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PUZZLING AND IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

WHAT one gets in the mail is an inexhaustible source of material for discussion. The letters and brochures that come invariably speak to "interest"—two kinds of interest, either self-interest or public interest. The self-interest appeals tell about ways to get rich, what to do with what money you have in order to double or triple it—how to invest it for extraordinary profit. They want to sell you something. The other appeals are to the human concern for suffering, here and in other lands, with having a good country, with the sort of social organization and law which will prove equitable—fair—for everybody. These communications tell you about the bad things that are being done by both industry and government, and what we must do to control the offenders. The public interest appeals are usually fund-raising efforts to obtain the money needed to mount a more effective campaign of public education for the common good. To respond to all of them with donations—and they all seem worthy enough—would require you to be rich, but the fact is that the people who feel sympathy for these causes, or most of them, are not likely to be rich, or even much interested in getting rich. And when you think of all the money spent on people good at the rhetoric needed to write the appeals, on design and printing, and then on postage to send them to thousands or hundreds of thousands of people—well, it doesn't seem the right way to go at our public problems.

But what else can they—we—do?

All we can do, at this point, is ask some more questions. We found two that apply in A. H. Maslow's *Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Viking, 1971), containing material assembled toward the end of his life and published a year after his death. In a note at the beginning of a chapter (15) on "Questions for the Normative Social Psychologists," he told about a semester-long seminar he arranged for senior and graduate students at Brandeis University. The subject was Utopian Social Psychology. It would offer, he said—

> Discussion of selected Utopian and Eupsychian writings. The seminar will concern itself with the empirical and realistic questions: How good a society does human nature permit? How good a human nature does society permit? What is possible and feasible? What is not?

The first two questions are surely the most important to ask at the outset. The first one, How good a society does human nature permit?, has implicit in it the old Socratic inquiry: Can virtue be taught? The second question leads to wondering if Thoreau was right in declaring that the best government is the least government. Are there, one must ask, people who require a lot of government, and are they few or many? And then: But will providing them with a lot of government get in the way of their personal development; if so, what on earth do you do?

In this chapter Maslow asks twenty-nine questions, all of them important. Answers are not given, but are sometimes implied. The two paragraphs of introduction are valuable:

> Make the general assumption that no normative social thinking is possible until we have some idea of *the individual goal,* i.e., the kind of person to aim to be and by which to judge the adequacy of any society. I proceed on the assumption that the good society, and therefore the immediate goal of any society which is trying to improve itself, is the self-actualization of all individuals, or some norm or goal approximating this. (Transcendence of self—living at the level of Being—is assumed to be most possible for the person with a strong and free identity, i.e., for the self-actualizing person. This will necessarily involve consideration of societal arrangements, education, etc., that make transcendence more possible.) The question here is: Do we have a trustworthy, reliable conception of the healthy or desirable or transcending

> or ideal person? Also this normative idea is itself moot and debatable. Is it possible to improve a society without having some idea of what one considers to be an improved human being?
>
> We must also have some notion, I assume, of the *autonomous social requirements* (which are independent of the intrapsychic or of individual psychological health or maturity). I assume that the idea of personal improvement, one person by one person, is not a practicable solution of the problem of improving society. Even the best individuals placed under poor social and institutional circumstances behave badly. One can set up social institutions which will guarantee that individuals will be at each other's throats; or one can set up social institutions which will encourage individuals to be synergic with each other. That is, one can set up social conditions so that one person's advantage would be to another person's advantage rather than the other person's disadvantage. This is a basic assumption and is debatable, and ought to be demonstrable.

How, then, shall we find out when a society is as good as human nature permits? Which is similar to asking which plans and projects are feasible with human nature in its existing state. Then there is the question of whether it is possible to "lead" human nature to a higher level of accomplishment, given the right provocatives? The answers to such questions must of necessity be speculative, although a partial answer to the last one might be obtained by considering how well the people of the new American Republic measured up to the obligations of the Constitution completed by the Founding Fathers in 1787.

