

A HISTORIAN'S PRESCRIPTION

ASKED by a reporter how he would set the terms of an award, to be given every ten years, to a statesman for "lifetime achievement," Norman Cousins replied: "For the recognition of the reality of human unity and for the creation of those institutions that would enable it to become manifest." *Christian Science Monitor*, Aug. 20.) Mr. Cousins thinks that statesmanship is at very low ebb in the United States. And according to the reporter, he believes that "our collective future depends largely on the caliber of men who will inherit the governing power of the world." He is now "looking for a new generation of statesmen."

As editor of the *Saturday Review* for thirty-four years, Norman Cousins has devoted much of his critical intelligence to calling American statesmen to account, and has worked hard to see established the sort of institutions he believes would make human unity manifest. As for statesmen, while he respected Harry Truman, calling him "courageous," he holds that dropping an atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki created "a precedent for its use, making it a normal part of the arsenal of nations, and set off the nuclear arms race." This, he says, "will be on the conscience of the U.S. forever."

If only we had recognized our tremendous responsibility to humankind, not just to ourselves! Harry Truman was not unscrupulous. He was a very spunky President, a scrapper. But I don't think he had the moral imagination to recognize our obligations at the time. And I think he did a great disservice to the American people.

It would certainly help to have statesmen with moral imagination, but how does a country get them? Where are they found? While we are cautioned, these days, that we live in a time of rapid and perhaps irreversible change, with little point in turning to the past for guidance, a look at the frequencies of moral imagination among

statesmen who have played a decisive part in history is certainly in order. There is also the question of whether statesmen are able to produce the sort of institutions that will make human unity manifest. "Manifest" is a powerful word. It means a showing forth of something that cannot be denied. The only statesman we can think of who really moved in this direction was Mohandas K. Gandhi, and it wasn't his statesmanship, but something of deeper origin, that gave him what influence he had. Call it, to use Mr. Cousins' term, a magnificent endowment of "moral imagination." A natural question arises: Can institutions be equipped or endowed with moral imagination, or will they, at best, only vaguely reflect some of the effects of this illuminating power?

Institutions are of various kinds and their accurate definition is exceedingly difficult. If they do some good—and they must, since no society can exist without them—it doesn't attract much attention, that good being something like having a healthy body, which we take for granted until something goes wrong. In consequence, we think of institutions as mainly the dead and unintelligent hand of the past, from which people need to be free. Both Church and State are examples. Let us look at the State, which provides the function of government, since Mr. Cousins is concerned with those who will have the governing power in the future.

In *Esquire* for last May, Barbara Tuchman, eminent historian and essayist, reviews the record of government in the Western world, finding it grievously lacking in ordinary intelligence. Her article is titled "An Inquiry into the Persistence of Unwisdom in Government." She has a flair for ridicule, amply exercised in this review, yet the point of what she says at the end gains its force from the record of history. In the matter of

having better training for governors, she expresses some doubt that "professionalism" is the cure for the continuous stupidity shown by leaders in the twentieth century, "comparable to the worst in history." She says:

Although professionalism can help, I tend to think that fitness of character is what government chiefly requires. How that can be discovered, encouraged, and brought into office is the problem that besets us.

This seems the practical equivalent of Cousins' "moral imagination," but Barbara Tuchman has something important to add:

More profound change must come if we are to bring into office the kind of person our form of government needs if it is to survive the challenges of this era. Perhaps rather than educating officials according to Plato's design, we should concentrate on educating the electorate—that is, ourselves—to look for, recognize, and reward character in our representatives and to reject the ersatz.

That was really Plato's idea, too, since the *Republic*, as more than one scholar has pointed out, is really an allegory, not a political blueprint, and intended to inspire self-education. We'll return to Plato, to consider the qualifications of his Guardians, but give first Barbara Tuchman's concise indictment:

A problem that strikes one in the study of history, regardless of period, is why man makes a poorer performance of government than of almost any other human activity. In this sphere, wisdom—meaning judgment acting on experience, common sense, available knowledge, and a decent appreciation of probability—is less operative and more frustrated than it should be. Why do men in high office so often act contrary to the way that reason points and enlightened self-interest suggests? Why does intelligent mental process so often seem to be paralyzed?

