

## THE INHERENT PURPOSE

AWAY of getting at the conception of knowledge or truth that now seems to be taking shape in the modern consciousness is provided by Wylie Sypher's discussion of Gaston Bachelard, (*American Scholar*, Winter, 1967-68). Contrasting poetic and scientific responses to experience, Mr. Sypher says:

The scientist must repeat his observation if it is to be verified. In scientific experience, "the first time doesn't count. By the time the observation is again confirmed, it is no longer new. In a marvelously poetic vein Bachelard remarks, "In scientific work we have first to digest our surprise." The poet, not the scientist, is one who can trust his first vision, before the recognition is endorsed by duplicating it, before it is codified into ideas, theories, laws. . . .

The poet, then, has a privilege which the scientist, as scientist, must forego: the poet's world is forever new. His recognitions may be disturbing, for they are not yet crystallized into explanations. We hardly need be reminded of Keats's spatial experience in first reading Chapman's Homer:

Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken.

This first time the astronomer feels his wild surmise he is a poet, and the poetry in science is this instant of revelation or epiphany. Then his discovery must be reduced before it is reliable science. So Bachelard describes science as a way of organizing our disappointments under the guise of knowledge. Knowledge in scientific form is coherent disillusion, a sacrifice of discoveries to concepts and systems, a loss of an epiphany.

There seems a sense in which the entire period of the Enlightenment was shaped by cultural experience of the poetic phase of scientific discovery. While the scientists made the discoveries, their thrill at the wonder of what they found out was felt by others. The ardor of the Enlightenment was a poetic celebration. But when the materials, processes, and laws had, so to speak, been beaten into the shape of formulas and put into handbooks—when engineers could look

them up in manuals and turn the scientific findings into the technology on which we now depend—there was no more poetry in science. The whole assimilative process, moreover, was largely vicarious for the ordinary man. *He* did not make the discoveries, and he seldom knew much about how they were made. Yet he readily enjoyed their fruits and felt that he, although only a consumer, had taken part in the achievements that produced them.

It was inevitable, therefore, that a scientific establishment, in some ways like the religious establishment it replaced, should come into being. An establishment is an authoritative bureaucracy. First it serves, then it manages, and finally it controls human decision. Naturally enough, people who think for other people, "achieve" for other people, "take care" of other people, tend to become conceited, arrogant, and often tyrannical. What, then, happens to their knowledge?

It becomes, you could say, the "coherent disillusion" of all society. There is not much point in blaming the scientists for this. The idea that the smart people are meant to run people's lives, telling them what's right and what to do, did not begin with the scientific establishment. It is rather an expression of the basic social ignorance and malpractice of human beings, repeated again and again, under various auspices. Churchmen, the wealthy, and the scientific experts have all had a chance at it. No matter who is responsible, this mode of conducting the common life eventually breaks down. The conventionalization of truth in the interest of smooth management means shutting out human possibility. Every human being needs personal encounter with uncertainty—encounter with *some* uncertainty. No institution can long pretend that what it claims to know is a sure thing. The very quality of human knowledge is debased in this way.

Religion as sure-thing, science as sure-thing—both are equally bad. Both are artificial substitutes for epiphany, for independent discovery, for knowing at first hand. This was the main and underlying criticism of institutional claims made by A. H. Maslow in all that he wrote in behalf of a psychology of health. In *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*, he said:

. . . very many people in our society apparently see organized religion as *the locus, the source, the custodian and guardian and teacher of the spiritual life*. Its methods, its style of teaching, its content are widely and officially accepted as *the path*, by many as the *only path*, to the life of righteousness, of purity and virtue, of justice and goodness, etc.

This is also true, paradoxically enough, for many orthodoxly positivistic scientists, philosophers, and other intellectuals. Pious positivists as a group accept the same strict dichotomizing of facts and values that the professional religionists do. Since they exclude values from the realm of science and from the realm of exact, rational, positivistic knowledge, all values are turned over by default to non-scientists and non-rationalists (i.e., "non-knowers") to deal with. Values can be arbitrarily affirmed by fiat only, they think, like a taste or a preference or a belief which cannot be scientifically validated, proven, confirmed, or disconfirmed. . . .

Something of this sort is certainly true for many psychologists and many educators. It is almost *universally*, true for the positivistic psychologists, the behaviorists, the neo-behaviorists, and the ultra-experimentalists, all of whom feel values and the life of value to be none of their professional concern, and who casually renounce all consideration of poetry and art and of any of the religious or transcendent experiences. Indeed, the pure positivist rejects any inner experiences of *any* kind as being "unscientific," as not in the realm of human knowledge, as not susceptible of study by a scientific method, because such data are not objective, that is to say, public and shared. This is a kind of "reduction to the concrete," to the tangible, the visible, the audible, to that which can be recorded by a machine, to behavior. . . .