But this, in the present, raises other questions—like those which troubled Jefferson's mind. He knew, as Hannah Arendt notes in *On Revolution* (Viking, 1963), "however dimly, that the Revolution, while it had given freedom to the people, had failed to provide a space where this freedom could be exercised."

> Only the representatives of the people, not the people themselves, had an opportunity to engage in those activities of "expressing, discussing and deciding" which in a positive sense are the activities of freedom. And since the state and federal governments, the proudest results of revolution, through sheer weight of their proper business were bound to overshadow the townships and their meeting halls—until what Emerson still considered to be "the unit of the Republic" and "the school of the people" in political matters had withered away—one might even come to the conclusion that there was less opportunity for the exercise of public freedom and the enjoyment of public happenings in the republic of the United States than there had existed in the colonies of British America. Lewis Mumford recently pointed out how the political importance of the township was never grasped by the founders, and that the failure to incorporate it into either the federal or the state constitutions was "one of the tragic oversights of post-revolutionary political development." Only Jefferson among the founders had a clear premonition of this tragedy, for his greatest fear was indeed lest "the abstract political system of democracy lacked concrete organs."

Today, with the enormous expansion of the power of nation-states and the centralization of both wealth and authority—together with the concomitant and ever-present threat of nuclear war—many people are beginning to look kindly at the arguments in defense of the Articles of Confederation, not minding the charge of "national weakness" that was made by the Federalists. Only the weak states of the present, it is said, can avoid being terrorists. And only the small units remain capable of practicing democracy.

Yet fear, along with tradition, stand in the way of the weakening of national sovereignty, setting limits to what can be done toward political design according to bioregional boundaries which would make possible at least a partial return to direct democracy and rule by the town meeting. An achievement of this sort, as a "test" of the potentialities of human nature, lies in the future.

How else can we deal with this somewhat amorphous but crucial question?

A contemporary historian, William Appleman Williams, who happens to be among the social critics who now recall the virtues of the Articles of Confederation, has assembled material for measuring the quality of human nature when confronted by a crisis, in this case the Great

Depression which began in 1929. How did the people respond? William gets at this question by examination of the principles and practice of Herbert Hoover, who was, Williams says, "an unusually intelligent, and often perceptive, conservative who understood that the system was a system; that it was based on certain clear and not wholly absurd axioms, and that it would work only if the people acted in ways that honored those principles."

The estimate and character analysis of Hoover by Williams is necessary to understanding why the experience of the Depression may be regarded as a legitimate test of American human nature. We take the historian's judgment as given, since it is based on a study of the relevant documents, with conclusions that seem as impartial as any socialist critic could arrive at. He begins by quoting Hoover's credo (our extracts are taken from a small book, *Some Presidents*, published in 1972 by *The New York Review*):

> "I want to live in a community that governs itself," Hoover explained very simply, "that neither wishes its responsibilities onto a centralized bureaucracy nor allows a centralized bureaucracy to dictate that local government." "It is not the function of government," he continued, "to relieve individuals of their responsibilities to their neighbors, or to relieve private institutions of their responsibilities to the public." "You cannot extend the mastery of the government over the daily working life of a people," he warned "without at the same time making it the master of the people's souls and thoughts."
>
> If you are Hoover, that is to say, then your moral imperative demands that you let the system come apart at the seams rather than violate the principles by saving the system *for* the people. One of your principles is that the system is *their* system, and hence the moment *you* save it *for* them you kill the dream. For when you do that you *rule* the people instead of serving the people. And the commitments to honoring principles, and to service, are Quaker creed. Perhaps, even, *the* Quaker faith. And Hoover was a Quaker.