Why, to begin at the beginning, did the Trojan authorities drag that suspicious-looking wooden horse inside their gates? Why did successive ministries of George III—that "bundle of imbecility," as Dr. Johnson called them collectively—insist on coercing rather than conciliating the Colonies though strongly advised otherwise by many counselors? Why did Napoleon and Hitler invade Russia? Why did the

Kaiser's government resume unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917 although explicitly warned that this would bring in the United States and that American belligerency would mean German defeat? Why did Chiang Kai-shek refuse to heed any voice of reform or alarm until he woke up to find that his country had slid from under him? Why did Lyndon Johnson, seconded by the best and the brightest, progressively involve this nation in a war both ruinous and halfhearted and from which nothing but bad for our side resulted? Why does the present Administration continue to avoid introducing effective measures to reduce wasteful consumption of oil while members of OPEC follow a price policy that must bankrupt their customers? How is it possible that the Central Intelligence Agency, whose function it is to provide, at taxpayers' expense, the information necessary to conduct a realistic foreign policy, could remain unaware that discontent in a country crucial to our interests was boiling up to the point of insurrection and overthrow of the ruler on whom our policy rested? It has been reported that the CIA was ordered *not* to investigate the opposition to the shah of Iran in order to spare him any indication that we took it seriously, but since this sounds more like the theater of the absurd than like responsible government, I cannot bring myself to believe it.

Historians, obviously, are good people to have around. They keep track of things and are able to convince us that the politicians who run our government, in Barbara Tuchman's words, "lack self-confidence and magnanimity, they are more interested in image than in substance, they rarely get the right information let alone know how to act on it," and are "just plain *stupid*."

Haven't there been any really good leaders and statesmen? The writer has a section on them. Occasionally, she says, wonderful exceptions appear—Pericles among the Greeks, Caesar and the Antonines for the Romans, and then, in the Middle Ages, Charlemagne. The next eminent leader worth talking about, she says, was George Washington, who had not only moral imagination but other qualities necessary to what he undertook:

Possessed of an inner strength and perseverance that enabled him to prevail over a sea of obstacles, Washington was one of those critical figures but for whom history might well have taken a different

course. He made possible the physical victory of American independence, while around him, in extraordinary fertility, political talent bloomed as if touched by some tropical sun. For all their flaws and quarrels, the Founding Fathers, who established our form of government, were, in the words of Arthur Schlesinger Sr., "the most remarkable generation of public men in the history of the United States or perhaps of any other nation." It is worth noting the qualities Schlesinger ascribes to them: They were fearless, high-principled, deeply versed in ancient and modern political thought, astute and pragmatic, unafraid of experiment—"convinced of man's power to improve his condition through the use of intelligence." That was the mark of the Age of Reason that formed them, and though the eighteenth century had a tendency to regard men as more rational than they in fact were, it evoked the best in government from these men.

But what concatenation of causes gave Pericles—and Socrates and Plato—to Athens, and by what benign influence were so many men of talent, vision, and moral responsibility drawn to birth in North America during the middle years of the eighteenth century? "For our purposes," Barbara Tuchman remarks, "it would be invaluable if we could know."

Schlesinger suggests some contributing factors: wide diffusion of education, challenging economic opportunities social mobility, training in self-government—all these encouraged citizens to cultivate their political aptitudes to the utmost. Also, he adds, with the Church declining in prestige, and with business, science, and art not yet offering competing fields of endeavor, statecraft remained almost the only outlet for men of energy and purpose. Perhaps the need of the moment—the opportunity to create a new political system—is what brought out the best. Not before or since, I think, has so much careful and reasonable thinking been invested in the creation of a new political system.

It seems clear that the appearance of the Founding Fathers in a time of opportunity for major historical change is and will remain a mystery—wholly as obscure in origin as the galaxy of human distinction that emerged in Athens in Pericles' time, or as the talent in art, philosophy, and religion which attended the Revival of Learning in Florence under the

Medicis. The Elizabethan Age in England is as mysterious, when it comes to explanation, and doubtless historians of the Orient could find corresponding periods of inexplicable greatness such as noted, more broadly, by Frederick J. Teggart in *Rome and China* (University of California Press, 1939), in the Preface to which he says:

... I may point to the great religious movements associated with the names of Zoroaster in Persia, Lao-tzu and Confucius in China, Mahavira (founder of Jainism) and Gautama Buddha in India, the prophets Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, Thales in Ionia, and Pythagoras in southern Italy. All these great personages belong to the sixth century B.C., and their appearance certainly constitutes a class of events. Yet, though the correspondence of these events has frequently been observed, no serious effort has ever been made, so far as I have been able to discover, to treat the appearance of these great teachers—within a brief compass of time—as a problem calling for systematic investigation. But without this knowledge how are we to envisage or comprehend the workings of the human spirit? The history of human achievement, indeed, displays extraordinary variations of advance and subsidence. How are the outstanding advances of men at different times and places to be accounted for?