Behavior is often a means of *preventing* the overt expression of everything I'm talking about, just as spoken language can also be. How then can we explain the quick spread of that theory-bound, sectarian, question-begging phrase: "The behavioral sciences"? I confess that I cannot.

Maslow came out in defense and advocacy of the capacity for discovery—independent discovery—in all human beings, and he made open attack on all institutions which work against it. He was determined to free the potentialities of man from the control of cultural managers. This meant freeing the mind—everyone's mind—from confinement to sure-thing doctrines, whether of religion or science. Science, so far as its ascertained truths are concerned, deals only with matters that can no longer surprise us. The poet, the imaginer, the dreamer, the discoverer in us cannot survive in such an atmosphere alone, which discourages vision and is prejudicial to growth. Maslow adopted the principle declared by John Dewey: "For endeavor for the better is moved by faith in what is possible, not by adherence to the actual." Endeavor for the better is the vital substance of human life.

In short, Maslow campaigned for another kind of science. To develop norms for this discipline, he studied the healthiest, most creative people he could find. He thought of it as a psychology of health, every sort of health. A passage from his paper published in *Sign, Image, Symbol* (Braziller, 1966), edited by Gyorgy Kepes, helps to suggest what this sort of psychology looks into:

Joseph Bossom and I have recently published an experiment in which we found that secure people tended to see photographed faces as more warm than did insecure perceivers. . . . are the secure perceivers who perceive or attribute more warmth right or wrong? Or are they right for warm faces and wrong for cool faces? Do they see what they want to see? Do they want to like what they see?

A last word about what I call B-cognition (cognition of Being). This seems to me to be the purest and most efficient kind of perception of reality. . . . It is the truer and more veridical perception of the percept because most detached, most objective, least contaminated by the wishes, fears, and needs of the perceiver. It is noninterfering, non-demanding, most accepting. In B-cognition, dichotomies tend to fuse, categorizing tends to disappear and the percept is seen as unique.

Self-actualizing people tend more to this kind of perceiving. But I have been able to get reports of this kind of perception in practically *all* the people I have questioned, in the highest, happiest, most perfect moments of their lives (peak experiences). Now, my point is this: Careful questioning shows that as the percept gets more individual, more unified and integrated, more enjoyable, more rich, so also does the perceiving individual get more alive, more integrated, more unified, more rich, more healthy for the moment. They happen simultaneously and can be set off on either side, i.e., the more whole the percept (the world) becomes, the more whole the person becomes. And also, the more whole the person becomes, the more whole becomes the world. It is a dynamic interrelation, a mutual causation. The meaning of a message clearly depends not alone on its content, but also on the extent to which the personality is able to respond to it. The "higher" meaning is perceptible only to the "higher" person. The taller he is, the more he can see.

As Emerson said, "What we are, that only can we see." But we must now add that what we see tends in turn to make us what it is and what we are. The communication relationship between the person and the world is a dynamic one of mutual forming and lifting-lowering of each other, a process that we may call "reciprocal isomorphism." A higher order of persons can understand a higher order of knowledge; but also a higher order of environment tends to lift the level of the person, just as a lower order of environment tends to lower it. They make each other more like each other. These notions are also applicable to the interrelations between persons, and should help us to understand how persons help to form each other.

Maslow, it becomes plain, was concerned with renewal and restoration—recovering the lost verities of philosophical religion—and at the same time he sought radical innovation in scientific method; he expanded the conception of science to include the world of values. He believed that a merger of science and philosophical religion would guard against the excesses and institutional distortions of both.

That this sort of synthesis is required becomes more evident every day. Maslow spoke of the need in *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*:

The final and unavoidable conclusion is that education—like all our social institutions—must be concerned with its final values, and this in turn is just about the same as speaking of what have been called "spiritual values" or "higher values." These are the principles of choice which help us to answer the age-old "spiritual" (philosophical? religious? humanistic? ethical?) questions: What is the good life? What is the good man? The good woman? What is the good society and what is my relation to it? What are my obligations to society? What is best for my children? What is justice? Truth? Virtue? What is my relation to nature, to death, to aging, to pain, to illness? How can I live a zestful, enjoyable, meaningful life? What is my responsibility to my brothers? Who *are* my brothers? What shall I be loyal to? What must I be ready to die for?

