

PHILOSOPHY: SOME COMPARISONS

MAINLY because of the short shrift given to American philosophy by Herbert Kohl in *The Age of Complexity*, we welcomed the suggestion of a reader to have a look at a book which views the development of serious thought in this country in a more favorable light—*Seven Sages*, by H. B. Van Wesep, published in 1960. This author certainly picks the best men to represent the course of American philosophy since colonial days. The seven, whether or not they all qualify as "sages," are Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, George Santayana, Charles Sanders Peirce, and Alfred North Whitehead. What is the central theme of American philosophy? Both Kohl and Van Wesep agree on this—it is Pragmatism, first proposed by Peirce, and further developed by James and Dewey. Pragmatism, one could say, is a practical man's answer to what to do about the difficulties of knowing anything at all in a world of endless relativities. It is a philosophy for men of action—for Americans—and it is, Kohl says, "more of an attitude than a philosophy." No one can define pragmatism without getting into serious trouble, since the first and greatest of the pragmatists, Peirce, never made any final formulation of it, and he was made unhappy by James's simplifications. But part of a definition would be that the pragmatic theory of truth is that what proves out in practice to be workable, and good in its effect, is true. So pragmatism, one could say, is a method without a doctrine, a praxis without a theory. It is an essential but partial statement about how men find out what they need to know and can rely upon.

Mr. Van Wesep's book seems a little over-enthusiastic, yet a good one to read. Franklin grows in stature, even if he reaches only a high level of sagacity rather than actual sage-ship. Apparently, he was a consciously economical

individual from his earliest days. Van Wesep tells this story about him: "As a child Franklin suggested to his father the more efficient way of saying grace just once over a whole barrel of salt fish than over each herring served separately." While never impious, Franklin insisted upon common sense in religion. He would even use Holy Writ in a hoax in order to make a point. Here is another story:

One day, as friends were having a heated argument on tolerance, Franklin picked up the Bible and read from it a solemn page about how Abraham had pressed a wayfarer, biding under a tree, to come into his house and eat with him. When the stranger, on eating, blessed not God, Abraham's wrath was kindled. After a violent quarrel with the stranger Abraham "arose and fell upon him, and drove him forth with blows into the wilderness." Then in the sudden way of the Old Testament the Lord appeared and reproved Abraham: "Have I not borne with this man these hundred and ninety and eight years, and nourished him and clothed him, notwithstanding his rebellion against me, and couldst not thou, who art thyself a sinner, bear with him one night?" Abraham repented, ran after the aged stranger, treated him kindly, and on the morrow sent him on his way with gifts. All this Franklin read to his visitors, and what he read was clothed in such good biblical style that he had people hunting for weeks thereafter in their Bibles for this nonexistent passage.

Franklin, of course, being a printer by trade, had bound an extra page in his Bible, and for generations curious scholars have been tracking down the source of the story, it finally turning up in Saadi, the Persian poet, who said he had read it "once upon a time."

These anecdotes hardly do justice to the strength of Franklin's character, but they illustrate the sort of man who served the United States in public office during the early years.

Emerson, who comes next, was a true sage, and it is questionable that there have been any

since—any, that is, who have gained recognition. All seven of Mr. Van Wesep's thinkers are deep; they all have skills of mind, and some of them show sage-like qualities, most of all, after Emerson, Whitehead. But Van Wesep seems able to link them as successive contributors to the developing stream of American philosophy only by finding a common mood, a kind of courage and optimism, rather than close conceptual relations, although Peirce, James, and Dewey do form a succession in the development of Pragmatism. Perhaps an observation by Robert McClintock on what unites the major figures of Western culture has modest application here. Speaking of the continuity through great historical changes of Western thought, Mr. McClintock says (in *Ortega as Educator*):

There is no continuity in stasis. A tradition, like a bicycle is stable only when moving. The culture by which men have lived in the West rests on the principle of the infinite profundity of the person. When the chips were down, the human person has always been considered to be greater than any of his creations. The fixity of external characteristics has continually given way to transformations in internal character. What binds Socrates, Jesus, Abelard, Sir Thomas More, and Albert Schweitzer is not the government they recognized, the ways they earned a living, similarities in their choice of friends, the conventions they heeded, or their style of dress; they are bound together by their willingness to think through their convictions and to live or die in fidelity to their conclusions. Up to now in the West, institutions have remained protean forms, allowing any person who has the will to break loose, not without cost but with effect, to explore the endless possibilities of his character. As a consequence, each man in each successive generation has found himself with a richer heritage to draw from and with greater goals to aspire to, *should he so wish it*.