Moved by the same revulsion toward war as Norman Cousins, Teggart asked these fundamental questions and offered a mode of historical study to help find some of the answers. But we are still a long way from understanding the underlying rhythms of history and are at a loss to know what causes, if any, are behind the appearance of, say, a Lincoln or a Gandhi. We may eventually feel obliged to leave such providential interventions to the stars or whatever gods there be, and give attention to the Platonic program, as all that we can attempt.

But what *was* the Platonic program? Barbara Tuchman has a brief answer:

The idea of a class of professionals trained for the task has been around ever since Plato's *Republic*. Something of the sort animates, I imagine, the new Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. According to Plato, the ruling class in a just society should be men apprenticed to the art of ruling, drawn

from the rational and the wise. Since he acknowledged that in natural distribution these are few, he believed they would have to be eugenically bred and nurtured. Government, he said, was a special art in which competence, as in any other profession, could be acquired only by study of the discipline and could not be acquired otherwise.

Plato has often been accused of being the father of elitism, with his specially trained aristocratic guardians of the state, but—as Northrop Frye has pointed out—this "caste" of wise men really stands for the ruling faculties in the self-controlled human being. Moreover, if we take literally Plato's proposals, full consideration should be given to the qualifications of the rulers of the utopian community. In his chapter on Wisdom in *Therapeia* (Chapel Hill, 1958), a study of the Platonic philosophy, Robert E. Cushman makes this summary:

Of all forms of knowledge, therefore, the kind which alone approximates to and deserves the name of wisdom is, as the *Republic* states, the kind which is attained only by the highest rank of guardians. They are, to begin with naturally of a philosophic nature, possessed of a spirit of truthfulness, apt to learn and of good memory, and with a mind endowed with measure and grace. Moreover, the guardian of highest attainment must be a lover of truth striving after true being, not lingering over the particulars of sense and *doxa* [external opinion]. Instead, he will cherish true opinions and, with the aid of the sciences and dialectic, at length discriminate the essential reality of each thing, laying hold of it with that part of his soul, doubtless the *logistikon* [rationality], with which it is "akin." So there will be begotten in him intelligence and truth. But, this is not all; the wisdom of the guardian must include knowledge of existence as well as essence. He must have learned to know the ideal reality of things and yet not fall short of others in experience. The wisdom of the guardian-philosopher does not consist merely in apprehension of abiding reality, but in his disposition and capacity to make his "vision" relevant to life and in his desire to do so. . . . The wise man or philosopher-statesman does not fulfill his calling in attaining intellectual fulfillment of reality; on the other hand, he cannot fulfill his role without it. No one can be an acceptable guardian of the historical *polis* until he has begun "naturalization" procedures in "the city whose home is in the ideal."

This vision of sage-like rulers is likely to be discouraging—how far above the possible should we go, in our definitions of good statesmen?—but Robert Cushman's helpful comment applies here:

Plato, however, did not intend to propagate a forlorn hope. The philosophic guardian, like the state he rules, is only a paradigm pointing in the right direction, and Plato anticipates no more than approximate attainment. We are closer to Plato's intention when we observe that, in the larger sense, wisdom begins its life in the human spirit coincident with the mind's passage from the "dream state" of the multitude to the waking condition of the philosophic searcher.

And if, in democracy, every man is a ruler, then Barbara Tuchman has said exactly the right thing in the last words of her article: "Perhaps rather than educating officials according to Plato's design, we should concentrate on educating the electorate—that is, ourselves."

Meanwhile, the one thing that kept occurring to us while reading those qualifications of the ideal ruler is that *no one* like that could be persuaded to run for office, or even serve, in our society, for the very practical reason that the electorate would not select, support, or seat such a candidate, and indeed does not deserve anybody like that as a ruler. So, again Barbara Tuchman is right—it is the electorate that needs educating.

In a recent study titled *Future Development Dimensions* published by the Daon Corporation, several "scenarios" are offered for the next ten or so years. One is Business-as-Usual, which means resistance and opposition to change, likely to be succeeded by Stubborn Persistence, having this characterization:

The Stubborn Persistence scenario predicts that the 1980s will be filled with increasing numbers of symptoms and warnings indicating that a change of course is urgent. However, it also assumes that Americans will continue to be obdurate, ignoring these warnings, interpreting them as signs of merely transient problems, or attributing them to political ambitions or international interests. There will be strong resistance to any changes in present levels of consumption and waste, with attendant energy and

environmental costs. "We like what we have and no one is going to take it from us," the prevailing sentiment.