When Maslow says that these questions—which used to be answered by the organized religions—must now be illuminated by "natural facts," he is not suggesting that they be handed over to some special branch of science. He is proposing disciplined inquiry into *all* the facts and experiences of life. Only by this means can science and religion avoid institutionalization and become at last one.

What does this mean for the scientific spirit? It means careful and progressive study of areas of human experience that have long been neglected. It means full respect for the glancing lights of intuitive discovery, for poetic inspiration, for metaphysical inquiry, and for moral as well as intellectual genius. It means a change in the very function of science and its role in society.

Since the time of Galileo, the business of science has been to settle the argument about what really *is*. With a reputation based upon achievement of this sort, scientists have had to be very careful. A great many of them absolutely refused to look at anything that did not give promise of being proved or disproved to the satisfaction of a jury of scientific peers. As we are now realizing, this leaves out of consideration the most crucial areas of our lives. It is probably the case that all the really great truths are "unprovable." It follows that if science is to give attention to this aspect of reality, it will have to

assume a very novel task—no longer just to go about "settling" things, but rather keep them open, to hone the tools of inquiry, to insist on open-mindedness, to be sure that no great question is prematurely settled on a shallow or wishful basis, and to encourage the spirit of search in scientifically unmapped directions.

This would make science into a universal explorer, the pathfinder to epiphany for the whole human race. It would respect all the known ways of looking, and invent new ones. If an Einstein could find his way by rejecting an axiom, ordinary people have a similar right and privilege. Yet it would be the business of science and scientific educators to point out that Dr. Einstein earned the right to challenge an axiom, and that while everyone is free to do so, doing it *fruitfully* takes more than impulsive daring. What the educated of the world now think, right or wrong, has cost something to accumulate. Even the institutional versions of the truth, while bound to be improved in time, are what the great majority start with, and a decent respect for the opinions of all these people is called for. Real discovery is difficult. We need, in short, to create an open world, but also a world protected from the chaos of random guesses.

It was this second requirement, one may think, that led the Buddha to devote his public teaching, not to a metaphysical account of reality, but to the moral psychology which has exemplary expression in the *Dhammapada*. Knowledge, however extensive, is not of much human value unless it is founded on ethical insight and intent. Plato, who was certainly concerned with knowledge, was convinced of this. The focus of the dialogues is on the virtuous man and the teaching of virtue. He was not so much interested in facts which could be "proved" as in how men could learn to be just. He also knew that they would have to see the value of justice for themselves. No one can be bludgeoned with "logic" into becoming a just person. The

invitation to virtue became Plato's lifelong concern.

This, one could say, would be the very substance of Maslovian sort of science.

Is such science a Utopian, or Eupsychian—Maslow's preferred word—dream?

Well, yes and no. The replacement of big institutions with unpretentious, fragile, and improvised affairs will not be easy. Freeing people from the habits established by authority is never easy. And even harder than freeing them is developing internal disciplines to take the place of the external controls that are breaking down. To give an example of the sort of problem that will have to be solved: How would you get the multi-nationals to change their ways?

On the other hand, there is a basic consistency between Maslovian science and the rapidly developing ideas of the ecologists and environmental planners—in general, the "organic" decentralists. The latter are concerned with how we may be able to live a more natural, more ecologically intelligent life. Maslow was in effect concerned with the reasons for *choosing* this way of life—with, that is, the psychology of health. The two schemes fit together almost perfectly. Obviously, authoritative mechanistic science will have to be abandoned along with vast industrial enterprises which cannot operate without an assured market of properly subservient and dependent consumers. The techniques of the one require the submission and cooperation of the other.

Another way of confirming this relationship would be to point out that there is really nothing else for us to do, and as more and more people recognize this, the pioneers will be strengthened by growing numbers of volunteer helpers. There are already many people who have lost interest in making a lot of money; they just want to find a way to live decent lives.

Maslow saw this change coming in psychological terms. After speaking of the

reviving interest in man's higher nature and the possibility of a higher life, he wrote (in *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*):

. . . positivistic science—which is for many the only theory of science—proved . . . to be an inadequate source of ethics and values. Faith in the rationalist millennium has also been destroyed. The faith that ethical progress was an inevitable by-product of advances in knowledge of the natural world and in the technological by-products of these advances died with World War I, with Freud, with the depression, with the atom bomb. Perhaps even more shaking, certainly for the psychologist, has been the recent discovery that affluence itself throws into the clearest, coldest light the spiritual, ethical, philosophical hunger of mankind. . . .

Thus we have the peculiar situation in which many intellectuals today find themselves skeptical in every sense, but fully aware of the yearning for a faith or a belief of some kind and aware also of the terrible spiritual (and political) consequences when this yearning has no satisfaction.

