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WE WHO DREAM

HERACLITUS, the Greek philosopher, was born about 540 B.C. at Ephesus, an ancient city in Asia Minor (now Turkey), the ruins of which may be seen on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea. He lived through the first quarter of the fifth century B.C. He is said to be the founder (in the West) of metaphysics, his profundity matched by his obscurity. Socrates declared that the Delphic character of his writings requires a Delian diver to get at their meaning. Yet the wisdom found in his fragments—collected from many sources—has made him one of the most quoted thinkers of the pre-Socratic Greeks. By reason of this "popularity," one comes across his ideas again and again.

One of his Fragments (No. 95), while less familiar than some others, seems particularly valuable in the present, when a serious attempt at redefining what "knowledge" is pervades the work of many writers. It says:

> The waking have one common world, but the sleeping turn aside each into a world of his own.

This affirms that there is a common world of truth, known to the wise, who are "awake," while other humans, governed in their thinking by appearances, have each their private worlds of dreamy delusion. "So," Heraclitus said, "we must follow the common, yet the many live as if they had a wisdom of their own." This "common" world is the world of Law, of Reason with a capital R, accessible to the wise, who have learned how to think clearly, but remaining unknown to the multitude. In consequence, the wise are seldom loved. Heraclitus found cause to be contemptuous of popular opinion, making his countrymen the butt of his scorn. When they exiled Hermodorus, his friend, he said:

> The Ephesians would do well to hang themselves, every grown man of them, and leave the city to beardless lads for they have cast out Hermodorus, the best man among them, saying, "we will have none who is best among us; if there be any such, let him be so elsewhere and among others."

This is a biting comment on the human tendency, especially noticeable among the followers of sectarian leaders and demagogues, to resent all who reject customary opinions. The better their reasons, the more they are disliked.

But what is this "common world" of knowledge to which Heraclitus refers? Can its leading ideas be identified? Cicero seems to have thought so. He is quoted by Louis J. Halle in *Men and Nations* (Princeton University Press, 1962):

> "There is . . . a true law—namely right reason—which is in accordance with nature, applies to all men, and is unchangeable and eternal. . . . It will not lay down one rule at Rome and another at Athens, nor will it be one rule today and another tomorrow. But there will be one law, eternal and unchangeable, binding at all times upon all peoples. . . . The man who will not obey it will abandon his better self and, in denying the true nature of man, will thereby suffer the severest penalties."

But Prof. Halle, a modern thinker, questions Cicero's apparent confidence in discoursing about the *Logos*—the "Word" expressive of the world of Truth:

> Cicero identified his own views of human propriety with this natural law on the assumption that the logic of his own mind was the "right reason" which corresponded to it. The difficulty is that the logic of other men's minds has represented "right reason" otherwise, thereby arriving at other views of human propriety. The *Logos* itself might be the same at Rome as at Athens, tomorrow as today, but the identification of it by the men of Rome has been different from the identification of it by the men of Athens, and the identification made by the men of one age has been abandoned in favor of another identification by the men of the next.
>
> This experience suggests that, unlike Cicero, we should distinguish between the ideas that we have in our minds and the *Logos* itself. The *Logos* remains

> largely unknown: the ideas in our minds represent only our partial apprehension of it, or our supposition of what it must be. The idea of the Athenian (as described in Pericles' funeral oration), the idea of the Roman (as represented by Cincinnatus at the plow), the old Teutonic idea of man as a warrior the Quaker idea of the peaceable man—each of these may, by comparison with others, have points of greater and points of lesser correspondence to the original idea (i.e., the *Logos*). But they are not the original idea itself. . . . In our ignorance and disagreement, then, some of us follow Nietzsche and some St. Francis, some Kipling and some Gandhi, some Tolstoy and some Hitler. Without knowledge of the ultimate, we are constrained to make do among conflicting opinions as best we can.

Heraclitus, doubtless, would simply say, "Of course; you are asleep. One must be awake to recognize the truth of the world common to the wise." And we might recall that the Buddha said much the same thing. When asked how he had obtained his wisdom, he said, "I am awake."

We may now skip to the eighteenth century, and there find a version of the Heraclitean doctrine very much alive, in the form of Natural Law. Volney, the French thinker who survived the Revolution and died in 1890, set down the prevailing conception in his time:

> The regular and constant order of facts by which God rules the universe; the order which his wisdom presents to the sense and reason of men, to serve them as an equal and common rule of conduct, and to guide them, without distinction of race or sect, towards perfection and happiness.