The compliance of government to this outlook, already in evidence, is easy to illustrate. In a recent issue of *Self-Reliance*, David Morris said in a book review:

In 1972, for the first and last time, a federal agency laid out the ethical criteria for energy planning. The Atomic Energy Commission stated that neither "institutions" nor "life styles" were to be changed. In the early 1970's, economists believed there was a direct correlation between energy growth and economic growth. . . . Now suppose the director of the U.S. Department of Energy is given a choice: Construct 500 nuclear or coal plants, contract with two major companies, and a handful of contractors, thus permitting us to continue within present institutional structures, and present lifestyles. Or, move toward conservation and solar, thereby requiring major changes in local building codes, the architectural curriculum, small business financing and the way we design our communities. Which option is he likely to choose? Unless the federal government sees itself as a "subversive force," whose goal is a radical restructuring of American society, we should not fault the bureaucrats for choosing what appeared to be the easier route.

Multiply this illustration in a few dozen directions and you will have a realistic picture of the present state of government in the United States. Again, Barbara Tuchman is right.

REVIEW

THE VITALITY OF THE ARTIST

EARLY in *The World of Lawrence—A Passionate Appreciation* (published this year by Capra Press in Santa Barbara, Calif., \$15.00), Henry Miller, who, unhappily, died a day or two before the book came out, gives the one important reason for reading it. It comes after a diatribe directed at John Middleton Murry, one of the biographers of D. H. Lawrence. Murry admired Lawrence, was his friend, but picks at him so extensively—and cleverly—that Miller, filled with literary rage, shouts:

Failure! Failure! Complete failure and fiasco. It seems to me as though the discovery of the failure of the artist dates from the discovery of the psychologic method of approach. Everything is failure, because everything is based on a study of failure. It may be convenient, satisfying, and even at times convincing to regard the artist from the standpoint of failure and disease, but it leaves the problem of his appearance, and his art, untouched. It merely adds a new category of scientific lingo to the already boring terminology of the history of aesthetics.

This is an age when the great spirits are taken up only as illustrations for the text-book of pathology. To read these pompous know-alls is to believe that there never was a psychology but this psychology of dead or diseased tissue. The interest in a great figure, be it Mohammed, Jesus, Napoleon, Tamerlane or Buddha, is not in what the man was, but in what he wasn't. The attitude is negative and evasive. And above all, *false*. Criticism—this kind of criticism—is of no avail. We do not need the critic to discern for us between the true and the false, but to help us to discover what it is that the artist is trying to say. It is of absolutely no consequence to know wherein the man failed, wherein he made mistakes, wherein he contradicted himself. *That* the reader should be able to perceive for himself and be properly silent about. What we want to know, or what we ought to want to know, when we come upon a great figure, is: *what is he seeking to give us?* To point to the weak, human links in his armor is simply to flatter and tickle our own vanity. What mockery that we should seize on the weak, obscure manifestation of the spirit and rend it, rather than go to the source and drink! What irony to inform the artist what is wrong with his work—as

if that mattered. The artist speaks out of his inner certainty, and no matter how far astray he may seem to go, no matter how wild, how erratic his words, he is always a thousand times more right, more true, than those who presume to judge him. *If he is an artist!* As for the rest, those who call themselves artists, they do not matter. One should not confound the issue because there are artists and pseudo-artists. If one does not know when he is confronted with a real artist, then it is all hopeless. And that is pretty much how things stand today, with all distinctions fading, with the learned ones talking about Proust, Joyce and Lawrence, as though they were all on one platform, one level, and of the same order.

That is Henry Miller, what he was made of, what he stood for, and the reason for the power in his prose. You can push or pull this paragraph, exclaim about its extravagance, note the writer's failure to qualify—and insist that an artist's mistakes do have importance, lest one be tempted to repeat them, and you will be right, but not as right as Miller is in the first place. His truth is primary, and the business of criticism is to frame and exhibit primary truth, and then to say those other things in a careful sort of way. Miller does both as well as he knows how with Lawrence.

Of course, as with all his books, this book is mostly about Henry Miller. The answer to such comment is that this tends to be true of any book you pick up, but Miller is wholly unashamed of the tendency in himself. "The only way to do justice to a man like that," he said of Lawrence, "who gave so much, is to give *another* creation." "Not *explain* him—but prove by writing about him that one has caught the flame he tried to pass on." This is indeed another primary truth about writing or criticism. The only way to convey just appreciation of an actual work of art is by the creation of another work of art. Anything else misses the point. Anything else implies that it is perfectly all right to sit on the sidelines instead of entering the play. We don't learn anything from anybody except by entering the play. This is Miller's position. It is the reason for reading his book.

A close-running second reason is that you do get a picture of Lawrence that seldom appears at all in ordinary books of criticism. You get a sense of the agony and struggle in the man. You begin to feel what was great in him and came out, and what was frustrated in him and prevented from coming out. You may feel obliged to judge him, but you are likely to be temperate about it. This, Miller would say, is as it should be.