Williams turns to what another historian or biographer has called Hoover's dream, and says:

> Hoover's dream was that the people—the farmers, the workers, the businessmen, and the politicians—would pull themselves together *and then join together* to meet their needs and fulfill their potential by honoring the principles of the system.
>
> That dream defined both the basis and the nature of his anti-depression program. In his view, the government could ". . . best serve the community by bringing about cooperation in the large sense between groups. It is the failure of groups to respond to their responsibilities to others that drives government more and more into the lives of the people."
>
> Thus he offered ideas, his own influence, the services of the national government, and increasing monetary help short of massive federal intervention. But he could not go beyond his commitment to the principle that the people were responsible—"this is the people's problem"—and embark upon what he considered the "disastrous course" of centralized, irresponsible, and increasingly irresponsive and manipulatory bureaucracy.
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> As it happened, he did provide more federal aid than had been offered in any other depression, and would have supplied far more if the Democrats had not defeated or spiked a long list of proposals after their victory in the 1930 Congressional elections. And he did in truth block out the basic shape of the New Deal. But he simply could not give over and admit through his actions that he had abandoned his commitment to an American community and to the spirit and will of the people. . . .
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> You have to take Hoover whole. He should have given more direct relief. . . . He should have offered more of himself sooner to the people and he should have held fast to that beautiful faith in the people. The visceral truth of it all is that Hoover was done in by his faith in the dream of a cooperative American community, and by his ruthless intellectual analysis of what would happen if the dream was not honored. . . .
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> Hoover was traumatized by the failure of the people to take charge of their immediate lives and then join together in cooperative action, and by his terrifying insight into what the future would be if the people continued to duck their obligation—or if they settled for less.
>
> Do not laugh. Hoover outlined our future in 1923. We are living in it now. We do not like it. And even yet we have not taken charge of our immediate lives so that we can then come together and create an American community. We have *let* the

future that Hoover foresaw in 1923 *happen to us.* Hoover *did not do it to us*.

There are nine more pages of analysis of Hoover's thinking and policy in this chapter of Williams' book, all intensely interesting. We are quoting from it not in behalf of any partisan political contention, but to provide what seems light on Maslow's two basic questions. (There is of course also the matter of justice to a much misunderstood man. Williams honors above all Hoover's personal integrity.)

"Hoover," Williams says, "knew modern American industrial society better than *any* other President."

> It takes one to know one. And he had been one. And had become increasingly disturbed and concerned. Let us begin in 1909, with the chapter on labor in his famous (and still used) exposition of the *Principles of Mining.* "The time when the employer could ride roughshod over his labor is disappearing with the doctrine of *'laissez faire,'* on which it was founded." Indeed, unions were "normal and proper antidotes for unlimited capitalistic organization." The good engineer "never begrudges a division with his men of the increased profit arising from increased efficiency." . . . .
>
> Of course it is capitalistic. And of course it has a tinge of paternalism. But it is personal, it is moral, and it reveals an awareness that the past is past—and that the corporation poses a serious danger to the community.

One conclusion by Williams:

> It is easy to say that Hoover's dream involves an unresolvable contradiction: that a people's capitalism of the kind he envisioned is like a round square. And the criticism is deadly if you see Hoover as nothing more than a Quaker Rockefeller. But when a man talks seriously about the need for grass-roots cooperation in order to secure and maintain the opportunity for individual fulfillment, then he is not discussing orthodox capitalism. He is headed, however cautiously, and even unknowingly, toward a transitional kind of political economy. It might indeed be impossible to realize that kind of society, and certainly we have not created it, but Hoover was correct about the other options if we did not break out of our traditional *Weltanschauung*.
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> If the people abdicated their responsibility for realizing the dream, and instead relied on the government, Hoover projected a period of increasingly unsuccessful bureaucratic pseudo-socialism. And then, "in the United States the reaction from such chaos will not be more Socialism but will be toward Fascism." . . .
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> Once again, of course, Hoover can be damned for not breaking free of capitalism. He can be faulted, for example, for not realizing that it was impossible to depoliticalize trade and investment in a market place system. But I have thought that one measures capitalist leaders not by how socialist they are, but by the extent to which they understand and try to overcome the classic inequities of capitalism without at the same time moving toward fascism or bureaucratic statism.