Certainly the seven men selected for study by Mr. Van Wesep were all determined "to think through their convictions," and it is this, more than anything else, which makes them memorable. Yet of their thoughts, we doubt if what they said and wrote, except for Emerson, and perhaps Whitehead, will survive for very long. Like Plato, Emerson spoke in universal accents. His ideas

have a timeless quality. And the ideas of Emerson, even more than Plato's, are susceptible to common understanding. This may be true of the greatest of philosophical ideas; not in their subtle reaches, perhaps, but in their simpler dimensions, they can be known to the multitude and may in this form be made the basis of a life.

But it would be an injustice to William James to overlook his extraordinary gift for shaping insights in unforgettable phrases. He headed the chapter on habit in his *Psychology Briefer Course* with these words: "Sow an action, and reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny." This comes very close to classic expressions of folk wisdom.

However, the influence of British and American thought, in both philosophy and psychology, was in a contrary direction so far as classical Greek conceptions were concerned. The great contribution of Socrates and Plato had been the idea of the individual soul or *psyche* as the responsible agent within the body, a view of man which survived in one form or another until the time of Descartes. With Descartes, identity became little more than an intellectual abstraction, with the bodily machine assuming more and more of the actual functions. With John Locke, the Platonic teaching of innate ideas or reminiscence was entirely abandoned, and with David Hume the "self" was reduced to nothing more than a bundle of fleeting perceptions. Only for Emerson, a modern Platonist, did the transcendental self retain reality. And much as later American thinkers might admire Emerson, they did not follow him in this mode of thinking about the nature of man, but took Hume as their guide. James spoke of the various "empirical selves" which are in every human being. Boyd H. Bode, a progressive educator who followed James's ideas, wrote:

The content of the self is furnished by the ideals or interests that we cherish. This is easily verified by observing the way in which we ordinarily refer to the self. Very often, it is true, self is identified with the body, but this is by no means always the case. If a man says, "He struck me," the "me" in question is

clearly the body. But if he says, "He ruined me (financially)," the "me" is identified with certain economic interests; if he says, "He attacked me (in the newspapers)," the "me" is presumably his reputation; if he says, "He supported me (in a political campaign)," the "me" is the political aim to which he aspires.

John Dewey said something very similar in *Human Nature and Conduct*:

There is no one ready-made self behind activities. There are complex, unstable, opposing attitudes, habits, impulses which gradually come to terms with one another, and assume a certain consistency of configuration, even though only by means of a distribution of inconsistencies which keeps them in water-tight compartments, giving them separate turns or tricks in action.

No longer, then, in either psychology or philosophy, was there a unitary self in human beings. Yet law, common sense, and moral intuition continued to assume the presence of a unitary self. Law is founded on the idea of an individual, responsible agent in every man. Common sense appeals to the judgment of a single person, not a loosely connected bundle of diversities, and intuition thinks of people as indeed persons, not disorderly democracies of conflicting elements. Who, after all, was it that called himself David Hume and wrote that he could never "catch himself" as a unitary being? Who was it that noted the passage before his mind's eye of a succession of vagrant images, perceptions, and sensations? Of any other man who might believe there was in him a single identity, Hume said, "He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls himself; though I am certain there is no such principle in me." But who or what is the "I" which declares this certainty, if not just such a principle in Hume?

At any rate, such reflections did not enter into the strictly "this-world" conclusions of the psychological philosophers after William James, although, to be sure, James's speculative discussion of reincarnation in the preface to the second edition of his essay, *Human immortality* (Dover, 1956), suggests a pleasant inconsistency

on his part. Apparently there was in James a latent transcendental longing that would come to the surface every now and then, but which has been rather consistently ignored by his successors and admirers.

Our point would be that, in relation to the great wide world, and the great wide country of the United States in particular, all this intensive thinking on the part of men in universities had very little effect. Emerson and his fellow transcendentalists at least went on lecturing tours about the country, and they wrote books which sometimes enjoyed a wide sale. And how different the impact of philosophers of the Orient, who were also religious teachers! These men wandered the countryside, as Gandhi did in modern times, speaking to the people, casting their wisdom in simple language. There is for example an interesting parallel between the ideas of James and Bode concerning the formation of the empirical self and the teaching of the Buddha in the "twin verses" which begin the *Dhammapada*:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought, all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain pursues him, as the wheel of the wagon follows the hoof of the ox that draws it.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought, all that we are is founded on our thoughts and formed of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness pursues him like his own shadow that never leaves him.

Such aphorisms are easy to remember, yet profound in meaning. The multitude of "empirical selves" is but the collection of tendencies which a man's thoughts have established in himself, during his lifetime. He can do something about them, bring them under control. The teachings of the Buddha are ethical and psychological. Their use begins in daily practice, but it is difficult indeed to discover any sort of daily practice that might be made out of either modern philosophy or psychology.