This order, the *philosophes* were convinced, exists, even if we are unsure as to what it is. Finding out what it is is the business of science. You will see, they said; men are discoverers and thinkers. We shall find out and make all things good, or at least better than they are now. Volney's "God," as Carl Becker points out in *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (1939), was soon reduced to an abstract "first cause" and then allowed to disappear entirely. Isaac Newton had made Him superfluous. Nature was there, and everywhere, and the study of nature would reveal natural truth. For those who want religion, a "natural religion" might be deduced from the order of natural phenomena. "Nature and natural law," Becker exclaims "—what magic these words held for the philosophical century!"

> To find a proper title for this lecture I had only to think of the Declaration of Independence—"to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station, to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them." Turn to the French counterpart of the Declaration, and you will find that "the aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man." Search the writings of the new economists and you will find them demanding the abolition of artificial restrictions on trade and industry in order that men may be free to follow the natural law of self-interest.

Becker is chronicling the rise to power of this new confidence in the truth implicit in the laws of nature, from discovery of which we all might become wide awake. This was the vision of the time, called by historians "The Enlightenment," which accurately describes the feeling of its protagonists, if not the content of their convictions and faith. Today—or rather ten years ago—in the *New American Review* (No. 8), John Schaar described the paling and decline of that vision, leaving modern man with nothing but the "natural" appetites which the *philosophes* had been so eager to see satisfied, to fill the vacuum. As a political philosopher, Prof. Schaar writes from the point of view of public order, showing that in the nineteenth century it began to seem clear that nature reveals no moral law—anything but!—and the economists' readings of the Darwinian and Spencerian principle of the Survival of the Fittest gave industrial and commercial aggression its scientific license to exploit everything in sight. After all, if you can really do it, it must be *natural,* and that's the rule we go by, isn't it?

What were the basic Enlightenment assumptions? Prof. Schaar finds them to be two:

> (1) The notion that man's cognitive apparatus did not basically condition the quality and nature of

what was known; and (2) the notion that there existed a kingdom of order outside man, and independent of him (*e.g.*, the laws of nature, God, the laws of history). Given the first assumption, truth always meant *discovery*. Given the second, truth meant discovery of a *pre-established* order. Discoveries made by the methods of science, philosophy, and theology were not fabrications of the human mind, but faithful representations of an order independent of the discoverer. For man to increase his own harmony with the pre-established harmony outside himself, he had only to increase his knowledge of the world. . . .

That older view of knowledge and truth has now just about disappeared, and with its disappearance men have lost most of their older principles of legitimation. In the newer view, order becomes dependent on will, with no source of rewards and punishments external to the system and its members. With that, the social and political world becomes "unfrozen" as it were, moveable by skill and power, for it is seen that there is no necessity in any given arrangement of things. All things could be other than they are. It is the world of Georges Sorel rather than the world of Plato. It is not even a world in which change or becoming follows a necessary pattern. It is the world of Sartre, rather than the world of Hegel.

The ancient conception of an over-arching ethical order, to which rulers and all men are answerable, which makes humans morally responsible individuals, however obscurely that responsibility is defined, died out from our civilization. Diderot's ugly prophecy had at last come true—men were moved, and declared that they were moved, only by the "last impulse of desire and aversion." With the idea of a moral law excised from our consciousness, there is nothing left but expediency to guide political rules and nothing but self-interest to determine individual decision. Schaar summarizes for Americans:

We have no mainstream political or moral teaching that tells men they must remain bound to each other even one step beyond the point where those bonds are a drag and a burden on one's personal desires. Americans have always been dedicated to "getting ahead"; and getting ahead has always meant leaving others behind. Surely a large part of the zealous repression of radical protest in America yesterday and today has its roots in the fact that millions of men who are apparently "insiders" know how vulnerable the system is because they know how ambiguous their own attachments to it are. The slightest moral challenge exposes the fragile foundations of legitimacy in the modern state.

Heraclitus, were he among us today, would doubtless declare that we are not merely asleep, but inextricably involved in what Henry Miller aptly named the "Air-conditioned Nightmare." We live in a chaotic wilderness of "things," which are indeed in the saddle. We have, as changeling children of the Enlightenment, a corresponding religion of "things," which we call Economics. In a recent paper ("Rationality, Economics, and Culture," published in the June 1980 *Ecologist*), Henryk Skolimowski discusses the psychological consequences of this religion:

We must clearly bear in mind that economics conceived as the maximization of profit could not be elevated to the paramount importance but in a society which seeks its fulfillment and salvation in the consumption of material goods. Put otherwise: in order to elevate market economy to the supreme element of our culture, our eschatology had to be reduced to the ideology of consumerism. [Eschatology is the realm of reflection concerned with ultimate goals and ends.] Now, if the consumerist society is described as the dictatorship of the masses, then the present West is in the grip of this dictatorship. Our politicians and economists are dancing to the tune of the mass music of consumption.