Hoover, one might say, in an effort of this sort, made the mistake of believing that the people, all classes, would respond to the crisis of the depression as he as an individual would, and did. But this faith was misplaced. The focus of human nature, in an acquisitive society, is on personal acquisition, not on cooperation involving personal sacrifice. From its early days our republic has been populated by individuals intent upon satisfaction of their own desires, for whom freedom, as John Schaar notes in one of his essays, meant "freedom from inherited authorities and freedom to get rich."

> Millions upon millions of Americans strive for that goal and, what is more important, base their political views upon it. The state is a convenience in a private search, and when that search seems to succeed, it is no wonder that men tend to deny the desirability of political bonds, of acting together with others for the life that is just for all. 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. (*New American Review*, No. 8.)

This, then, has been the bent given to "human nature" by the interests and habits of both the leaders and the led. These influences have had a determining effect on the way people feel and act

under the pressure of bad times. A good society is hardly permitted by the human nature given to these tendencies.

Hoover, it seems fair to say, was concerned about the quality of human nature that society permits. He didn't think that either a fascist or a bureaucratic state would permit human nature to develop in the right direction. However many mistakes he made, whatever his blindness in 1929, he could not have been wrong in this. So, Maslow's questions can hardly have firm answers, which in a way only increases their importance.

Meanwhile, a remark by William Appleman Williams in his Introduction to *Some Presidents* is directly relevant to the questions:

> There are only two ways to govern a continent. One is to assert and enforce the will of a minority or a well-organized plurality. The other is to divide the continent into natural regional communities and allow each people to decide its own fate—including its relationships with other such communities.

One has the feeling that neither society nor human nature will permit much of anything good to develop until we get around to the second solution of the problem of government—a solution which should largely eliminate the "problem" aspect of government by adopting Thoreau's formula.

REVIEW
THEY HAVE THE TIME

As the weeks go by, there are times when your reviewer seeks relief from reporting on current books which, while having merit, are not reading which lifts or stirs, but simply informs. So, this week, we turn to one of Plato's books, the *Theatetus,* concerned with an interlude in the life of Socrates which came shortly before his trial and execution. The dialogue involves three persons—Socrates, Theodorus, an older man, and a promising youth named Theatetus, who somewhat resembles Socrates in looks. The question they attempt to answer, although not successfully, is "What is Knowledge?" But as Socrates notes at the end, they have found out how little they know about this and other matters, so that they are at least relieved of much of the vanity of ignorance. But in addition, while pursuing the question, Socrates brings in what his companions term "digressions," and his hearers find these incidental explorations of great value, and are grateful for them.

A failure as the dialogue is in terms of its declared objective, the reader is soon impressed by Plato's skill as an expositor. He starts with a conversation between two men who do not figure in the discussion. One of them tells how he spent time with Theatetus when he returned, sorely wounded, from a war, and learned of his conversation with Socrates. Then, later, he asked Socrates about the meeting, and in time, through repeated questioning, he obtained a complete account of what was said by each of the three. Of the style of the report, the compiler says:

> You see how I wrote the conversation—not in narrative form, as I heard it from Socrates, but as a dialogue between him and the other persons he told me had taken part. These were Theodorus the geometer and Theatetus. I wanted to avoid in the written account the tiresome effect of bits of narrative interrupting the dialogue, such as 'and I said' or 'and I remarked' wherever Socrates was speaking of himself, and 'he assented' or 'he did not agree, where he reported the answer. So I left out everything of that sort, and wrote it as a direct conversation between the actual speakers.

