and must be only an eternal answer to the single question forever asked by our Greco-Christian civilization. The Sphinx stands before me, questions me, and I do not even have to seek to understand the terms of the

riddle. There is only one possible answer to everything: man.

Well! To this I say, No. . .

And modern (or future) man [Robbe-Grillet's sort of man] no longer feels this absence of meaning as a lack, or as an emotional distress. Faced with this emptiness, he succumbs henceforth to no dizziness. His heart no longer requires a hollow place in which to take refuge.

For, by refusing communion, he also refuses tragedy.

Would it be too much to say that a similar argument could be made for pre-frontal lobotomy?

It is at least conceivable that the sense of a community of being which the language of universal literature suggests is in fact an intuitive and spontaneous expression of the realities of man's life and being. This, at any rate, has been the view of many great philosophers whose claim to attention has not been diminished by what modern thinkers call the "complexity" of the modern world. A case could be made for the view that this complexity, or the confusion it has brought, is largely chargeable to the egocentric activities of modern man, to the neglect of his responsibilities to the rest of life.

An excellent antidote to Robbe-Grillet's sophisticated empiricism or materialism is found in another of Kohl's selections, an essay on the poetic element or inspiration in philosophy, by Wallace Stevens. Readers who have, so to say, been compelled to admire Stevens' work, despite a disinclination to read modern poetry, may be helped by reading this essay to understand their own reaction to Stevens. The roots of great philosophy, he shows, are all essentially poetic in origin. Philosophy, in short, cannot do without poetry, even though the object of philosophy is not to achieve poetry. From the welter of our experience of the world, poetic insight reveals starting-points, visions of possibility, which the discipline of philosophy may then investigate and

pursue. Both philosophy and the poetic art gain a fresh dignity and meaning from this essay.

*The Age of Complexity* is a useful if not especially enjoyable or encouraging book. It may help the reader to decide what to look into further and what to leave severely alone.

## *COMMENTARY* **POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY**

IN his essay on the part played by poetic insight in philosophy, Wallace Stevens (see Review) means the contribution of a flight of the imagination, or of the intuition. The attempt to philosophize without a poetic inspiration, he says, would be to "dismiss from philosophy all the profound expectations on which it is based." For illustration, he quotes from Bruno, the philosopher of the dawn of science, a lyrical passage on the plurality of inhabited worlds:

It is not reasonable to believe that any part of the world is without a soul, life, sensation and organic structure. From this infinite All, full circle above us to the sparkling dust of the stars beyond, the conclusion is drawn that there are an infinity of creatures, a vast multitude, which, each in its degree, mirrors forth the splendor, wisdom and excellence of the divine beauty. . . . There is but one celestial expanse, where the stars choir forth unbroken harmony.

By the nineteenth century, philosophy had turned away from this sort of imaginative envisioning, making Victor Hugo say that the stars are no longer mentionable in poetry. Stevens quotes a poet-philosopher friend, Jean Paulhan, as saying that "Louis de Broglie admits that progress in physics is, at the moment, in suspense because we do not have the words or images that are essential to us." And, Paulhan adds, the creation of "illuminations, images, words, that is the very reason for being of poets."

Perhaps anticipating Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, Stevens shows that at the moment of discovery or inspiration, there is little difference between philosophy and poetry, but that the subsequent development widens the gap. It is notable, also, that for the philosopher who is a writer and teacher, the use of metaphor, versatile tool of the poet, is indispensable. Plato is probably the best illustration of this. Stevens quotes also from Paul Weiss:

If by a poetic view we mean one which probes beneath those used in daily living, or one which cuts across the divisions which are normative to ordinary discourse, then all philosophy must be said to be poetic in conception and doctrine. It writes a cosmic poetry in prose, making use of such abstract terms as being, individuality, causality, etc., in order to talk about the presuppositions of all there is.

Toward the end, Stevens shows that, in discussing the relation between poetry and philosophy, he has really been examining the interdependence of imagination and reason. Neither is supreme, but together they make thought fruitful.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### TASKS OF EDUCATION

THERE is no good reason why those who engage in mind-shaping activities which affect the coming generation should allow themselves to be influenced by intellectual fashions. Fashions are either dictated by marketing motivations or sweep into play as a result of waves of popular feeling expressive of superficial appetites and needs based on weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Education ought always to go back to the roots where all good things begin, endeavoring to lay the basis for a new start. Making the young participate in the failures of the older generation because of adult pessimism, depression, and scapegoating anger is a crime against the future.