Other consequences:

The first one is the aggressive concept of man, conceived as *homo homini lupus*, which directly and indirectly led to the justification of selfishness under the cloak of individuality. Selfish individualism is indeed a peculiarly Western ideal. Hobbes' concept of man (*Homo homini lupus*) has led to a variety of assertions justifying the aggressive nature of man. Of late, this trend has found a new expression in the discipline called sociobiology. *Homo Economicus is only an outgrowth of the Holobesean ideal of man as being a wolf to a man;* and so is utilitarianism; and so are such concepts as the territorial imperative. . . .

The physical amelioration of mankind is all that matters. Hence *material progress is elevated to the condition of a deity.* Fulfillment here and now, in material terms, becomes the implicit Utopia. And hence it follows that the ideology of consumerism is

> not an aberration of the technological society, but its innermost expression. . . .
>
> A slow but subtle process of the *reification of culture* is also taking place. Treating human beings and products of human culture as mere physical objects becomes the order of the day. Hand in hand with the mechanization of the cosmos and the physicalization of knowledge goes the process of the so-called "operationalization" of language, which is increasingly reduced to its empirical content or to the elements that can be empirically verified; other utterances, not reducible to empirical ones, are ruled as invalid. As the result, a great deal of the content of our inner lives, as well as the content of things spiritual, simply go overboard. As a part of this process, the instrumentalization of values is also taking place: cost/benefit analysis often assumes the position of the dominant criterion of values. In this process of the "thingification" or reification of culture, art is reduced to business-art as distinguished from art-art; the homogenization of human experience through mass media is taking place on an enormous scale; the result of which is smothering of the distinguished and the elimination of the excellent.

Prof. Skolimowski's conclusion might gain the casual approval of Heraclitus:

> Our economic theory is as good as is our cosmology—which originates our economics. Our cosmology is about the gods we are prepared to worship. We have worshipped the God Economos; and it has given us material plenty. But he is unable to give us the meaning of life. Hence our existential drama. And hence the drama of our rationality which, in the cause of a mistaken logos, has shrunk our being. However, our reason is not all defunct. It is the peculiar quality of reason that it always transcends itself. It has already done so with regard to the economic boundaries. When our eschatology becomes transcendental again, when we re-establish intrinsic values, we shall put economics in its proper place and our reason will flourish again, guiding us on the path of enlightenment and wisdom.

Would Heraclitus concede that in such expressions, now increasingly frequent, we give evidence of being partly awake? He might say that we are at least dreaming *about* waking up, which is a step in the right direction. But how shall we know when we have dreamt the right conception of knowledge and are beginning, although tentatively, to participate in the "common world" of truth?

Here Plato comes to our assistance, in his discussion of "true opinion." The trouble with true opinion is that it lacks stability. It is still only opinion. People can talk us out of our intuitions, our feelings, about what is good and right. "True opinions," Plato said in the *Meno*, "are a fine possession, and effect all that is good; but they do not care to stay for long, and run away out of the human soul, and thus are of no great value until one makes them fast with causal reasoning." He associates "causal reasoning" with *anamnesis*—the recollection of soul wisdom garnered in former lives—since the reasoning may help us to convert such deep impressions of truth into knowledge.

As Robert E. Cushman puts it in *Therapeia*, his masterful study of Platonic philosophy:

> The business of dialectic is to discriminate fully the *logos* implied, but not truly discerned, in ordinary experience.
>
> The transformation of true opinions into knowledge through implementing the recollective process by dialectic was strikingly illustrated in the case of Meno's slave boy. By the skillful use of *elenchos* [cross-examination], Socrates was able to show that, quite unwittingly, the lad entertained true opinions concerning the square of the diagonal. At first, says Plato, true opinions were "stirred up in him, like a dream." As suitable questions were directed to him, he came to an exact understanding of the import of each one. At length he attained an articulate grasp of their comprehensive bearing.

This is an appropriate place to speak of the work of Theodore Roszak, who has been practicing the Platonic counsel for years. In 1968, in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, he began drawing attention to aspiring expressions, poetic enthusiasms, and transporting declarations, while at the same time using a Socratic sort of reasoning to assure balance and sobriety. Then, in *Where the Wasteland Ends* (1979), he championed Blake's rejection of Newton's "single vision," offering a chapter on "Waking Up, Being Real." He proposed that we evolve "A Science of

Rhapsodic Intellect," taking for a start the Romantic poets as guide. In *Unfinished Animal* (1975) he gathered material to put the idea of non-physical evolution on a rational basis, and in 1978 considered other facets of awakening in *Person/Planet.* Finally, in an essay in the *Michigan Quarterly Review* (Summer, 1980), he connected the wild extravagances of the new cultist religions with the stubborn indifference of academia to *any* conception of an inner life, concluding:

> The academy has come to specialize in a sheerly critical function; the spiritual fraternity—any that survive—has concentrated upon techniques and disciplines of illumination that are no longer on speaking terms with critical intellect.
>
> Can these two be brought together once again in their proper Socratic unity as an ideal of rhapsodic intellect: the critical mind open to transcendent energy? More challenging still, can that balance of intellect and vision once more be taken into the public realm, to meet the spiritual need that has arisen there? Or will philosophy shrink back from the importunate vulgarity, the citizenry burden of the task?
>
> This much is certain: we will not find what we refuse to seek; we will not do what we refuse to dare.

REVIEW
A WORTHY EXPLORATION

THE understanding of American culture is by no means only a leisure-time activity, but an enterprise of personal need and value. It has to do with who, inescapably, we are in the social and psychic portions of our being. The study of the American character might begin—to name indispensable sources with some reading of Thomas Paine, and then move to de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America.* Of almost equal value would be the article, "What Then Is the American, This New Man?" by Arthur M. Schlesinger, in the *American Historical Review* for January, 1943 (the words of his title are the question asked by an essayist of revolutionary times in America, St. John de Crevecoeur, who wrote as "An American Farmer"). There are other good materials, of course, such as D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature,* but it is not our intent, here, to supply a bibliography on so large a subject. We want to name only "indispensable" works, another suggestion being Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America* (Sierra Club, 1977).

But there is one more book of importance, *The Roots of American Culture,* by Constance Rourke; (Harcourt, Brace, 1949). A measure of the excellence of this work may be had from the fact that Van Wyck Brooks undertook to put into readable form some of the material for a three-volume history of American culture left by the author when she died in 1941. Born in Cleveland in 1885, Constance Rourke had deep roots in the Middle West; as Van Wyck Brooks says, "she pondered over the statement, so frequently made by other critics, that America had no esthetic tradition of its own." He continues:

> Was it true, she asked herself, that we had failed to produce a culture in which the arts could flourish? If this was true, it was serious, it was ominous indeed, for no art had ever reached a point where it could speak a world-language without an inheritance of local expression behind it. Occasional peaks of achievement did not alter this rule. As Constance Rourke said later in her study of Charles Sheeler, "Art has always taken on a special native fibre before it assumes greater breadth"; and therefore an American esthetic tradition was a desideratum that was not to be lightly given away. . . . It was in some such terms as these that Constance Rourke posed her problem, well knowing that if she could solve it successfully and fully the consequences might be important for American art.

She took her cue from Herder, who had declared that folk-forms are the texture of communal experience and expression, and that the fine arts spring from folk arts. It was almost universally believed, Brooks says, that "America had no folk-art" except for "the vestigial remains of European culture." Constance Rourke, he added, "opposed this theory because it led us to disregard the ways in which every culture had actually developed."

> Was it true, then, to return to Herder, that we really had no folk-forms? Was it not rather the case that we had a long folk-life behind us which had found inevitable expression in forms of its own? Had not the critics ignored the creative forces that have always existed in this country? And could not these be shown to constitute an esthetic tradition?

She studied everything: architecture, drama, music, the novel, Black folklore, the Shaker colonies, religious life, the crafts, and painting. Her interest, Brooks says, was never antiquarian, but in the living practice of the arts in the early days of the Republic, and before she was done she "had assembled proofs of a rich creative life in our past, and she had found indications in it of distinctive native American elements." Brooks made a book of almost three hundred pages out of "the great mass of her half-written manuscripts and notes," revealing "the rich stores of tradition that lie behind us, the many streams of native character and feeling from which the Americans of the future will be able to draw."

For sheer enjoyment in reading, *The Roots of American Culture* would be hard to match. Quotation from the eighty pages devoted to "The Rise of Theatricals" will illustrate both the fascination of the content and the stature of the artists. The story of Junius Brutus Booth is

romance from beginning to end. He came to this country at the age of twenty-five after notable professional success in England, well known because of "his stormy rivalry with Edmund Kean." He had no trouble finding engagements here, expressing throughout his life, Constance Rourke says, the major phases of the American theater. "He was an acutely edged individual: he was also an archetype. No one was quite like him, yet he comprised the sum of many men." He found a hiding-place for rest from the importunate world in a tract of forest wilderness in Maryland, and became the country's original "preservationist."