In the quest for a definition of knowledge, Socrates gets down to business by quoting from Protagoras, an older philosopher who had been a pupil of Democritus. He became rich from the large fees he commanded as a popular Sophist, yet like other talented men was exiled from Attica for teaching what were held to be impious doctrines. The often repeated expression which Socrates recalled from Protagoras was the saying, "Man is the measure of all things." On several grounds, Socrates shows how misleading is this rule. First of all, since all material things are in flux, changing or "becoming" all the time, the measure a man takes at one moment will be different in the next. Moreover, each man's sense endowment is different from that of others, so that his measure will be different, and only endless relativities can be the conclusion of the measures provided by a number of men—utterly unreliable as estimates of the thing in itself. In short, the measures provided by men cannot be called knowledge.

The business of the senses is shown to be perception. But since perceptions vary, they do not constitute knowledge, so that seeing, which is a form of perception, is not knowledge. Eventually it becomes evident that closer to knowledge than perception is our reflection on our perceptions. So the mind, with which we reflect, is perhaps the instrument for obtaining knowledge. After all, reflection leads to judgment, and judgment is what we act upon, presuming it to be knowledge.

What, in effect, Theatetus asks, is thinking? How do you describe it? Socrates replies:

> As a discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering. You must take this explanation as coming from an ignoramus, but I have the notion that, when the mind is thinking, it is simply talking to itself, asking questions and answering them, and saying yes or no. When it reaches a decision—which may come slowly or in a sudden rush—when doubt is over and the two voices affirm the same thing, then we shall call that its

> "judgment." So I should describe thinking as discourse, and judgment as a statement pronounced, not aloud to someone else, but silently to oneself.

Yet judgments, too, Socrates shows, may be in error. And that is about as far as the dialogue gets. Along the way, however, there have been valuable insights gained, especially with respect to the function of the mind. The mind receives the deliveries of the senses, and then reflects upon their possible meanings, but the mind also deliberates concerning matters of which the senses are wholly unaware—such as the meanings of things, and what is honorable and what dishonorable. The mind may also reflect upon the very *existence* of things, an activity in no way possible for the senses. What, Socrates asks Theatetus, is the organ by which the mind conceives of such questions? The young man replies:

> Really, Socrates, I could not say, except that I think there is no special organ at all for these things, as there is for others. It is clear to me that the mind itself is its own instrument for contemplating the common terms that apply to everything.

Socrates exclaims:

> In fact, Theatetus, you are handsome, not ugly as Theodorus said you were, for in a discussion handsome is that handsome does. And you have treated me more than handsomely in saving me the trouble of a very long argument, if it is clear to you that the mind contemplates some things through its own instrumentality, others through the bodily faculties. That was indeed what I thought myself, but I wanted you to agree.

One suspects, after reading this dialogue, that knowledge is not something to which finality can ever be applied, but Socrates would rather have the inquiry seem inconsequential than discourage the participants with this conclusion as an apodictic (indisputable) certainty. Pursuing a certainty which does not exist may be vastly instructive concerning all the relativities of existence, and he hoped that this sophistication would develop in his companions, so long as their ardor in the search remained unreduced.

But what of the wonderful digressions? The one that seems most fruitful comes as Socrates' explanation of why he does not mind seeming to be ridiculous to others. It is natural, he says, "that men who have spent much time in philosophical studies should look ridiculous when they appear as speakers in a court of law." Theodorus asks him to say more about this and Socrates begins to make his real point: "When you compare men who have knocked about from their youth up in law courts and such places with others bred in philosophical pursuits, the one set seem to have been trained as slaves, the others as free men."