A column by William Stringer in the *Christian Science Monitor* for last Dec. 2 notes the widespread pessimism throughout America and the rest of the world, as reported by a number of opinion-gathering agencies, then offers this comment:

Certainly the hopefulness of the last few centuries has melted in the face of nuclear threats, pollution, immorality, religious indifference, technological dictates. John Stuart Mills' belief that mankind would be steadily enlightened through education is now doubted. Karl Marx is disbelieved, who thought that socialism, then communism, would advance society into a golden age.

Rapid change, piling in on us from all quarter—from changing neighborhoods to disintegration of family living—has alarmed many. Alvin Toffler in his book *Future Shock* sees this "fire storm of change" as producing a kind of mental illness, a "dizzying disorientation brought on by the premature arrival of the future." Leo Cherne, at the Research Institute of America, has attributed today's discontent to a loss of faith that "everything is soluble, every ill is curable, every need answerable . . . an end to innocence."

Among promising signs Mr. Stringer lists the fresh search for community, the attempt to rebuild a sense of personal identity, Revel's *Without Marx or Jesus* as an encouraging view of what is happening in the United States, and the "Jesus cult," in which he sees positive simplicities of Christian faith in a personal savior.

Mr. Stringer's intentions may be good, but these seem frail reeds for the support of counter-currents in education. There would be far more point in turning to sources of inspiration in men whose thinking was free of the false optimism described by Leo Cherne. These would include Tolstoy, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. When a civilization begins to sour, the intellectuals who submit to the sense of failure and then make anger, depression, alienation, and despair fashionable are almost always in the majority. Otherwise, the civilization would not have gone sour. Teachers need to seek out the handful who have a blessed immunity to these tendencies and strike a strong, positive note even in the worst of times. Six years ago, in the *Saturday Review* for Sept. 6, 1966, Kenneth Rexroth contributed a page on Walt Whitman (part of his "Classics Revisited" series) in which he shows the great difference between Whitman and most of his contemporaries. Whitman is a man to keep fresh in the memory and in the minds of the young:

One nineteenth-century writer of world importance successfully refused alienation, yet still speaks significantly to us—Walt Whitman, the polar opposite of Baudelaire.

Most intellectuals of our generation think of America as the apotheosis of commercial, competitive, middle-class society. Because Whitman found within it an abundance of just those qualities that it seems today most to lack, the sophisticated read him little and are inclined to dismiss him as fraudulent or foolish. The realization of the American Dream as an apocalypse, an eschatological event which would give the life of man its ultimate significance, was an invention of Whitman's.

Other religions have been founded on the promise of the Community of Love, the Abode of Peace, the Kingdom of God. Whitman identified with his own nation-state. We excuse such ideas only when they began 3,000 years ago in the Levantine desert. In our own time we suspect them of dangerous malevolence. Yet Whitman's vision exposes and explodes all the frauds that pass for the American Way of Life. It is the last and greatest vision of the American potential.

Rexroth seems a little careless with words here, since "nation-state" hardly conveys what Whitman felt about the United States. A great city, he believed, is a place—

Where the populace rises at once against the never-  
ending audacity of elected persons . . .  
Where outside authority enters always after the  
precedence of inside authority,  
Where the citizen is always the head and ideal, and  
President, Mayor, Governor and what not, are  
agents for pay,  
Where children are taught to be laws unto themselves,  
and to depend on themselves,  
Where equanimity is illustrated in affairs,  
Where speculations on the soul are encouraged. . .

However, Rexroth does point out the following:

Walt Whitman's democracy is utterly different from the society of free rational contractual relationships inaugurated by the French Revolution. It is a community of men and women related by organic satisfactions, in work, love, play, the family, comradeship; a social order whose essence is the liberation and universalization of selfhood. *Leaves of Grass* is not a great work of art just because it has a great program, but it does offer point-by-point alternatives to the predatory society, as well as to the systematic doctrine of alienation from it that has developed from Baudelaire and Kierkegaard to the present. . . .