> The hand of Rousseau was the shaping hand in this whole scene, and here all nature was sacred, even the trees. Only fallen timber and brushwood were used for fires, and the partridge, the wild boar and the blacksnake could roam at will. Flesh for food was forbidden in the household. Even in his brief London years Booth had anticipated this preoccupation with the philosophy of nature by playing the lead in one of the American plays picturing a phase of Indian history. He continued to take these parts, with their philosophical undertones, and was known to introduce the popular "Song of Alknoomok"—or the Cherokee lament, as it was sometimes called—somewhat irreverently into his plays and entr'actes.

Booth's father, Richard Booth, joined him in America.

> As a young man, he had attempted to leave England to fight in the American revolution. In this he had been unsuccessful, but he had insisted that visitors in his London house uncover before the picture of Washington; and he was deep in the analogies between the United States and the classic civilizations. The name of his son Junius Booth was a symbol of his convictions and preoccupations; and in the forest retreat, amid the tangle of wild land, to the sound of falling water, he wrote odes to liberty—declamatory odes inevitably, worked on biographies of classic heroes, began a translation of the *Aeneid* with a view to its adaptation to the stage, and was fond of repeating the lines that began *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. A certain inconsistency appeared in this projection of classic republicanism and the philosophy of nature. Old Richard Booth used to march to the village attended by a gigantic black. But the Booths owned no slaves, they only borrowed or rented them; and in terms of ideas at least they were consistent.
>
> They read Pythagoras, reinforcing their belief that no flesh should be eaten; they read Locke and Shelley, particularly Queen Mab. They must have extended their reading into some of the great myths that celebrated nature, for one of Booth's children was named for the Norse goddess of fertility Frigga. With a sufficient sense of natural scale, she was also named for a continent—Asia Frigga.

More of the character of this early citizen—naturalized citizen—of the United States is revealed by a wonderful anecdote:

> Booth was religious in his way. He could deliver the Lord's Prayer in such a fashion as to move his listeners to tears and perhaps to make them shudder, but his convictions were set against formal religion and its exponents. His mournful burial of wild pigeons on one of his Western journeys was partly an expression of natural philosophy, partly a bit of macabre humor and partly a prank on a minister. The slaughter of these birds had been ruthless and great flocks were brought to earth within a few hours. Booth called a minister to his room in a small Western tavern, saying that he wished to discuss the burial of a friend. While the minister respectfully listened, Booth talked of the purity and worth of this dead friend, then, turning, drew back a sheet on his bed and disclosed a heap of slaughtered pigeons and eerily declaimed *The Ancient Mariner*. The minister, who recognized the meaning of this ceremony, departed feeling like the wedding guest. Booth then bought a lot in the cemetery and buried the pigeons with a public service, at which he declaimed poetry whose theme was nature.

Such was one of the ancestors of American culture; and there were others like Junius Booth. Why couldn't this material be used in the education of all the young in our country? If we want more of such people as artists, they will need the inspiration of a past which goes beyond "Yankee ingenuity."

Sometime in the 1920s Henry Beston, a writer and New Englander, planned and had built a small house atop a dune on Cape Cod. He lived there on the beach for a year, and wrote a book about what it was like. Beston, you could say, was a true restorer of American culture. He

wrote fairy tales for children and essays for adults. His book about Cape Cod is *The Outermost House,* in its way another "Walden." The libraries and some used-book dealers have it, and there is a Ballantine paperback edition ($1.75) still in print. Here we give Beston's reflections about the experience of night:

> Our fantastic civilization has fallen out of touch with many aspects of nature, and with none more completely than with night. . . . With lights and ever more lights, we drive the holiness and beauty of night back to the forests and the sea; the little villages, the crossroads even, will have none of it. Are modern folk, perhaps, afraid of night? Do they fear that vast serenity, the mystery of infinite space, the austerity of stars? Having made themselves at home in a civilization obsessed with power, which explains the whole world in terms of energy, do they fear at night for their dull acquiescence and the patterns of their beliefs? Be the answer what it will, today's civilization is full of people who have not the slightest notion of the character or the poetry of night, who have never seen night. Yet to live thus, to know only artificial light, is as absurd and evil as to know only artificial day.

His book is filled with the natural wonder of both day and night on Cape Cod.

COMMENTARY
NO EASY WAY

A REPORT in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* for last Aug. 31 (in the section translated from *Le Monde*) surveys the fortunes of organic farming in France, where it is known as "biological" farming. While only one per cent of French farmers use organic methods, this article by Pierre Audibert provides persuasive quotation from those who do. One of these, Philippe Desbrosses, who relies on compost, using no chemical fertilizers or synthetic pesticides or chemical weedkillers, has been "officially" recognized as having the best farm in the region of Loir-et-Cher. Audibert relates:

> Desbrosses feels that conventional farming is headed for disaster as pesticides render fields sterile, and nitrates filter into underground water courses. "If you know anything about soil, you know that eventually we're going to have to pick up the tab for choosing the easy way out." . . .
>
> Harking back to the old days, organic farmers rotate crops to avoid exhausting the soil and limit weed growth. Desbrosses has experimented with plants like lupin, which he uses as "green fertilizer" by burying it. . . . He's also adapted red Basque corn, a variety that long ago was used to make polenta (corn meal mush) in southwest France: it contains twice as much protein as current hybrids.