In what way? Theodorus asks, and Socrates recalls that Theodorus had remarked that the three of them need not be in a hurry to reach a conclusion: they had the time to think; so Socrates says:

> In the way you spoke of. The free man always has time at his disposal to converse in peace at his leisure. He will pass, as we are doing now, from one argument to another—we have just reached the third. Like us, he will leave the old for a fresh one which takes his fancy more, and he does not care how long or short the discussion may be, if only it attains the truth. The orator is always talking against time, hurried on by the clock; there is no space to enlarge upon any subject he chooses, but the adversary stands over him ready to recite a schedule of the points to which he must confine himself. He is a slave disputing about a fellow slave before a master sitting in judgment with some definite plea in his hand, and the issue is never indifferent, but his personal concerns are always at stake, sometimes even his life. Hence he acquires a tense and bitter shrewdness; he knows how to flatter his master and earn his good graces but his mind is narrow and crooked. An apprenticeship in slavery has dwarfed and twisted his growth and robbed him of his free spirit, driving him into devious ways, threatening him with fears and dangers which the tenderness of youth could not face with truth and honesty, so, turning from the first to lies and the requital of wrong with wrong, warped and stunted, he passes from youth to manhood with no soundness in him and turns out, in the end, a man of formidable intellect—as he imagines.

So the driving lawyer, the concentrated businessman, the conscientious administrator who

knows the rules of his profession, is nonetheless a slave, while the philosopher, indifferent to profit and loss, winning or losing, may be laughed at for falling into a well in his path because his attention is removed from earthly things. Socrates goes on, saying of the philosopher:

> He hears of the marvelous wealth of some landlord who owns ten thousand acres or more, but that seems a small matter to one accustomed to think of the earth as a whole. When they harp upon birth—some gentleman who can point to seven generations of wealthy ancestors—he thinks that such commendation must come from men of purblind vision, too uneducated to keep their eyes fixed on the whole or to reflect that any man has countless myriads of ancestors and among them any number of rich men and beggars, kings and slaves, Greeks and barbarians.

But when the practical man of affairs and a philosopher meet, the latter is likely to bring the mind of his companion far above these earthly matters, so that the comparison between them is reversed—the practical man is made dizzy at such an unaccustomed height and he "will be laughed at, not by maidservants and the uneducated—they will not see what is happening—but by everyone whose breeding has been the antithesis of a slave's."

No wonder the Athenian men of affairs ordered death for Socrates.

COMMENTARY
HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?

THE Laucks Foundation in Santa Barbara (P.O. Box 5019), Calif. 93150, reprints material on the issues of peace and war. Its sixty-seventh mailing presents the last November *Esquire* article, "Why Men Love War" by William Broyles. T'he *macho* element in many males will cause them to agree with this writer, although he admits that they "hate" war too. Following this article is comment by Harold Thornton, of Santa Barbara, who asks:

> If war is so devastating, why do we court it? . . .
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> It seems probable that the answer to our militaristic behavior is that a sizeable number of our citizens—mainly men—*like* war! And probably for some in key positions, the emotion is even stronger: they *love* war! . . . Too many people in our power structure seem to *like the arms race*. It's profitable! Not only does our country seem to like military hardware—apparently we are addicted to it and would have economic DT's if it were withdrawn. . . .

He recalls the exchange of letters between Einstein and Freud in 1932. Einstein asked: "How is it possible for a small clique to bend the will of the majority who stand to lose and suffer by a state of war? . . . How is it these devices succeed so well in arousing men to such wild enthusiasm, even to sacrifice their lives?" Einstein then replied: "Only one answer is possible. Because man has within him a lust for hatred and destruction. In normal times this passion exists in a latent state; it emerges only in unusual circumstances; but it is a comparatively easy task to call it into play and raise it to the power of a collective psychosis." Freud, who also replied, asked another question:

> Why do we, you and I and many another, protest so vehemently against war, instead of just accepting it as another of life's odious importunities? . . . Because every man has a right over his own life and war destroys lives that were full of promise; it forces the individual into situations that shame his manhood, obliging him to murder fellow men against his will; it ravages material amenities, the fruits of human toil, and much besides.