And so we have a new language to describe the situation words like anomie, anhedonia, rootlessness, value pathology, meaninglessness, existential boredom, spiritual starvation, other-directedness, the neuroses of success. . . .

As John MacMurray said, "Now is the point in history at which it becomes possible for man to adopt consciously as his own purpose the purpose which is already inherent in his own nature."

This was written (or published) in 1964.

## *REVIEW*

### RESOURCE FOR THE WORLD

METAPHYSICS, as the Buddha made plain, is not for everyone. Quoting the *Majhima Nikaya* (Sutta 63) in *Man in the Universe* (1966), a study of the themes in Indian thought, W. Norman Brown shows the reason for this in the Buddha's thinking. The metaphysical truths—the way the universe is constructed, the structural necessity underlying the moral laws he taught were a net of speculation in which ordinary people are too easily caught, as, indeed, the Brahmins had been caught. The Buddha's discourses are on moral psychology and the ways of right living. He said little in his sermons about states and planes or more recondite matters. And to a logic-chopping questioner, he explained why he would not elucidate the obscure and controversial matters which were so widely debated in his time. Then he said:

And what have I elucidated? Misery have I elucidated; the origin of misery have I elucidated; the cessation of misery have I elucidated; and the path leading to the cessation of misery have I elucidated. And why have I elucidated this? Because this does profit, has to do with the fundamentals of religion, and tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana; therefore have I elucidated it. Accordingly, bear always in mind what it is that I have not elucidated, and what it is that I have elucidated.

Mr. Brown comments:

The Buddha in this way is represented as refusing to be sidetracked into those metaphysical questions which he considered irrelevant, as not tending to edification. He does not say he does not know the answers, and it would be unfair to think he was without opinions on them, for he was a thoughtful man, who is elsewhere described as given to rather involved chains of reasoning. But he had a message for the average mind, which could not comprehend philosophical subtleties, and by avoiding discussion of such subtleties he gave strength to that message.

The strength was very great, so great, in fact, that in the twentieth century a learned Chinese, Hu Shih, spoke gratefully of the Buddhist

conquest of China—wholly accomplished by the spread of moral ideas—as a great benefit to his country over more than a thousand years. Yet it must not be supposed that the people of India had no knowledge of metaphysics. Actually, the doctrines of the *Dhammapada*—regarded as the most faithful to the Buddha's teaching to the multitudes—float in a sea of Upanishadic metaphysics, suggesting that those in whom the intellectual principle was aroused could always kind the ingredients of answers to the questions which begin: Why should I accept or believe this?

Cultural research has shown that simple moral doctrines such as the Buddha taught were at one time very widespread. This was so much the case that Robert Redfield, in *The Primitive World and its Transformations*, was able to generalize the common attitude in a few words:

Primitive man is at once in nature and acting on it, getting his living, taking from it food and shelter. But as that nature is part of the same moral system in which man and the affairs between men also find themselves, man's actions with regard to nature are limited by notions of inherent, not expedient rightness. Even the practical, little-animistic Eskimo obey many exacting food taboos: religious restrictions on practical activity, rituals of propitiation, or personal adjustments to field or forest, abound in ethnological literature. "All economic activities, such as hunting, gathering fuel, cultivating the land, storing food, assume a relatedness to the encompassing universe." And the relatedness is moral or religious. . . .

The difference between the world view of primitive peoples, in which the universe is seen as morally significant, and that of civilized Western peoples, in which that significance is doubted or is not conceived at all, is well brought out in some investigations as to the concept of immanent justice.

This seems the key idea—"immanent justice." Yet this belief in the ultimate moral ordering of all that takes place is not a "primitive" idea at all, but belongs, like the idea of Karma, to the most complex systems of thought the world has known; and it also seems to have spontaneous acceptance from mature minds everywhere, as in Emerson's "Compensation." Why, then, have Western

peoples lost touch with feelings that were once so all-pervasive?

The answer to this question probably lies in the events of the late eighteenth century, when the tyrannies and deceptions of organized religion were violently rejected by armed and angry revolutionists. Since the Renaissance, the most thoughtful men of the West had been asking the "why" questions, and they obtained from the doctors of religion no answers that seemed acceptable. In fact, the refusal of the men of the Church to deal relevantly with the questions raised by awakening minds led to Galileo's outspoken attack on scholastic pretense to knowledge, and the subsequent limitation of scientific inquiry to the physical universe alone.