Marketing, not production, is the chief problem of the organic farmers. The *Le Monde* writer describes at length the fraudulent tendencies in the middle-man distribution network for organic products, which the farmers are struggling to control. Some solve the problem by local distribution.

> Near Blois, Louis Pinault sells directly to consumers, taking his produce to the Blois market once a week. He doesn't need to go further afield: since 1978 he's quadrupled his clientele. Cars pull up in front of his farm and beneath the summer sun city-dwellers visit his fields and make their purchases. He points to his asparagus, a specialty of the region: "I do just as well as my neighbors. Over the years, they've had to increase their 400 kilos of fertilizer per hectare to one or two tons, and the harvest has dropped by half. That's what converted me to organic farming ten years ago."

But there are problems. "The farmer who dares to go organic faces three years in the desert, the time it takes to eliminate chemicals from the soil and to learn the whole process on his own hook, due to lack of technical advisers." While training courses are offered by a research and development group, strong conviction is needed to become an organic farmer.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
PREFACES TO HISTORY

AT some point in the study of history—teachers would doubtless best know when—it becomes obligatory to make sure that children recognize the difference between a chronicle of past events and the serious investigation of what the events *mean.* For the understanding of any subject, the critical faculties eventually need to come into play, and to assist in the birth of this activity requires the perceptive art of the teacher. It is a question of maintaining balance. One might for example ask: If the historian's work is of necessity oriented by subjective judgments—more simply, *opinion*—why should it be worth reading? (Descartes asked this question!) One answer might be that *all* human work, even the higher reaches of mathematics, has in it a decisive subjective factor, and that a measured trust in good scholarship is indispensable in studying the works of the human mind.

Another question needing attention would be: On what should such trust be based?

The candor of the historian may be instructive here. It would be difficult to find a better example than the prefaces of Barbara Tuchman. History may be one of the social "sciences," but Mrs. Tuchman makes plain how much "art" is involved in the investigation of the meaning of human events. In her Preface to *The Proud Tower,* subtitled "A Portrait of the World Before the War: 1890-1914," she begins by declaring her purpose:

> The Great War of 1914-18 lies like a band of scorched earth dividing that time from ours. In wiping out so many lives which would have been operative on the years that followed, in destroying beliefs, changing ideas, and leaving incurable wounds of disillusion, it created a physical as well as psychological gulf between two epochs. This book is an attempt to discover the quality of the world from which the Great War came.

Next, the writer takes her reader behind the scenes of the historian's task, showing what happens—what must happen—as the work proceeds. Changes in outlook are inevitable, and for at least some readers this may come as a disturbing surprise. The idea that "certainty" in social science barely exists—that it changes in the course of research, becoming, in some cases, more and more tentative—gives the reader almost as much responsibility as the writer. But for the reader who recognizes this and accepts it, the historian who explains his (her!) own uncertainties becomes a "reliable source."

Study of Barbara Tuchman's prefaces illuminates the reason for confidence in her work. Speaking of *The Proud Tower,* she says:

> It is not the book I intended to write when I began. Preconceptions dropped off one by one as I investigated. The period [1890-1914] was not a Golden Age or *Belle Epoque* except to a thin crust of the privileged class. It was not a time exclusively of confidence, innocence, comfort, stability, security and peace. All these qualities were certainly present. People were more confident of values and standards, more innocent in the sense of retaining more hope of mankind than they are today, although they were not more peaceful nor, except for the upper few, more comfortable. Our misconception lies in assuming that doubt and fear, ferment, protest, violence and hate were not equally present. We have been misled by the people of the time themselves who, in looking back across the gulf of the War, see that earlier half of their lives misted over by a lovely sunset haze of peace and security. It did not seem so golden when they were in the midst of it. Their memories and their nostalgia have conditioned our view of the pre-war era but I can offer the reader a rule based on adequate research: all statements of how lovely it was in that era made by persons contemporary with it will be found to have been made after 1914.

What is Barbara Tuchman doing here? She is instructing us in the patterns of human feeling, throwing light on how opinions are formed, and making history into the tool of self-correction for the reader. Her aim is not to "teach us" about the past, but to equip us with the tools of better judgment. She has, in short, basic respect for the reader. She assumes that the reader will want to think, and *will* think. (While, actually, no other

viewpoint is acceptable in a historian, not all of them give evidence of it.)