The next verses relate to matters similar to those spoken of by Boyd Bode, but in this case afford a sense of moral leverage to the individual:

"He reviled me, he beat me and conquered me and then plundered me," who express such thoughts tie their mind with the intention of retaliation. In them hatred will not cease.

"He reviled me, he beat me and conquered me and then plundered me," who do not express such thoughts, in them hatred will cease.

In this world never is enmity appeased by hatred; enmity is ever appeased by Love. This is the Law Eternal.

These pithy moral sayings have hardly any duplicates in Western thought, unless they be found in the Gospels or in the counsels of Socrates. And it is here that the weakness of Western philosophy is to be recognized. With the exception of Emerson, the serious philosophers examined by Mr. Van Wesep set out to solve the problem of knowledge wholly in terms of the *meaning* of the world. But the Buddha set out to solve the problem of knowledge out of concern for the *pain* of the world. There is a considerable difference in the point of view, and therefore in the results obtained. Americans have their share of pain, but it has certainly been less than that suffered in other parts of the world. They have always, until now, had some kind of a "wave of the future" to ride along on. America is the place where there is supposed to be plenty for everybody—more than enough for some. The fundamentals of Buddha's philosophy are built around the alleviation of pain, through knowledge of what causes it. While it rises to impersonal heights, Eastern thought is intensely human in all its starting points. In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the focus is on the disconsolate Arjuna, who cannot understand why "doing what comes naturally" in respect to custom and conventional obligation is not regarded by his teacher as the means to philosophic truth. And the Upanishads are treatises for instruction of the young, of the ardent, of seekers after truth. There are profundities and flights of the mind beyond

everyday affairs, but they begin with the human situation. They do not start with the world "out there," although they get to it eventually. Modern American philosophy, unlike Plato's, is pervaded by the scientific approach. Not man, but the dynamics of nature, considered without reference to man, is its primary focus, although it tries to get to man later on. Only Franklin, who was not a speculator, but a practical thinker, and Emerson and Whitehead were able to deal with man directly, and Emerson and Whitehead renewed, each in his way, the Platonic inspiration.

Buddha, like certain scientific crusaders, saw the evil wrought by religious bigotry and by useless metaphysical disputation, but the Buddhistic reform was reconstructive rather than iconoclastic alone. As Sanepalli Radhakrishnan says in his *Indian Philosophy*:

There is much damage done to the moral nature of man by a superstitious belief in God. Many good men do devil's work in the belief that it has divine sanction. It is difficult to overestimate the amount of evil which has resulted in the world from a confusion of morality and religion. Abraham is commanded by God to sacrifice his son, and Saul is called upon to massacre his captives in cold blood. The views which under the name of religion crept into life and had so far prevailed as almost to extinguish any spark of spiritual vigour cut Buddha to the quick.

The sceptics on this theory need not be moral. So long as morality is based on a divine command miraculously conveyed, every discovery of science and development of thought would impair the basis of morals. The feeble in faith may reject the sanctions of morality.

Buddha, like Lucretius, felt that the world would be better for the triumph of natural law over supernaturalism. By announcing a religion which proclaimed that each man could gain salvation for himself without the mediation of priests or reference to gods, he would increase the respect for human nature and raise the tone of morality. "It is a foolish idea to suppose that another can cause us happiness or misery." After Buddha did his work, the belief in the permanence and universality of natural law became almost an instinct of the Indian mind.

We shall see . . . that the world of experience according to Buddha does not require for its

explanation any God. The law of karma will do. There is the implication of the Highest, but it is not a matter of logical demonstration.

Interestingly, there is sturdy self-reliance and psychological independence in the teachings of the compassionate Buddha, along with his large-hearted concern for the sufferings of the world. There is certainly nothing in Buddhist philosophy which violates the scientific spirit, and there is a sense in which it supplies what is missing in the typically pragmatic approach of American thought—a conception of values based upon the ideal of universal service and mutual regard.

It seems entirely reasonable to suggest that the time has now come for the rebirth of American philosophy from a new motivation, since these are certainly days of disappointment, frustration, and pain, for everyone in the land. The old days of competitive taking from the bounty of nature are over. The "struggle for existence" no longer has any glamorous appeal. Even the ideal of "scientific research" and "knowledge for its own sake" is tarnished by the uses men have made of the morally neutral secrets that they have found out by research and experiment.

It may be time for Prospero to leave his charmed island and return to the city that he deserted long ago, and which needs his help and his wisdom. An hour comes when philosophers must go back into the cave and risk instruction of the people, and when prophets who have taken refuge in the desert need to resume their duties among the walks of men. One has only to visit the corner drug store or newsstand to see what happens to the minds of people when philosophers talk only among themselves and scientists pursue only their specialties.