That was in 1932. Today, as Mr. Thornton says, "much" has become "all." Would those two distinguished thinkers, were they alive, now say something more? Perhaps so. People are beginning to understand more.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
BACK TO THE GREEKS

IN his introduction to Gustav Schwab's *Gods and Heroes—Myths and Epics of Ancient Greece* (Pantheon paperback, $7.95), Werner Jaeger begins by saying that this book seemed just right for his daughter, good not only for children but for adults, too. There should, he suggests, be such books for children, but grown-ups have a similar need. Jaeger, possibly the greatest and best of the classical scholars in recent times, then says that the Greeks themselves felt that both young and old should share in the riches of myth:

> Plato wanted the future citizens of his ideal republic to begin their literary education with the telling of myths rather than mere facts or rational teachings. This plan of the great philosopher of education mirrors the life of Greece as it then was, for there too the education of man—the *paideia*—began with the telling of myths, just as later in the Christian era, Bible stories and legends of the lives of the saints were the basis of all education.
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> But in the life of a Greek of the classical age myths never ceased to be a subject of deep interest. In early childhood they were the first food for his spirit, which he sucked in, as it were, with his mother's milk. And as he grew older, he returned to them again on a higher plane when he was introduced to the masterpieces of the Greek poets. Now it is true that even today millions of people learn the ancient Greek myths through reading Homer in modern translations; but at that time the mythical tradition reached Greek youth through hundreds of other channels besides the stories of the Trojan cycle which survive in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, for the poetry as well as the art of Greece was chiefly concerned with shaping the traditional legends. What the boy had eagerly absorbed as exciting stories, the youth found brought in its most perfect form in the art and poetry of his people. And later, when he grew to manhood, Homer's characters passed before his eyes on the stage of the Greek theater, in the tragedies of Aeschylus Sophocles, and Euripides, where their destinies no longer seemed a tale of long ago, but of immediate dramatic interest The audience which filled the benches at these performances regarded the events and sufferings they beheld as the most profound expression of the meaning of all human life.

Jaeger's introduction is itself a short course on cultural history, with emphasis on the role of myth. As author of the three-volume work, *Paideia* (Oxford University Press), he is naturally equipped to provide this sort of instruction and to discuss the psychological role of myth in human development. Schwab's book, *Gods and Heroes*, however, does not do this (except for Jaeger's introduction), but simply tells the great stories of the major myths, which include Prometheus, the Argonauts, Heracles, Theseus, Oedipus, the tale of the Iliad and the adventures of Odysseus, and a host of other mythic figures, making a volume of nearly 750 pages. Jaeger concludes:

> . . . this book is meant not only for children but also for the childlike spirit of the young and old alike. It conveys a breath of the imperishable strength of youth in Greek genius, which is perhaps most alive and beautiful in the myth. The Greeks felt this themselves. Plato called the mythical period of Greek poetry the flowering time of his people. In a certain sense this strength has never left the Greeks. "You Greeks are always children; there is no such thing as an old Greek," said an Egyptian priest, the representative of an age-old civilization, to Solon, the sage of Athens, who came to Egypt by ship to see the wonders of the land of the Nile. These words of Plato's are quoted from the *Timaeus*, the work of his old age, and Plato himself bears surpassing witness to the inexhaustible impulse of the Greeks to create myths in an era (the fourth century B.C.) in which the mythical tradition seemed to be dying off everywhere else. In his dialogues he invented a new kind of myth which blends old mythical elements of symbolic force with new philosophical ideas. Even Aristotle, Plato's greatest pupil, the master of pure reason, once said: "The friend of wisdom (*philosophos*) is also a friend of the myth (*philomythos*)." That is how the most profound spirits among the Greeks thought at the zenith of their civilization.

Only now, as the hold of "scientific rationalism" on the modern mind is loosening, are we beginning to appreciate the value of myth in education—indeed, in all processes of imaginative thought. In the nineteenth century scholars such

as Max Muller, the distinguished philologist, popularized the claim that "mythology is a disease of language," and in the first half of this century educators frowned on both myths and fairy tales for use with children. But through the efforts of such writers as Bruno Bettelheim and some others, we are now recovering from this mechanistic delusion.