Only recently it was fashionable to dismiss Whitman as foolish and dated, a believer in the myth of progress and the preacher of an absurd patriotism. Today we know that it is Whitman's vision or nothing.

"Progress," in Whitman's way of thinking, or rather singing, was not dissimilar to Tolstoy's idea of progress as entirely an inward thing, in the qualities of human beings. The great mistake of the false optimists is to put it outside, in "history," and in external achievement. Rexroth shows that the ideal conceptions which were not uncommon in the early days of the American Republic were driven underground during the years before the Civil War. Social dreaming emerged in cooperative colonies, religious communal sects, in vegetarianism, feminism, and among the Quakers. Whitman, Rexroth says, often used Quaker language, and his attitudes were familiar in the radical and pietistic circles of the Abolitionist Movement. Speaking of this movement, he continues:

This was the first American Left, for whom the Civil War was a revolutionary war and who, after it was over, refused to believe that it was not a won revolution.

Unfortunately for us, as is usually the case with won revolutions, the language of the revolutionists turned into a kind of newspeak. The vocabulary of Whitman's

moral epic has been debauched by a hundred years of editorials and political speeches. Still, there are two faces to the coin of newspeak—the counterfeit symbol of power and the golden face of liberty. The American Dream that is the subject of *Leaves of Grass* is again becoming believable as the predatory society that intervenes between us and Whitman passes away. . . .

Whitman's philosophy may resemble that of the *Upanishads* as rewritten by Thomas Jefferson. What differentiates it is the immediacy of substantial vision, the intensity of the wedding of image and moral meaning. Although Whitman is a philosophical poet, almost always concerned with his message, he is at the same time a master of Blake's "minute particulars," one of the clearest and most dramatic imagists in literature. . . . His poetry has influenced all the cadenced verse that has come after it. Yet, in fact, there has never been anything like Whitman's verse before or since. It was original and remains inimitable. It is the perfect medium for poetic homilies on the divinization of man.

Of Whitman as teacher or educator, we could say that he spoke more to potentiality than to actuality. Yet he wrote of the stuff of everyday life. He wrote of what he dreamed all men and women could become, not in some misty Utopia, but on the present scene. In Whitman's celebration of the work of the world, as Rexroth says, abstract relations are never mentioned:

Money appears to be scorned. Sailors, carpenters, longshoremen, bookkeepers, seamstresses, engineers, artists—all seem to be working for "nothing," participants in a universal creative effort where each discovers his ultimate individuation. The day's work over, they loaf and admire the world on summer hillsides, blowing on leaves of grass, or strolling the quiet First-Day streets of Manhattan . . . an attempt to extrapolate the future into the American present. His is a realized eschatology.

What better use could a poet make of his genius? Whitman is a man of that "other America" which still awaits the hour of its birth.

## *FRONTIERS* New Views of China

IN 1962, Dr. Wilder Penfield, a Canadian neurological surgeon, spent a month visiting the medical schools and hospitals of Communist China. He was so impressed by what he saw and heard that he wrote for *Science* (Sept. 20, 1963) an article, "Oriental Renaissance in Education and Medicine," in which he spoke of the extraordinary progress being made there, and of the confident, hard-working habits of the people. This article was reported in MANAS for Nov. 27, 1963. In it Dr. Penfield said:

In a physical sense, the people of the People's Republic of China are isolated from the rest of the world. No doubt that isolation serves various purposes. In spite of it (or is it perhaps because of it?), a remarkable renaissance of Western learning is going on. It has been said that, at the beginning of this Communist regime, pressure was brought to bear on scientists to accept certain ideas and principles in the field of science, with a disappointing result. Whether or not that is true, it is obvious that in the broad field of science and medicine today, and in most of the "arts and sciences," there is no isolation. There is freedom of thought and debate in those fields—freedom to seek the truth independently.

He described the extensive training of doctors and nurses, and the open-minded attitude of the teachers and medical researchers toward the traditional Chinese practice of herbal medicine and acupuncture, the intent being to discover the merits in these methods. Obviously, these attitudes continue in the present, since recent visitors to China have brought back impressive reports about the benefits of acupuncture, with extensive accounts in the American press.