If anything good, anything fresh and new, is to be made of the welter of misdirected energies and saddened hearts of the great masses of mankind, there cannot be too much delay on the part of men of learning and ability, for the pain of the world grows greater every year, if not every day.

REVIEW

NOTES ON HISTORY

IN his book, *Observations*, Arthur Morgan speaks of the importance of the study of history. History, he says, is at least partly the record of the achievements of remarkable men. The student meets few remarkable men. Actually, we all live our lives in the company of rather mediocre people, and except for the reading of history might not know that great and unusual individuals have actually existed. History, therefore, for many, may be the sole contact with this sort of human possibility.

This was also one of the seldom mentioned values of the Great Books seminars. In the first year's program of reading three dialogues of Plato are included, the *Apology*, the *Crito*, and the *Phaedo*, which deal with the trial, the imprisonment, and the death of Socrates. It sometimes happened that there would be persons who did the reading and took part in the seminars who had never before heard of Socrates. For them, reading and discussing these dialogues was often a great personal discovery. To know that such a man as Socrates had actually existed became a comfort and an inspiration to them. He stood as an example of human integrity that they had never before encountered; he was also a reproach to the timid conformers of every age. He showed that it was possible to take the high ground of principle and live or die there. The Athenians did not defeat Socrates by condemning him to death. They only degraded themselves.

In that first year of the Great Books discussions, there were always one or two who found in the figure of Socrates a vision that lasted for the rest of their lives, or promised to. Reading good books doubtless has many justifications, but none of them can be more important than this one, which is closely related to the reason given for studying history by Arthur Morgan.

Now and then you run into a young person who says that he doesn't ever read books, and

doesn't need to, since he gets all the knowledge he needs from "inside himself." And occasionally, along with this announcement, the nonreader will tap or even slap his chest to indicate the source, which is probably more accurate than tapping his head. There is of course some truth in this claim. No doubt we do get all our knowledge from inside ourselves. But the provocatives to seeking it come from everywhere, and for this books are practically indispensable. A book by a wise man is always a challenge to the reader, who must now find a way of explaining to himself how anyone was able to become so wise.

Another side of history relates to the lost grandeur of ancient peoples. Lately we have been reading once again Hiram Bingham's fascinating book, *Lost City of the Incas* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1948), which is the story of his discovery of Machu Picchu. This hidden sanctuary of the last of the Incas is only fifty miles from Cuzco, but it remained practically inaccessible until the Peruvian government, early in this century, blasted a road along the shores of the Urubamba River to provide means of transport to the planters who raised coca and sugar in the river valley.

Mr. Bingham begins his book with these words:

Few Americans realize how much we owe to the ancient Peruvians. Very few people appreciate that they gave us the white potato, many varieties of Indian corn, and such useful drugs as quinine and cocaine. Their civilization, which took thousands of years to develop, was marked by inventive genius, artistic ability, and a knowledge of agriculture which has never been surpassed. In the making of beautiful pottery and the weaving of fine textiles they equaled the best that Egypt or Greece could offer. Although the Incas governed their millions of subjects with firmness and justice under a benevolent despotism that allowed no one to be hungry or cold, they had no written language, not even hieroglyphics. Accordingly our knowledge of them has had to depend on what we can see of what they left, aided by the chroniclers of the sixteenth century, contemporaries of Pizarro and the Conquistadors, most of whom looked upon their history and politics through European eyes. Even the Inca Garcilasso de

la Vega had been in Spain forty years when he wrote his famous account of his ancestors.

Some four hundred years ago, the last of the Incas were living in one of the most inaccessible parts of the Andes, the region lying between the Apurimac River and the Urubamba two important affluents of the Amazon. Here they were shut off from that part of Peru which was under the sway of Pizarro and the Conquistadors by mighty precipices, passes three miles high, granite canyons more than a mile in depth, glaciers and tropical jungles, as well as by dangerous rapids. For thirty-five years they enjoyed virtual independence as their ancestors had done for centuries. They had two capitals Vitcos, a hastily constructed military headquarters where they occasionally received refugees, Spanish emissaries and Augustinian missionaries, and Vilcapampa, their principal residence, a magnificently built sanctuary to which no Spaniards ever penetrated.

With the death of the last Inca in 1571, Vitcos was abandoned. It was a fortress on top of a mountain and inconvenient as a dwelling place. Its name was forgotten and its location obscure until we found it. The royal city of Vilcapampa was completely lost. It was a sacred shrine hidden on top of great precipices in a stupendous canyon where the secret of its existence was safely buried for three centuries under the shadow of Machu Picchu mountain. Its ruins have taken the name of the mountain because when we found them no one knew what else to call them.