What shall we do with the space available for comment on this book? Well, we could quote some of the almost endless dithyrambic passages celebrating D. H. Lawrence, but Miller's asides—which are not really asides, but the substance of what he has to say—seem more important. They illustrate Miller's mind at its best moments, which, reading them at the time of a man's death, and no doubt after, is what we should give attention to. In our first passage for quotation, Lawrence's ideas and his inspiration are woven into Miller's text on how Lawrence conducted his great resistance:

Man today is nothing but a personified machine (his mechanized conquest of space and Nature is matched by his metaphysical conquest of space in the scientific extension of his senses which his instruments represent, and through which he ideates a mechanical universe). He has, like Faust, sold himself to the devil (which is how the machine was always justly regarded hitherto). He is hopelessly enslaved and dominated by it, in thought and action.

It was impossible for Lawrence, as it is now impossible for me, to imagine that having invented all these instruments of destruction (he has never employed his scientific instruments, or his machines except to *conquer* something, to wrest power from Nature, which Spengler interprets as the signal illustration of Faustian will)—impossible to imagine that he will not employ these devils eventually upon himself. Man has invented machines as his own unique method of finishing his destiny. Once he regarded the machine as anything but a curious phenomenon, or discovery, he was lost. He did not have the courage or wisdom to leave them alone (which is tantamount to saying he was not another type of man). He sought to employ them for his own end, to conquer Nature, an idea rooted in the belief that knowledge is power and salvation. . . .

In parentheses, we should note that there is little or no talk of creating new worlds—only of destroying old ones. Even the earth itself is threatened with destruction—in theory, which is merely the projected anticipation of an end. The current theory of entropy, of our extinction through the earth's death, is merely the myth we have invented in response to a death feeling in our souls. We have envisaged our own end, and the whole world dies with us. We have tasted destiny and, though we deny it everywhere in conscious thought, it emerges in scarcely any disguise in our most firmly held theories of life. True, we also theorize about life as everlasting, as going on elsewhere, on other planets, but this is mere evasiveness; it is the concession we make to our instincts. It is this which perhaps also caused us to create the idea of a multiverse. We can never shut the door, never wholly believe in our own rationalistic conceptions. And before us the Hindus had conceived also of staggering worlds, of grand impossibilities of conception. They too were intensely scientific. Just as we get most of our religion from them so also we get most of our fundamental scientific cast, our flexible, functional mathematics. With us the Will is always imperative, always expressing the deep life feeling. We establish an immortality through the symbols of physical sciences, the Hindus through a surrender to the great All.

Miller, it should be noted, wrote this book in the early 1930s, then set it aside because he didn't feel able to organize the material properly. At the end of his life, the present editors of the volume, Evelyn Hinz and John J. Teunissen, persuaded him to let it be put into print. They pointed out that "one of his central theses throughout his study was that it is vitality not smoothness or consistency that is the mark of greatness, and of the former quality his work lacked nothing."

In one place Miller speaks of Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* as about the best thing to read on this subject. Miller himself has qualifications that should not be neglected. We close with an example of his criticism:

All of Dostoevski's work is pregnant with conflict, *heroic* conflict. . . . Proust, early in life, relinquished this conflict. As did Joyce. Their art is based on submission, on surrender to the stagnant flux. The Absolute remains outside their works,

dominates them, destroys them, just as in life idealism dominates and destroys the ordinary man. But Dostoevski, confronted by even greater powers of frustration, boldly sets himself to grapple with the mystery; he crucifies himself for this purpose. And so, wherever in his works there is chaos and confusion, it is a rich chaos, a meaningful confusion; it is positive, vital, soul-infected. It is the aura of the beyond, of the unattainable, that sheds its luster over his scenes and characters—not a dead, dire obscurity. Needless to say, with Proust and Joyce there is an obscurity of another order. With the former we enter the twilight zone of the mind, a realm shot through with dazzling splendors, but always the pale lucidity, the insufferable, obsessional lucidity of the mind. With Joyce we have the night mind, a profusion even more incredible, more dazzling than with Proust, as though the last intervening barriers of the soul had been broken down. But again, a *mind!* . . .

With Proust and Joyce the mind resembles a machine set in motion by a human hand and then abandoned. It runs on perpetually, or will, until another human hand stops it. Does anybody believe that for either of these men death could be anything but an accidental interruption? When did death occur for them? Technically one of them is still alive. But were they not both dead before they commenced to write?