Another passage in this preface shows how much "freewheeling" the historian practices, and why it is inevitable.

> In attempting to portray what the world before the war was like my process has been admittedly highly selective. I am conscious on finishing this book that it could be written all over again under the same title with entirely other subject matter; and then a third time, still without repeating. There could be chapters on the literature of the period, on its wars—the Sino-Japanese, Spanish-American, Boer, Russo-Japanese, Balkan—on imperialism, on science and technology, on business and trade, on women, on royalty, on medicine, on painting, on as many different subjects as might appeal to the individual historian. There could have been chapters on Leopold II, King of the Belgians, Chekov, Sargent, The Horse, or U.S. Steel, all of which figured in my original plan. There should have been a chapter on some ordinary everyday shopkeeper or clerk representing the mute inglorious anonymous middle class but I never found him.

"I know," Mrs. Tuchman says in conclusion, "that what follows is far from the whole picture." This may be obvious, but it is a fact that needs frequent repetition. Happily, there is nothing monotonous about this historian's way of repeating it. Finally, she says:

> It is not false modesty which prompts me to say so but simply an acute awareness of what I have not included. The faces and voices of all that I have left out crowd around me as I reach the end.

This seems to make doubly important what she does select for conveying the quality and some of the meaning of the period.

Another of her books, *A Distant Mirror*, published by Knopf in 1978, is entirely devoted to the fourteenth century, written, she says, "to find out what were the effects on society of the most lethal disaster of recorded history—that is to say, of the Black Death of 1348-50, which killed an estimated one third of the population living between India and Iceland." Such a period seemed to her of importance to understand since our own time might be on the brink of a similar or worse disaster. For this work she has relied largely on the contemporary chroniclers of the time, saying that they are indispensable for "a sense of the period and its attitudes," and that—"Furthermore, their form is narrative and so is mine." This open defense of the narrative form of history is welcome. Humans naturally think in narrative terms—we think of our lives in this way, and probably learn more from narratives than from anything else. But narratives written in the distant past, Mrs. Tuchman says, have "empty spaces" in them, so that supplying historical continuity becomes difficult. She offers another valuable warning:

> A greater hazard, built into the very nature of recorded history, is overload of the negative: the disproportionate survival of the bad side—of evil, misery, contention, and harm. In history this is exactly the same as in the daily newspaper. The normal does not make news. History is made by the documents that survive and these lean heavily on crisis and calamity, crime and misbehavior, because such things are the subject matter of the documentary process—of lawsuits, treaties, moralists' denunciations, literary satire, papal Bulls. No Pope ever issued a Bull to approve of something. Negative overload can be seen at work in the religious reformer Nicolas de Clamanges, who, in denouncing unfit and worldly prelates in 1401, said that in his anxiety for reform he would not discuss the good clerics because "they do not count beside the perverse men."
>
> Disaster is rarely as pervasive as it seems from recorded accounts. The fact of being on the record makes it appear continuous and ubiquitous whereas it is more likely to have been sporadic both in time and place. Besides, persistence of the normal is usually greater than the effect of disturbance as we know from our own times. After absorbing the news of today, one expects to face a world consisting entirely of strikes, crimes, power failures, broken water mains, stalled trains, school shutdowns, muggers, drug addicts, neo-Nazis and rapists. The fact is that one can come home in the evening—on a lucky day—without having encountered more than one or two of these phenomena.

What could be more valuable to the student of history than the little "essays" which make Barbara Tuchman's prefaces?

FRONTIERS

"It Can Be Done"

A SLIGHTLY sour but extremely pertinent letter by Steve Baer (of Albuquerque, New Mexico) in *Rain* for August/September says things that people (all of us) need to hear:

> I am trying to understand what is going on. What does it mean that recently 65,000 people assembled in Washington, D.C., to protest against nuclear energy and the speakers I saw on television spoke of how delighted they were to have the "Movement" under way again. . . . The Solar Lobby and the "Movement" frighten me. What are they after? Couldn't all this energy and excitement be used to build houses and other equipment that is more to this group's liking? . . .
>
> In 1969, six months after we had finished the solar heating system at Drop City, Berry Hickman, Ed Heinz and I started Zomeworks. . . . I'm glad we went into business. I am part of a movement—the production of useful goods, the economy, the human race, life.
>
> I recommend business for other great idealists, dreamers, people who have endless ideas and good advice for others. The whole adventure can even have some of the delights and beauties of the natural convection system. If you have something that is useful to others they will want to trade with you and, like the warm air, your business will rise. "Yes—it sounds like a lot of hot air," you may say, because you know that the businessmen are cheaters, greedy for profits. Well, plenty of businessmen are narrow-minded and greedy for profits, and some are cheaters, too. They are people.
>
> But if you want a new world—with many of today's conveniences—that runs on solar energy, there is a lot of work to do and it may be a good idea to try and do some of this work one's self—directly—instead of insisting that others do it for you. It is possible that forming lobbying groups, striking poses, and demonstrating against "bad things" will bring this world into being, but I wouldn't give these tactics very good odds.