As a young man, Hiram Bingham—who in later years became the Governor of Connecticut—aspired to teach South American history. So, to prepare himself, he repeated General Simon Bolivar's expedition across the Andes from Venezuela to Colombia, following the route of the great South American Liberator. Elihu Root, then U.S. Secretary of State, became interested in this adventure and liking Bingham's report appointed him as a delegate to the first Pan American Scientific Congress, which was held in Santiago de Chile in 1908. Bingham used this visit as an occasion to do some exploring with official government sanction, and soon found himself drawn into archaeology. A Peruvian official was convinced that the lost Inca city would be a treasure trove of gold, and urged Bingham, who must know all about archaeology, since he had a

Ph.D. and was a delegate to a scientific congress, to find the gold. He found not gold, but a vocation for unearthing Inca remains. Back at Yale, he was able to organize another expedition and set out to locate the last two Inca cities—Vitcos and Vilcapampa. Even Vitcos was hard to find. Vilcapampa was much more difficult, but the time had come, in 1911, for this extraordinary enterprise to be at last known to the world. In the thick of dense growth Bingham came upon "the walls of ruined houses built of the finest quality of Inca stone work." Then, a little later, his guide showed him a cave lined with the finest cut stone. On the ledge above "was a semi-circular building whose outer wall, gently sloping and slightly curved bore a striking resemblance to the famous Temple of the Sun in Cuzco." Actually, Bingham later concluded that this temple might have been the original of which the Cuzco temple was a copy. The beauty of the pure white granite, so perfectly shaped, made the structure seem to Bingham "softer and more pleasing than that of the marble temples of the Old World."

Words are of little use to anyone who has seen pictures of Machu Picchu, which is one of the most photographed places in the world. Today, inexpensive tours by air make possible a visit to this extraordinary site. But reading about the Incas and their civilization, and Bingham's book, are certainly prerequisites for full enjoyment of the experience.

Another sort of book that will have an enlarging effect upon many readers is David Caute's study of *Frantz Fanon* (Viking paperback, 1970, \$1.65). It would probably be better, of course, to read Fanon's books, *Black Skin, White Masks*, and *The Wretched of the Earth*, both published in paperback by Grove, but the background of his brief career—he died at thirty-six in 1961—as provided by Mr. Caute is important, also. This book is the story of a compassionate, principled, sensitive, and highly intelligent man, told against the background of historical upheaval and the cultural awakening of

the heretofore inarticulate black peoples of the world. It is also the story of the incredibly cruel and ruthless policies of the colonialist nations of Western "civilization," leading to the inevitable response of counter-violence—which, for Fanon, and in a sense against his will, became the sole means for the regaining of dignity by the peoples oppressed by racist colonizers. It seemed to him that cooperation with colonial regimes always meant that black leaders became collaborators in oppression of their own people.

Fanon had been educated by the French, had gained his ideals as a physician and a psychiatrist from his training in French universities, and until his experiences during the Algerian rebellion remained essentially a French European in vision and cultural background. But the behavior of the French in the Algerian war, starting with the tortures inflicted by the French paratroopers on the Algerians effectually reshaped his outlook. Cauter recites the facts of case after case, remarking:

As for the occasional Commissions of Inquiry set up by the French Government, they had no meaning for the Arabs. After seven years of atrocities, not a single Frenchman had been convicted before a French court for the murder of an Algerian.

Fanon noted this. We begin to see why and how the "early" Fanon became the "late" Fanon.

At this time Fanon was a psychiatrist attached to an Algerian hospital, and he accumulated case histories on the effects of torture on both the inflictors of it and the victims. Cauter describes one of these:

A European police inspector, who was deeply involved in the torture sessions, became increasingly autocratic and violent in all his relationships, until he found himself beating his wife and children. At this point he came to the hospital for help and was put under Fanon's care. "He asked me without beating about the bush to help him go on torturing Algerian patriots without any prickings of conscience, without any behavior problems and with complete equanimity."

Curiously, the African poet and statesman, Aimé Césaire, said that Fanon's "violence was that of a non-violent man," and Simone de Beauvoir, who knew him in Paris shortly before his death, wrote: "Though an advocate of violence, he was horrified by it." The tragedy of Fanon is the tragedy of a man driven by the unrelieved brutishness of his times to go against realities that he knew from the practice of his own healing art. The shapers of those times have much to answer for, and Fanon's books, along with this one, give the vast dimensions of the crime. What does the reader of Fanon remember most? Not his advocacy of violence, but his determined humanism, his sympathy for his suffering fellows, and his essential loyalty to the human essence, which is certainly beyond issues or conclusions about either white or black.