Today the basic "why" questions—which are all metaphysical—are once more being raised. Their suppression—which has gone on for several hundred years—is no longer tolerated. The result has been a renewal of interest in metaphysics. For this reason, the account given in Mr. Brown's book of Indian metaphysics, the intellectual foundation of the Buddha's moral teaching, becomes of particular interest. In a few paragraphs, he gives the doctrines upon which the moral psychology of the Buddha was based. The conceptions of right action issue from teachings concerning the very nature of things:

Correct or right behavior is viewed as a personal responsibility or duty with a most significant meaning to Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. Particular application of the idea of duty appears as early as in the Rig Veda. There it starts with the notion that our cosmos contains two opposing forces: that of ordered operation, progress, and harmonious cooperation of the parts; and that of disorder, chaos, destruction. The universe in which we live is held to operate under a code or set of principles to keep it going, and this code, this body of cosmic truth or order, has the name *satya* or *rita*. But disorder, known as *anrita*, is ever beating at our universe, tending to disrupt or destroy it. To keep our universe operating smoothly, every being in it has a function. Gods have their specific functions; humans have their functions. No two gods have the same function, and human beings' functions also differ. Each god and each human must

assiduously devote himself to his function. If he fails in performing it, to that extent the operation of the universe is impaired.

Thus the idea of duty is paramount:

The doctrine of rebirth and *karma*, the most characteristic of all Indian religious teachings, employs this notion to its fullest. Every person's slightest action is a determinant of his future state, and the literature in thousands of passages points out in minute detail the correspondence between deed and result.

The heritage in practice of these ideas has been well described by a Western psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson, in his notable book, *Gandhi's Truth*. In fact, it is impossible to understand the extraordinary moral stamina of a man like Gandhi except in the framework of the ancestral religious philosophy and metaphysics of India. The doctrine of *ahimsa*, or harmlessness, is said to represent the highest religion, and Gandhi made it the basis of his life, renaming it non-violence. He explained: "I am fascinated by the law of love. It is the philosopher's stone for me. I know that *Ahimsa* alone can provide a remedy for our ills."

Vinoba Bhave, in some respects Gandhi's successor, shows the same reliance on traditional Indian thought. He and his colleagues in the Sarvodaya ("the good of all") Movement, he has explained, regard themselves as workers for the restoration of the *Satya* or Golden Age. This is the great age, in the cycle of human evolution, when truth prevails. Vinoba has called the Sarvodayites "*Satya-Yaga-karis*," which means that they are those who try to establish a golden age in the present. "*Kari*," Joan Bondurant explains, means "a doer, or one who brings about the condition."

One reason Indian thought has proved so seminal for all the world may lie in the temper of the books studied by her philosophers and teachers. Mr. Brown describes their method, from which present-day inquirers might profit:

The Upanishads are among the world's greatest intellectual creations. They do not teach a single philosophic system nor do they teach a number of

systems, for they are not systematic in their method. They advance ideas in a tentative, experimental fashion, disagreeing with one another and exhibiting an ever-changing series of efforts to penetrate the mystery of the cosmos and man's relation to it. Fresh intellectual approaches are entertained with ready hospitality in the texts and old ideas are abandoned with no regrets . . . they also have an easy and informal literary style and employ narrative parable, illustration, figures of speech, dialogue, Socratic questioning, poetry, all so skillfully and appositely that the didactic purpose never becomes oppressive, while instead they sustain the reader's—or hearer's—lively interest.

Instruction of this sort could produce little bigotry:

The tone of the late Rigvedic speculations and of the Upanishadic teachings is tentative and undogmatic. An idea which is advanced may be discussed and accepted, but before long it may be casually discarded in favor of some new idea that seems more plausible. There is here a tradition of speculation, teaching, belief, development, fresh approach, advance, which cannot fail to win our admiration. It has set a pattern for later Indian religious development. Heresy has hardly been known in the native Indian tradition, and persecution for novel or startling ideas has been a rarity. Mutually contradictory doctrines have been allowed, and are still allowed, to stand side by side in argumentative and unreconciled, but not violently hostile coexistence. There has been an amazing willingness to tolerate another's opinion on intellectual issues, though it may differ from one's own, on the generally accepted theory that no one of us has found the final word, knows the ultimate truth.

Yet the pursuit of that truth has been unremitting. The assumption of final certainty seems to sound the death knell of philosophical inquiry. That may have been the reason why Western religion withered and has now all but died.

## *COMMENTARY*

### A THANKLESS TASK

A COMMON problem in societies regarded as self-governing is the frequently inadequate remedy provided for evil situations by established institutions. For example, the hijacking of planes goes on and on, and the means of preventing this air piracy are always burdensome and often ineffective. Another example is the difficulty any government has in dealing with terrorists who kidnap either eminent or ordinary persons, threatening death to their prisoners if certain demands are not met. And what can a government agency do to stop or prevent child abuse by cruel or indifferent parents? Care, affection, and thoughtful nurturing are what children need, and while the rhetoric of law may recognize this, how can public agencies replace the spontaneous values of parental responsibility?