COMMENTARY

SARTRE ON THE NATURE OF MAN

IN *Our Generation* (Summer-Fall 1980) an appreciative article by Pat Flanagan on Jean-Paul Sartre, who died at seventy-four last April, helps to make clear Sartre's meaning in his most-quoted opinion—that the human being has no "essence." This claim has always puzzled us, seeming to insist that the human is without beinghood of his own, yet Sartre, as Mr. Flanagan shows by quotation, intended quite another meaning—a meaning similar to that expressed by Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. (Humans, Pico said, create their own characters.) The passage quoted from Sartre declares that the human essence is *the power to choose*. In "A more Precise Characterization of Existentialism" (1944), Sartre wrote:

. . . everyone in the eighteenth century thought that all men had a common essence called *human nature*. Existentialism, on the contrary, maintains that in man—and in man alone—existence precedes essence.

This simply means that man first *is*, and only subsequently is this or that. In a word, man must create his own essence: it is in throwing himself into the world, suffering there struggling there, that he gradually defines himself. And the definition always remains open-ended. . . .

Since, for Sartre, man is always a *choosing* being, and the field of his existence is made up of the results of his choices, his life is nothing but a focus for his decisions and his responsibilities. He said in *Being and Nothingness*:

What happens to me happens through me. . . . everything which happens to me is *mine*. . . . I shall carry the entire responsibility for it. But in addition the situation is *mine* because it is the image of my free choice of myself, and everything which is presented to me is mine in that this represents me and symbolizes me. Is it not I who decide the coefficient of adversity in things and even their unpredictability by deciding myself?

Thus there are no *accidents* in a life; a community event which suddenly bursts forth and involves me in it does not come from the outside. If I

am mobilized in a war, this war is *my* war; it is my image and I deserve it. . . . For lack of getting out of it, I have *chosen* it. This can be due to inertia, to cowardice in the face of public opinion, or because I prefer certain other values to the value of the refusal to join in the war (the good opinion of my relatives, the honor of my family, *etc.*) Any way you look at it, it is a matter of choice. . . .

Someone will say, "I did not ask to be born." . . . I am ashamed of being born or I am astonished at it or I rejoice over it, or in attempting to get rid of my life I affirm that I live and I assume this life as bad. Thus in a certain sense I *choose* to be born. . . . That is why I cannot ask, "Why was I born?" or curse the day of my birth or declare that I did not ask to be born, for these various attitudes toward my birth—i.e., toward the *fact* that I realize a presence in the world—are absolutely nothing else but ways of assuming this birth in full responsibility and of making it *mine*. . . . The one who realizes in anguish his condition as *being* thrown into a responsibility which extends to his very abandonment has no longer either remorse or regret or excuse; he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this very revelation. . . .

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

ONE CHEER FOR IQ TESTS

IT goes against the natural inclinations of this Department to say anything friendly about IQ tests. Yet they do measure *something*—if only the capacity of test-takers to take tests. And if, by looking at how people tend to fail in doing them, one can find out something about how his intellect works, and then improve that performance, a certain value attaches to the tests, whatever else may be wrong with them.

A while back we acquired from a reader an old (January 1976) issue of *Psychology Today* which has in it two articles, a long one and a short one, on how to improve your IQ score. Both are interesting. In the short one, which is also amusing, Charles W. Slack, a professor of research in education, shows that he is far from impressed by the value of the tests:

I once offered \$100 to anyone who could find a single person who had been helped by taking an IQ test. Only a dozen people ever tried to collect the money; none succeeded. The person who came closest to winning was a student who said he had heard that novelist Truman Capote was tested as a child back in rural Alabama. People in town thought Truman was a strange child, but did not consider him particularly smart. Then the WPA came through and gave IQ tests. Truman scored highest of all. This triumph was supposed to have given him the confidence to go north and work for *The New Yorker*.

No one got the prize because Capote did not answer the psychologist's letter seeking confirmation. The professor, however, made up his mind to turn test-taking into a "learning experience," for the reason that his main objection to IQ tests was that the student "gives his answer and gets nothing back." Working with a number of students, he proved to himself that one could *prepare* for such tests, demonstrating that "studying would raise IQ scores as much as 20 points."

Does getting a better score really matter? Well, the other article suggests how it may matter. In this discussion Arthur Whimbey (author of *Intelligence Can Be Taught*), after admitting that "IQ tests may not measure innate intelligence," points out that there's no harm in having a good score, especially if you're looking for a job with people who rely on them when hiring. He says:

Many intelligent people score poorly on IQ and similar tests, not because they're stupid, but because they don't know how to use the intelligence they have. The evidence is mounting that scoring well on such tests is a skill that can be taught and learned.

More valuable, perhaps, is the fact that, from a reading of this article, one can learn to diagnose his own mental habits, and then correct tendencies likely to flaw many of the judgments that need to be made in everyday life. The article itself, in short, may be turned into a "learning experience."