COMMENTARY

THE INVIOABILITY OF 'X'

THE argument between the Platonists and the Aristotelians, or between the Vitalists and the Mechanists, or between the anti-reductionists and the reductionists goes on and on. The same struggle proceeded in the mind of Leo Tolstoy, as Isaiah Berlin shows in *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, although Tolstoy kept the opposing forces in balance and made magnificent art out of the resulting tension.

In this controversy the reductionists have the advantage of seeming to be specific in their claims, whereas the anti-reductionists maintain that incommensurable realities and even mysteries must be recognized, since to deny them is to dwarf the wonder of life and minimize the possibilities of human development.

Mystery and wonder may sometimes be sought as the asylum of ignorance, but oversimplification is the resort of *hubris*, and finding the fine line between these extremes requires the fine art of thinking. William McDougall was a psychologist who knew this necessity. After years of attention to psychic research, he said at the end of his life, when asked about the "proof" it afforded for human survival of death:

". . . I do not know the answer. . . . The human mind still remains its own greatest mystery. . . . It once did look as though proof of survival might provide the key; but perhaps an understanding of the mind, after all, will have to precede discovery of its ultimate destiny."

While McDougall believed that psychic research would help to find the answer, he knew that the great question of human identity was still unsolved, and that it should be kept open.

So, also, with the wonder of great civilizations. One of the scholars relied upon by Hiram Bingham for background on the Incas (see Review) was Philip Ainsworth Means. In his book, *Ancient Civilizations of the Andes*, Means acknowledged a persisting factor in human culture

which, he said, "may be designated frankly as x , the unknown quantity, apparently psychological in kind." He then added:

If x be not the most conspicuous factor in the matter, it is certainly the most important, the most fate-laden. When through a tardily completed understanding of the significance of life, we achieve mastery of x , then, and not until then, shall we cease to be a race of biped ants and, consummating our age-old desire, join the immortal gods.

Such men are true to the Humanist tradition of science and scholarship.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

SOME FREEWHEELING SOCIOLOGY

THOMAS COTTLE'S *Time's Children* (Little, Brown, 1971) is not an easily classifiable book, which is partly what makes it a good book. One could say that it is a kind of sociology because the author studied with David Riesman at Harvard; or that it is about the practice of humanist psychology, because he is also a clinical therapist; but the book is at its best when it is most unclassifiable—when it is good because the author writes with insight and imagination.

The material dealing with the schools of the country is the most unsatisfying. The writer sees clearly, and because of this it becomes evident that there are not likely to be any remedies except those obtained by a slow change or evolution over many years. Since publication of descriptions of these places goes on and on, one might think that there could be a better use of human energy, yet these accounts do show that individuals can be strongly ameliorating influences. But if someone asked, *Why should I read Time's Children?* we could think of no better answer than that it is the sort of book one might read for the same reason that he picks up the essays of Montaigne. Here and there, some wisdom is in it.

Conceivably, segments of society, such as "Youth," or "Blacks," or "Minority Groups" are not really good things to write about. There is a kind of segregation in isolating any section of people for attention. As a result of all the writing about "youth," it sometimes seems that an age group has come to be regarded as an alien breed which, when too numerous or powerful, is likely to be feared and hated. Tom Cottle writes well about this:

Now, about youth's anger, an anger, to listen to some observers, that every day brings youth closer to philosophies of hatred and nihilism. Were we perhaps misled by a certain group of intellectuals who taught us that aggression was the most prominent

activity of children and hence the cornerstone of life and death? To read some authors, we would think that youth bleeds and sweats its anger in a climate so hot that no negotiation or "radical confrontation" could ever soothe it. Dammit, we cry, why do they stomp so, their bitterness and pomposity sewn into their clothes and combed into their hair? Why do they scream obscenities, disloyalty and malcontent without respite, without consideration or apparent purpose? Why all of that stoked-up aggressiveness and crystalline anger? To touch angered youth, we fear, is to be wounded and, even worse, to have our blood mix with theirs. If we meet up with hostile, politicalized youth on a rampage we're liable to be contaminated by the scent of their culture, bowled over by their collective strength, or perhaps won over to what we perceive as their free-swinging, fault-finding parade.

But if we count the seconds of anger, rudeness or aggression in a child's life, or tally up the moments of unadulterated hate and antipathy either exhibited or implied, if we count the instants of militant action and open attack, we will miss nothing less than the form and stuffing of everyday life. Anger just is not as dominant a life-force as we wish to believe. There is just too much to existence. So how can we destroy for good and always the image that a "delinquent" is delinquent every waking second and that even in his dreams he plots the desecration of societies that bounce him and his blood-brother "gangs" into the seedy corners and wrinkles of cities embarrassed by their own inadequacies and injustices? How can we destroy the image of a college student as a full-time political warrior, draft card burner, trasher or whatever?