Institutional solutions for such ills are obviously no more than rear-guard actions. The law and its administrators are charged to do what the people ought to do naturally without being told. The officials may try, but they can't do it well. It isn't really their job. Nearly always, such problems come from the breakdown of relationships depending on a foundation of trust. As someone said recently, "Thirty years ago no one would have even *thought* of hijacking a plane!"

In every human society legal order depends for its function upon some level of moral order which is simply assumed and taken for granted, because it has always been there. But when the moral order shows signs of weakening, we blame the legal order. Yet the legal order is only an institutional expression of the moral order. When the legal order is expected to smooth away the effects of moral failure, only inadequacy, frustration, and misplaced blame can result.

A recent example of the limits of institutional remedies is available in the claim by the self-proclaimed "Nazis" in Skokie, Illinois, of the right

to picket the town's Village Hall, to protest an insurance-bond requirement blocking their use of the parks. Not only did they want to picket, but they wanted to wear storm-trooper uniforms and display swastikas. Confronted by an injunction barring the use of the uniforms, the "Nazis" asked a Civil Liberties Union attorney to defend their rights (under the First Amendment) to hold a peaceable assembly in Skokie.

Skokie happens to be a predominantly Jewish community where several thousand survivors of the Nazi concentration camps now reside.

After conference with his colleagues, David Goldberger, legal director of the Illinois Civil Liberties Union, decided that "the situation posed classic First Amendment questions, leaving us no choice but to intervene." In consequence of the ACLU action, Mr. Goldberger says, "nearly two thousand of the Illinois ACLU's 8,000 members have resigned, as have many other ACLU members across the country." Reduced support has meant that the Union's legal program must be cut back. (*Los Angeles Times*, April 9.)

Time was when *nobody* in America would have thought of doing what the Skokie "Nazis" want to do. That this handful of neurotics now seeks the technical support of a constitutional rule made in behalf of human freedom seems utterly ridiculous, and worse, yet the Illinois ACLU feels that it must preserve the integrity of the rule. No more unpleasant duty can be imagined, nor could there be a more unpopular task.

The only important lesson of the event may be that when a society delegates too many of its moral responsibilities and obligations to institutions, the resulting contradictions always come to a head at the institutional level, where there can be *no* acceptable remedy. Why, then, blame the ACLU?

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### A HARD TIME WRITING

IN the writing of Lafcadio Hearn, craftsmanship in the use of words is so naturally joined with the artist's inspiration that the reader cannot tell where one leaves off and the other begins. This is doubtless why no book about "writing" seems as good as Hearn's *Talks to Writers* (Dodd, Mead, 1927). It is made up of lectures Hearn gave between 1896 and 1902 at the University of Tokyo. In his introduction, John Erskine says:

For the benefit of the reader who may make the acquaintance of Hearn's lectures for the first time in this volume, it should be said that he lectured very slowly, choosing simple words and constructions, in order that the foreign language might be as easy as possible for his Japanese students; and some of his students managed to take down many of his lectures word for word. From their notes—the only record we have of Lafcadio Hearn the teacher—these chapters are selected.

In another part of his introduction, Erskine comes very close to revealing the secret of the excellence of the writer—any writer:

Lafcadio Hearn's ideas about the art of writing are the ideas not of a journalist nor of a theorist, but of one who practices the art. He had a very simple body of doctrine, as available as truth itself, and perhaps as rarely attended to. Probably he would say that he gave his students nothing new; yet what he says comes to us with the force of originality, like all sincere remarks of the craftsman on his experience and his ideals. The most original thing an artist can do, he held, is to tell the truth about life as he has lived it. . . .

The truth is that Hearn started as a disciple of the romantic school, but his intellectual interests were too great to be confined within even romantic horizons. He seems to have been a wide reader in every field, and whatever he read he turned to account in the judgments he pronounced upon life. . . . Lafcadio Hearn taught, therefore, that the art of writing is first of all the art of observing one's relations to life, one's emotions, one's memories, one's mature judgments. In the second place the art of writing is the art of recording these memories,

emotions and judgments. His attitude toward literature needs, perhaps, no further definition.