This letter has the ring of reality-testing. It recalls what Wendell Berry wrote in *The Unsettling of America* about the conservation organizations which have helped to keep places of unique beauty out of the hands of exploiters and developers. This activity began as a concern for "scenic" areas, as in the case of the Sierra Club, to which, incidentally, Berry belongs. But wilderness conservation, he points out, "did little to prepare us either to understand or oppose the general mayhem of the all-outdoors that the industrial revolution has finally imposed on us." Exploring and enjoying and protecting the nation's resources may, he says, be fine things to do, but they leave out "the most critical concern":

> For while conservationists are exploring, enjoying, and protecting the nation's resources, they are also *using* them. They are drawing their lives from the nation's resources, scenic and unscenic. If the resolve to explore, enjoy, and protect does not create a moral energy that will define and enforce responsible use, then organized conservation will prove ultimately futile. And this, again, will be a failure of character.
>
> Although responsible use may be defined, advocated, and to some extent required by organizations, it cannot be implemented or enacted by them. It cannot be effectively enforced by them. The use of the world is finally a personal matter, and the world can be preserved in health only by the forbearance and care of a multitude of persons. That is, the possibility of the world's health will have to be defined in the characters of persons as clearly and as urgently as the possibility of personal "success" is now so defined. Organizations may promote this sort of forbearance and care, but they cannot provide it.

Meanwhile, interestingly enough, the atmosphere of change (whatever produced it) has been spreading around and is now leavening the air breathed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Last year the Department empowered some scientists and economists and social scientists to conduct "a study of organic farming in the United States, the first such study by a federal agency." A member of this group (now known as the "Organic Task Force"), Garth Youngberg, told a writer for *Not Man Apart* (September) that the investigators were "an open-minded team willing to take an objective look." The writer, Janice Fillip, summarizes:

> During the last six months of 1979, the Organic Task Force conducted 70 on-farm interviews to gauge

the success of organic farming and discover what practices contribute to that success. The Task Force also investigated the research and educational needs of organic farmers and considered ways the government can help meet those needs. The study ranged over 20 states. "We tried to get people in all of the ten US production regions," Youngberg explained.

The initial report, according to Youngberg, drew positive conclusions on the importance of organic farming and "its potential contributions to agriculture and society," recommending research "to determine how organic methods can be used to improve—and perhaps eventually replace—conventional chemical farming."

Daniel Zwerdling, who has compiled a report for the USDA Extension and other Services, describes his experience in the field.

> "When I'd travel across the United States, I'd sit in coffee shops in farming towns and chat with people at random," he recalls. "Farmers did not laugh or ridicule the notion when I asked 'Have you heard of organic farming?' Many of them would prefer to farm the old way, to rotate their crops, not to have to use all these pesticides. But they felt trapped into having to use chemical methods to meet the rent.
>
> "My feeling was that if more farmers were exposed to the fact that their neighbors are farming organically—quite successfully—they might be open to some experimentation. . . . All the thousands of farmers who are cutting back significantly on chemicals and building up the soil instead of just tearing it apart—these farmers need recognition, too.
>
> So far, no one has recognized that they're making a tremendous contribution."

There are also very practical incentives to change. Janice Fillip writes:

> Farmers have economic as well as humanistic reasons for turning to organic methods. . . . Although farmers pour money into chemicals, they may not be getting much in return. "From 1950 to 1978, there's been a tenfold increase in pesticide use, at a rate of about 15 per cent per annum. But in that period of time, there's been somewhere in the region of a two-fold increase in insect crop loss" [according to Dr. Samuel Epstein of the School of Public Health, University of Illinois Medical Center].

Miss Fillip concludes:

> It is possible that, faced with the spectre of chemically depleted land and contaminated human beings, it will become economically advantageous for agribusiness to adopt organic methods. Whether the factory farms are too large to successfully convert to organic methods remains to be seen. Youngberg observes, "One California farmer with 6,ooo acres reduced his chemicals 50 per cent and did not suffer any decline in production. He intends to reduce chemical use another 10 per cent next year. In Texas, we interviewed a farmer who has 1,400 acres totally organic. It can be done."