Mr. Whimbey starts out with a test question which requires careful attention to the way it is put. A lot of people get it wrong because they have never learned to follow precise directions. Many of the questions are like that. The writer comments:

Many other researchers have seen low-IQ people make similar mistakes. It appears that when they face questions that require formal reasoning, they lack the patience to isolate the correct answer. Carl Bereiter and Benjamin Bloom have called this approach "one-shot thinking." Their studies show that low-aptitude students don't seem to carry on an internal monologue, nor do they proceed through a step-by-step sequence of deductions. If they can't see the answer immediately, they feel lost. In fact, a study by Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann reported that low-aptitude four-year-olds believe that questions should be answered immediately rather than after a certain amount of thinking.

Obviously, four-year-olds—or *these* four-year-olds—despise "linear thinking" which gets in the way of the spontaneous and the free. They're absolutely right, except for questions that *require* linear thinking.

It seems true enough that no one can really test for genuine "creativity." If poor van Gogh

was able to sell only one of the many hundreds of paintings he did in his short and tempestuous life, how could a mere psychologist be able to grade creative genius? And if some of Shakespeare's fashionable contemporaries thought that he didn't know how to write plays, will our modern literary authorities in the universities do any better?

But *linear* thinking can be "objectively" tested, and since it is on occasion necessary to do this sort of thinking, making the tests into a means of self-education becomes a worthy task. Mr. Whimbey shows how, beginning with a test question:

If you have three boxes, and inside each box there are two smaller boxes, and inside each of these boxes there are for even smaller boxes, how many boxes are there altogether?

(A) 24 (B) 12 (C) 13 (D) 21 (E) 33 (F) 36

The solution to this problem, "E," is also straightforward, involving no high-level abstractions or feats of memory. Yet most college students with IQs below 100 miss it. Their errors show that they fail to spell out ideas fully and accurately.

Another question:

During a special sale, eight spark plugs cost \$2.40 uninstalled and \$4.00 installed. How much is charged for the labor in installing each plug?

(A) \$1.60 (B) \$.50 (C) \$.30 (D) \$.20 (E) \$.40 (F) \$1.20

This question requires no advanced knowledge of algebra or geometry. Almost all American adults can perform the simple computations needed to come up with the correct answer, "D." But persons with IQs below 100 often fail to analyze the problem correctly. They do not set up the computations that must be performed.

The spark-plug problem shows why IQ tests have been so successful in predicting whether a person will succeed in school, even though they have never been able to predict whether a person will be a good doctor, engineer, artist, plumber or parent. It tests the kind of reasoning required in scholastic areas such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, accounting or statistics. Just as the previous item involved building an entire picture by placing boxes within boxes this one requires building an entire picture by

subdividing costs. The total costs must be separated into labor and materials. Then the labor cost must be broken down into the cost of each individual plug. Once this has been done, the arithmetic becomes relatively easy. As we might expect, low IQ students often answer "B," because they neglect to separate materials from labor; "C," because they confuse the cost of materials and labor; or "A," because they forgot to reckon the labor cost of each plug. These errors once again show their failure to seek out and use all the information of the problem.

Drawing on work by Benjamin Bloom and Lois Broder, Mr. Whimbey remarks that the mistakes made by low-scoring students have a pattern which seems to identify their habitual mode of thinking. The weaknesses are of two sorts:

First, the low-IQ student tends to engage in one-shot thinking, rather than in extended, sequential construction of understanding. Second, he seems willing to allow gaps of knowledge to exist, as if he didn't care about accurate understanding.

Bloom and Broder also found that low-aptitude students seem mentally careless and superficial. They often rush through the instructions or even skip them. They select wrong answers because they fail to comprehend what is required. When asked to reread the instructions more carefully, they frequently understand them and proceed correctly.

In actual problem-solving, low-IQ students are almost completely passive in their thinking. They spend little time considering a question, but choose an answer on the basis of a few clues, a feeling, an impression, or a guess. High-IQ students, in contrast, actively attack a problem. If at first they are confused, they go at it again with a lengthy sequential analysis to get the right answer.

The use made of IQ tests by these teachers is not without merit.

FRONTIERS

Sifting Issues

THERE is a built-in hazard in the conduct of a department which announces that it will deal with "frontiers." How can we be sure that the confrontations and emergencies which engage the interests of so many are indeed the "real" frontiers? What if they are only peripheral to deeper questions?