John Erskine concludes: "If there is, unfortunately, no magic by which a Lafcadio Hearn can teach us to write with his own skill, at least in his talk of his beloved art there is a kindling eloquence that rouses in us something of his own desire to see the beauty of life and to tell the truth about it." Here we seem on the edge of Hearn's secret, which might be put thus: Good writing is always preceded by good thinking, and great writing follows only from great thinking. There are times when great writing is more or less independent of technique. It occurs when the ideas expressed are so majestic, so generating, that they find the right words and rhythms of expression by their own attractive power. The writer is *led* by the muse. Eloquence is a flowering of thought.

What is thinking? Put simply, it is the dialogue one holds with oneself. The first requirement of good writing—careful observation—need not involve this dialogue. Fine reporters are often shallow thinkers. The excellence of what they do may have sensuous symmetry, but it lacks "kindling eloquence." The great writer is one for whom the dialogue with oneself is fatefully serious, and who holds himself to the highest standards he knows. The artist is both judge and jury of this internal process. His judgments of himself are more important than any other opinion. This is the Socratic canon, given by Hannah Arendt in her essay on "Thinking and Moral Considerations." In the *Gorgias* Socrates says to Callicles: "It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict *me*."

To be *one*, yet two in inner dialogue, is the unique endowment of human beings. It makes thinking possible. The power of the writer is

developed by uncompromising attention to the Socratic rule.

A book likely to convey this conception of good writing is *Writing without Teachers* (Galaxy paperback, \$1.95) by Peter Elbow. At the end of his preface he says:

The teacherless writing class is a place where there is learning but no teaching. It is possible to learn something and not be taught. It is possible to be a student and not have a teacher. If the student's function is to learn and the teacher's to teach, then the student can function without a teacher, but the teacher cannot function without a student. I was surprised and chagrined that in twenty years of being a student and eight years of teaching I had not before formulated this homely truth. I think teachers learn to be more *useful* when it is clearer that they are not *necessary*.

All good teachers seem to reach this conclusion. Ortega reached it and developed its implications in an essay on the fraud of claiming that education is the "transmission of the cultural heritage." This, he said, is a way of filling students' heads with other men's ideas—without questioning, without *thinking* about the ideas. The teacher must avoid this anti-educational practice, recognizing that he has only one legitimate goal: to generate in the students, by whatever means he can find, the hunger to know.

This, indeed, was the Socratic mission. As Hannah Arendt says:

He called himself a gadfly and a midwife, and, according to Plato, was called by somebody else an "electric ray," a fish that paralyzes and numbs by contact, a likeness whose appropriateness he recognized under the condition that it be understood that "the electric ray paralyzes others only through being paralyzed itself. It isn't that, knowing the answers myself I perplex other people. The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself." Which, of course, sums up neatly the only way thinking can be taught—except that Socrates, as he repeatedly said, did not teach anything for the simple reason that he had nothing to teach; he was "sterile" like the midwives in Greece who were beyond the age of childbearing.

Socrates compelled attention by his questions, while never pretending that he knew more than anyone else. We certainly need that kind of teacher. Veritable geniuses who have their own Socratic *daimon* may not need him; Ortega's ideal, who was the student that distrusts everything anyone tries to teach him—who will probably rewrite the textbooks supplied by his professors—may not need him; but the rest of us do.

Mr. Elbow's students probably all feel grateful to him for getting them going. He has his own version of the Platonic idea of thinking:

Language is the principal medium that allows you to interact with yourself. (Painters do it with shapes and colors, composers with musical sounds.) Without a symbol system such as language, it is difficult if not impossible to think about more than one thing at a time, and thus to allow two thoughts to interact and cook. Putting a thought into symbols means setting it down and letting the mind take a rest from it. With language you can put an idea or feeling or perception into words—put it in your cud or put it in the freezer—and then go on to have a different one and not lose the first. In this way you can entertain two thoughts or feelings at the same time or think about the relationship between two thoughts or feelings. A principal value of language, therefore, is that it permits you to *distance* yourself from your own perceptions, feelings, and thoughts.

Perhaps the best recommendation of Mr. Elbow's book is in his preface:

The authority I call upon in writing a book about writing is my own longstanding difficulty in writing. It has always seemed to me as though people who wrote without turmoil and torture were in a completely different universe. And yet advice about writing always seemed to come from them and therefore to bear no relation to us who struggled and usually failed to write. But in the last few years I have struggled more successfully to get things written and make them work for at least some readers, and in watching myself do this I have developed the conviction that I can give advice that speaks more directly to the experience of having a hard time writing. I have also reached the conviction that if you have special difficulty in writing, you are not necessarily further from writing well than someone who writes more easily.

## FRONTIERS

### Act of Rescue

IN his introduction to George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, Lionel Trilling recalled a student's impulsive comment about Orwell—"He was a virtuous man!"—and made it the basis of what he would say. This is indeed what comes through in Orwell's books—that he was a virtuous man. Trilling stressed his "ability to look at things in a downright, undeceived way."