Now that American policy in relation to Communist China has radically changed, with the People's Republic a member of the United Nations, a great deal of interesting material about China has been appearing in the magazines and better newspapers. It is as though a vast store of good will toward China, which for years could find no expression, is now reaching print. A two-

part series in the *Atlantic* (last November and the January issue) by Ross Terrill, has been highly praised by China specialists, and there is frequent appreciation of Mao's encouragement to the combination of rural industry and agriculture in the communes which have been developed throughout the country. According to Mr. Terrill, the fervors and excesses of the Cultural Revolution are over, there is much less idolatry of Mao, and frequent condemnation of "ultra-leftism."

Magazine articles are fairly accessible, and the material by Terrill is to appear soon in book form, but the best brief report on today's China that we have seen came out in four week-day issues of the *New York Times* (Jan. 24-27). This series by an American who was born in China, and returned last fall for a visit and tour of the country lasting six and a half weeks, would be invaluable for use in the schools. The author, John S. Service, who lived in China until he was twenty-eight, speaks the language and enjoyed friendly relations with many of the communist leaders during the war years of 1941-45. The *Times* identifies him as "formerly a leading State Department specialist in the China field." In any event, he returned there for his extensive visit in 1971 as a guest of the Chinese Government. He was, he says, permitted to visit every place he asked to see. We mention his articles chiefly because of their special suitability for use in schools. The contrast Mr. Service draws between what he remembers of the China of more than a quarter of a century ago and what he experienced last year makes a vivid report, and the achievements of revolutionary China, not only in improved living conditions for all the people, but in the restoration of human dignity, are well described.

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A *Nation* reviewer recently called attention to Jane Van Lawick-Goodall's *In the Shadow of Man* (Houghton Mifflin, 1971) by saying that this engrossing study of the life and habits of chimpanzees makes a good antidote to the "killer-

ape" books. Having now read the work of this young woman, who was urged to undertake this study of apes at their home in the African jungle by the anthropologist, L. S. B. Leakey, we are able to confirm this judgment. After telling of an experiment performed by others with a chimpanzee, in which the ape was taught a sign language and was able to signal the signs for self-recognition after seeing itself in a mirror, Mrs. Goodall observes:

This is, in a way, a scientific proof of a fact we have long known—that, in a somewhat hazy way, perhaps, the chimpanzee has a primitive awareness of Self. Undoubtedly there are people who would prefer not to believe this, since even more firmly rooted than the old idea that man is the only toolmaking being is the concept that man alone in the animal kingdom is Self-conscious. Yet, this should not be disturbing. It has come to me, quite recently, that it is only through a real understanding of the ways in which chimpanzees and men show similarities in behavior that we can reflect with meaning on the ways in which men and chimpanzees *differ*. And only then can we really begin to appreciate, in a biological and spiritual manner, the full extent of man's uniqueness.

Man is aware of himself in a very different way from the dawning awareness of the chimpanzee. He is not just conscious that the body he sees in a mirror is "I," that his hair and his toes belong to *him*, that if a certain event occurs *he* will be afraid, or pleased or sad. Man's awareness of Self supersedes the primitive awareness of a fleshly body. Man demands an explanation of the mystery of his being and the wonder of the world around him and the cosmos above him. So man, for centuries, has worshipped a God, has dedicated himself to science, has tried to penetrate the mystery in the guise of the mystic. Man has an almost infinite capacity for preoccupation with things other than the Self: he can sacrifice himself to an ideal, immerse himself in the joys and sorrows of another; love deeply and unselfishly; create and appreciate beauty in many forms. It should not be surprising that a chimpanzee can recognize himself in a mirror. But what if a chimpanzee wept tears when he heard Bach thundering from a cathedral organ?

In his long quest for truth the scientist has never been able to provide a platform for man's ancient belief in God and the spirit. Yet, who, in the silence of the night or alone in the sunrise has not

experienced—just once perhaps—a flash of knowledge "that passeth all understanding"? And for those of us who believe in the immortality of the spirit, how much richer life must be.

This passage ends with a question and an appeal. The question is, who can know what the chimpanzee will be forty million years from now? And the appeal: "It should be of concern to all of us that we permit him to live, that we at least give him a chance to evolve."