Take for example the destruction of the rain forests of South America. During the past year or so there have been dozens of reports recounting the ruthless advance of industry and opportunistic agriculture in these regions. The soil cannot withstand their methods. Exposed to a tropical sun, it hardens, cracks, and becomes a wasteland. Ecologists warn of the far-reaching effects of this exploitation, and social critics describe the misery of native peoples who are driven from their forest homes. Others list the names of the firms which are the chief offenders—no doubt with "multinationals" among them—and wonder what can be done to restrain these freebooters of the land. Still others nostalgically recall cultures all the members of which spontaneously respect and care for the earth as though it were a living thing, a vast, hospitable and parental member of the community of life.

What, then, is the real issue? Are we doomed to continue our endless and almost fruitless efforts to make the watchdog theory of social control work? And witness, along with the offenses that proliferate in all directions, our continuing failure to put a stop to them—to make those people *behave!*

How do you "re-educate" pirates and brigands? Don't they belong in jail? Well, they think they are right to do what they are doing, and they have theories—not very good ones, or very admirable—with well-paid experts to expound them. Spend a day in the halls of Congress—or wherever the laws are really made, if you are able to find out and prepare to be totally discouraged

with the watchdog theory of progress. The story of the Food and Drug Administration, to name one out of hundreds of regulatory bureaus, makes the reason for discouragement clear.

A direct attack on this sort of problem seems useless. What then does one, as an individual, do? The obvious, easy, true, but apparently inadequate answer is that while no one person can "change the world," he can always change a portion of it. Not good enough? Milton Mayer wrote a book about that—*What Can a Man Do?*—worth reading. Biography, or autobiography, is often a help in thinking about this universal frontier. Biography tells, not about social theory, but about what one individual decided to do with a life. And, sometimes, it gives the thinking that went along with the decisions, or led to them.

We have been reading in Herbert Read's autobiography, *The Innocent Eye* (Henry Holt, 1947), and it seems as though, in his best reflections, he did little but define certain larger frontiers—the frontiers which, as we decide about *them*, determine all our other decisions. At the risk of seeming to desert the urgencies of the day, we quote from Read.

First, a reflection about religion:

It is true that a great poet like Shakespeare cannot be claimed by any of the churches; but neither can he be convincingly claimed by any brand of heresy or paganism. His sympathetic insight hovers over every manifestation of the human spirit.

More than a hundred pages later, he amplifies:

I cannot claim, like some people, to have lived continuously with Shakespeare's works. He is, for me, the greatest of the romantic poets, and the justification for all time of the romantic theory of art. For that reason alone he occupies an essential place in my intellectual world. But perhaps just because he is so completely romantic, he is so didactically negative. Not even the German critics have been able to reconstruct Shakespeare's "Weltanschauung." We can find in Shakespeare half-a-dozen separate philosophies of life according to the mood and predilection with which we read him. It is true that

there is what has been called an "essential" Shakespeare, but there is no clue to it except what another poet can provide by his sympathy and intuition. Shakespeare was everyman—that is an acceptable commonplace. But the capacity to be everyman—that is only given to the poet, and it is only in so far as one has felt the poetic ecstasy in one's self that one has penetrated to any idea of the essential Shakespeare.

Read's concern with social issues and questions led him to what he regarded as an anarchist position, thereby cutting himself off "from the main current of socialist activity in England." He explains why:

Most people are content with practical issues: they think that if they plan the economy of the state for the immediate future by reconciling all conflicting interests, or by subordinating these interests to the general good, they have done all that is necessary, or humanly possible. Their ethos, if they have one, is vaguely religious, and complacently traditional. They forget that you cannot move one step without moving in a specific direction; and that if you do not keep looking at a fixed point on the horizon, you walk in circles. Anarchism is a point on the horizon: it has no plan to be put into being tomorrow or the next day. It does not believe in plans, which are rational constructions that always leave out the imponderable and elusive factors of human feeling and human instinct. When Confucius complained to Lao Tzu that though he had tried to get seventy-two rulers to adopt his plans for the government of the state—his six scriptures—not one of them had any use for them, Lao Tzu replied: "It is a lucky thing that you did not meet with a prince anxious to reform the world. Those six scriptures are the dim footprints of ancient kings. They tell us nothing of the force that guided their steps. All your lectures are concerned with things that are no better than footprints in the dust. Footprints are made by shoes; but they are far from being shoes."

Read gives his own position:

Confucius was a conservative planner; but Lao Tzu would have said the same to a socialist planner. There is only one necessary plan—the plan of nature. We must live according to natural laws, and by virtue of the power which comes from concentrating on their manifestation in the individual mind. Anarchism asserts—it is its only assertion—that life must be so ordered that the individual can live a

natural life, "attending to what is within." . . . To live in harmony with natural law—that should be our one sufficient aim. To create a society which enables the individual to pursue this aim is our political duty.