Yet, as Cottle also says, the anger is real and cannot be ignored. And he points to a strange and unreflecting "innocence" in the adults who cannot understand why it should exist:

The cruelty and hurt that the young can generate in a flash seem staggering to us, probably because we might like to believe that a period of years can be sustained between childhood tantrums and the time when the children must go to war, in which the young actually live according to an ethic of uncorrupted love and gentle kindness. What happened to that sweet-smelling bundle I used to call my baby, we ask again and again.

When, but a few years ago, we saw the hate of adults, the lust for power, as they say, and the obsequious planning that launched human spaceships

to unattainable heights of isolated strength and dominance, we said hurrah for those men, but heaven keep my children, now so clean and young, away from that power and that fire of self-aggrandizement and ambition. But as our wisdom grew, the truth emerged: if we are willing to forfeit our sensibilities of proportion, then adult power and hate and child power and hate look almost identical. . . . Like assassins, the young and the old plot to undermine the routes of youthful as well as adult travel and poison the wells of seemingly anyone's sustenance and luxury. At times these plots seem justifiable, vengeful but vindicable in some primitive legal sense. But at other times they seem, even to understanding observers, as being nothing short of bizarre and heinous. There are actions that seem so utterly bizarre that they make one think only demons could choreograph such horrible movement and render such sickening pain.

Perhaps the young commit their offenses more openly, with immaturity and naïveté, lacking even the manners that lead to concealment. At any rate, it is a mistake to segregate them for examination and criticism, although, looked at carefully, they many serve as mirrors of a sort.

No one counted the cost of the actual segregation of the young from the life of adults and the practical functions of the family. No one counted the cost of making a vast specialized profession out of education and teaching, until now there are issues of authority and interest and status to complicate the problems of child-rearing. And today, when people want their children back in the family, they don't want to come. Cottle has an interesting comment on this situation:

No one as yet has studied the notes written by parents to their runaway children in New York's East Village or San Francisco's Haight Ashbury district, a district which seems to have faded. These pitiful missives document so well the lack of generational space and the confession of failure in parenthood and adulthood. They could almost be letters of children who, wishing to come home, promise never again to misbehave. . . . The "Come back home—all is forgiven" notes stand as a testament as to what must be seen by the young as a crumbling structure or a tragic reversal of intentionality and interpersonal competence. They reflect adults' pleas for help and forgiveness, and as such they represent a far worse

social fact than "hippie" farm colonies or pot parties. The notes only document what poets know so well: of all rewards, youth is a supreme ideal. The old might wish to be young, but the young seem happy exactly where they are. This, too, is an asymmetry.

The high point of this book, so far as we are concerned, is the chapter on Creativity. The author finds it right and satisfying that, despite all the research, reports, analyses, and data on the subject which have been put into print in recent years, creativity remains mysterious and little understood. He says:

I have attempted in this chapter to interlard the concepts of some rather important essays on creativity with the words of extraordinary writers and scientists who for one reason or another stay on as heroes. Though the writing manages to capture but a fraction of a sacred darkness which at this point remains for me creativity, the ideas underlying the chapter come directly out of the works of Jerome Bruner, Abraham Maslow, Robert Coles and Paul Goodman and a small book by Michael Wallach and Clifford Wing. Most handsome, perhaps, in these essays is the authors' generous and unabashed confession of uncertainty and doubt and their essential and eager reliance on artists, poets, playwrights, professors, friends, anyone who might help in the greater task of comprehension. Here truly is the commencement of creativity's religiosity, for as one goes about his adventures with it, he comes to feel wise and ignorant, dignified and humiliated, satisfied and eternally incomplete. Then, as the very foundation of knowledge unravels, and the laws, theories conventions and traditions slip out of one's hand and head and heart, one is left with oneself, one's knowing, sensate self. And often this is quite a lot, profound and enormous.

There is, it seems clear, a poet held captive in these pages, one who gets away now and then, and adds his fire and disdain for ordinary matters and problems. And it is this, indeed, which makes it the sort of "sociology" that is worth reading.

FRONTIERS Criticism, and a Little Poetry

MANAS does not print original poetry; writers are not invited to submit it; the burdens of decision are too great; the responsibilities of selection unwelcome; the returns, on the whole, too small. Yet sometimes we borrow a little poetry from more daring publishers, by way of brief notice or review. The wonder of good poetry is one of the mysteries, and the gift of making it so rare as to leave little hope of explanation.