He seems to be serving not some dashing daimon but the plain, solid Gods of the Copybook Maxims. He is not a genius—what a relief! What an encouragement. For he communicates to us the sense that what he has done, any one of us could do. . . .

He implies that our job is not to be intellectual, certainly not to be intellectual in this fashion or that but merely to be intellectual according to our lights—he restores the old sense of democracy of the mind, releasing us from the belief that the mind can work only in a technical professional way and that it must work competitively. He has the effect of making us believe that we may become full members of the society of thinking men. That is why he is a figure for us.

This is surely one of the important frontiers of the present. We are such recent graduates of the school of ideological thinking—in which simple virtues are sneered at as distractions from social morality—that even the names of the virtues have been largely censored out of the modern vocabulary. They had already been weakened and made unpopular by the absence in scientific thinking of any ground for virtue, and the people who wanted to talk about them had to invent new terms. We don't say any more, "He's an honest man," but that he is "authentic," or something like that.

Well, perhaps we do need a new language. The old, moralizing words make us uncomfortable, mostly by reason of their association with systems of belief now reduced almost to dust. But the need for the virtues is evident on almost every hand. Among present-day writers, Wendell Berry seems to do more than

anyone else to generate a fresh feeling for the old ideas of virtue. He does this without preaching in *The Unsettling of America*.

A book published ten years ago—*Slouching Towards Bethlehem* by Joan Didion—has an essay in it which accomplishes the same thing. This writer simply records her own musings about life. The virtue she considers is "Self-Respect," and she was driven to reflect on this seldom-understood quality by what happened to her when she failed to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa:

Although even the humorless nineteen-year-old that I was must have recognized that the situation lacked real tragic stature, the day that I did not make Phi Beta Kappa nonetheless marked the end of something, and innocence may well be the word for it. I lost the conviction that lights would always turn green for me, the pleasant certainty that those rather passive virtues which had won me approval as a child automatically guaranteed me not only Phi Beta Kappa keys but happiness, honor, and the love of a good man; lost a certain touching faith in the totem power of good manners, clean hair, and proven competence on the Stanford-Binet scale. To such doubtful amulets had my self-respect been pinned, and I faced myself that day with the nonplussed apprehension of someone who has come across a vampire and has no crucifix at hand.

Obviously, you are going to read on. Anyone who writes with such unostentatious candor, at the same time so colorfully, can discourse on anything she likes—even one of the virtues—and we'll read her carefully. The clichés are no longer clichés. Good writers perform such acts of rescue for almost lost but worthy ideas.

Although to be driven back upon oneself is an uneasy affair at best, rather like trying to cross a border with borrowed credentials, it seems to me now the one condition necessary to the beginnings of real self-respect. Most of our platitudes notwithstanding, self-deception remains the most difficult deception. The tricks that work on others count for nothing in that very well-lit back alley where one keeps assignations with oneself; no winning smiles will do here, no prettily drawn lists of good intentions. One shuffles flashily but in vain through one's marked cards—the kindness done for the wrong reason, the apparent triumph which involved no real effort, the

seemingly heroic act into which one had been shamed. The dismal fact is that self-respect has nothing to do with the approval of others—who are, after all, deceived easily enough; has nothing to do with reputation which, as Rhett Butler told Scarlett O'Hara, is something people with courage can do without. . . .

This essay has only six pages, yet is far better than six hundred of exhortation. This may be because it is no more than Joan Didion talking to herself.

To live without self-respect is to lie awake some night beyond the reach of warm milk, phenobarbital, and the sleeping hand upon the coverlet, counting up the sins of omission and commission, the trusts betrayed, the promises subtly broken, the gifts irrevocably wasted through sloth or cowardice or carelessness. However long we postpone it, we eventually lie down alone in that notoriously uncomfortable bed, the one we make ourselves. Whether or not we sleep in it depends, of course, on whether we respect ourselves.

. . . people with self-respect have the courage of their mistakes. They know the price of things. If they choose to commit adultery, they do not then go running, in an access of bad conscience, to receive absolution from the wronged parties; nor do they complain unduly of the unfairness, the undeserved embarrassment, of being named co-respondent. In brief, people with self-respect exhibit a certain toughness, a kind of moral nerve; they display what was once called *character*, a quality which, although approved in the abstract, sometimes loses ground to other, more instantly negotiable virtues.

What is character? It is better to know it by encounters in life than to attempt abstract definitions. Writers like Wendell Berry and Joan Didion mine the experiences of life to give this splendid word a fresh and deeper meaning.