It sometimes seems that a poet is truly great only when he is more than a poet. That John Keats was more than a poet is shown by Lionel Trilling in an essay in *The Opposing Self*. In a letter written in 1819 to George and Georgiana Keats in Kentucky, two years before his death, Keats spoke of the flashing energies displayed by the creatures of nature in the struggle for existence. Wondering about this, and about similar behavior in man, he wrote:

May there not be superior beings amused by any graceful, though instinctive attitude my mind may fall into, as I am entertained with the alertness of a Stoat or the anxiety of a Deer? Though a quarrel in the Streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel—By a superior being our reasonings may take the same tone—though erroneous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry.
...

Picking up the thread of Keats's argument, Trilling continues:

It is very brilliant, very fine, but it does not satisfy him "amusement," "entertainment" are not enough. Even poetry is not enough. Energy is the very thing "in which consists poetry"—"and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—For the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth."

"Give me credit—" he cries across the broad Atlantic. "Do you not think I strive—to know myself?"

Surely this striving was part of what made Keats great. Wallace Stevens might have agreed, since he wrote: "A poem in which the poet has chosen for his subject a philosophic theme should result in the poem of poems." But other elements are needed, also, before this will happen.

In time: *Saturday Review* for Feb. 5, John Ciardi writes what may (or may not) be an imaginary letter, in which he explains to a young friend why he is not likely to write good poetry. This friend has just been blessed by the birth of a son' an event which made him resolve to become a poet. He sent his first effort to Mr. Ciardi for comment, or—as the *SR* contributor and poet suggests—for *praise*. He received an unrelenting response. Ciardi points out that since the baby is but ten days old, hardly a week can have been devoted to the poem. This is not enough, he says, to support the claim of "hard work" on it. The new father is filled with feeling and wants to put the equivalent of that feeling down in words. Ciardi says to him:

What you have written cannot possibly justify a decision to chuck all and to remake your life as a poet. What you have written is obviously bad, and how can I explain its badness to you, as I must if I am to keep you from making a life-size mistake? If I say that, having chosen to write metrically, you are hobbled by your metrics—will that mean anything?

If I say that, having chosen to rhyme, you rhyme not your lines but only their last words, straining those words into place for the sake of the rhyme rather than letting them fall into idiomatic place within the line's own tension—will that mean anything?

If I tell you that your words do not knit their overtones into one another, or that your metaphoric structure has no sequence, or that when you try a metaphor you show your distrust of it by immediately restating your metaphoric intent in overt prose—will any of that make sense?

Or look at some specific phrasings: spinning void, aching loneliness, life's fruition, echoing infinities, the confines of my heart, in love forever new. Were I your freshman English instructor and were you to use such phrases in a theme, I would

certainly underline them and write "trite" or "inflated" (or both) in the margin.

I am not talking about the validity of your feelings. I am saying poetry not only must start from feelings but must then communicate those feelings by translating them into equivalents.

Mr. Ciardi ends this missive with a deft surgical twist by speaking of Vergil's Fourth Eclogue about the birth of a child, and remarking that the joys of fatherhood do not make a poem; that the aspiring poet need not outdo Vergil, but must write something "fit to be on the same bookshelf" with Vergil, which means he must know how to make a poem. Unformed human feelings are not enough.

A friend has given us the collected works of Henry Dumas (published by the University of Southern Illinois Press), a black poet who was killed in Harlem when he was thirty-four, in 1968. From this we borrow:

VALENTINES

Forgive me if I have not sent you
a valentine
but I thought you knew
that you already have my heart
Here take the space where my heart goes
I give that to you too

and

THOUGHT

Love came to me and said:
What do you want of me?
Save me I said, Save me.
Love knelt down beside me
and love said:
If you knew the price
of coming to you,
you would ask nothing
but would give.

Another friend—anyone who sends such a book is a friend, even a publisher—has given us some poems by Wendell Berry—*Farming: A Hand Book* (Harcourt, 1970) which has these lines in it, from a poem called "The Morning's News":

To kill in hot savagery like a beast

is understandable. It is forgivable and curable.
But to kill by design, deliberately, without wrath,
that is the sullen labor that perfects Hell.
The serpent is gentle, compared to man.
It is man, the inventor of cold violence,
death as waste, who has made himself lonely
among the creatures, and set himself aside
from creation, so that he cannot labor
in the light of the sun with hope,
or sit at peace in the shade of any tree

• • • •

What must I do
to go free? I think I must put on
a deathlier knowledge, and prepare to die
rather than enter into the design of man's hate.
I will purge my mind of the airy claims
of church and state, and observe the ancient wisdom
of tribesman and peasant, who understood
they labored on earth only to lie down in it
in peace, and were content. . . .