How, after all, do the myths serve our thought? We might think of them as virtually indispensable generalizations. A generalization is a form of abstraction. Number is an abstraction which reduces content to the purely quantitative aspect of what is being considered. In this sense number is enormously useful, since the laws of physics are concerned with the quantitative aspect of physical things, yet turning things into numbers does have a reductive effect on our thinking, tending to make us mistake the numerical abstractions for the realities they represent. Algebra, for example, does this to geometry.

Myths are another kind of generalization, but instead of being reductive, they enrich. Myths deal with fundamental human relationships and the relationships between man and nature—the gods, after all, may be taken to represent nature. They add the drama of wonderful stories to our thought about these relationships. Think of what the story of Sisyphus teaches us concerning the human situation, of which Albert Camus wrote his remarkable essay. Think of the story of Prometheus as a classical archetype of every savior legend; remember the tortures of Tantalus, for his offense against the gods—always reaching, never obtaining, eternally unsatisfied. Myths served the Greeks, and in some measure ourselves, as dramatic images in our vocabulary of situations and meanings. Jaeger puts it well:

> The Greek mind had the capacity of detecting the basic law, not only in all human beings, but in all things. They called this "idea" inherent in everything and every human creature the "form of its being." Aeschylus saw Prometheus as a creative genius, inspired by warm love for suffering humanity, always ready to help the weak but defiant toward the higher powers and egregiously self-confident. Antigone is the idealist who readily sacrifices herself to the claims of divine law. Full of tender love for her dead brother to whom his fellow-citizens deny the rites of burial because they regard him as a traitor, she is fanatically inflexible in her opposition to the laws of worldly power which claim her as their victim. Achilles, a character of heroic greatness, is essentially noble, and just because of this, he loves honor and is given to sudden anger against everyone who offends this sense of honor. Oedipus has an agile and penetrating brain and solves every riddle with the greatest ease; but he is nevertheless blind to his own share in the disaster he unwittingly brings upon his city and his people. Bellerophon is a great hero in his fight against all external dangers and resists every temptation devised by feminine shrewdness and desire. But a strain of melancholy in his blood separates him from his fellow men and finally drives him, the radiant hero, to go his lonely way sick and bewildered, like one who is hated by all the gods, and finally to destroy himself to no purpose. Thus the philosophic mind of the Greek people shaped the characters of legend into a series of ideal types which serve as significant examples for the understanding of human nature.

We might conclude by noting the problems of translation from the classical Greek. W. H. Auden, the modern poet, makes them quite evident in his editor's introduction to the Viking *Portable Greek Reader*. He quotes a passage from *Medea:*

> MEDEA: Why didst thou fare to earth's prophetic navel?
>
> AEGEUS: To ask how seed of children might be mine.
>
> MEDEA: 'Fore Heaven!—aye childless is thy life time now?
>
> AEGEUS: Childless I am, by chance of some god's will.
>
> MEDEA: This with a wife, or knowing not the couch?
>
> AEGEUS: Nay, not unyoked to wedlock's bed am I.

Auden notes the to us absurdity of the passage and asks, "but what is the poor translator to do?" If, for instance, he translates the last two lines into modern idiom, he must write:

> MEDEA: Are you married or single?

AEGEUS: Married.

In the modern idiom, the humor is gone, and the poetic ornament of a dialogue constructed of riddles is gone, too, so what, indeed, is the translator to do?

We might keep such things in mind when reading modern English versions of Greek myths, legends, and plays, and remember Auden's counsel: "if one wishes to understand the form and idea of Greek tragedy, it is better to give a trilogy like *The Oresteia* than three separate plays by three authors; so too with all the other poetic selections which have been chosen for their representative character as literary forms rather than for their individual poetic excellences."

FRONTIERS

News of the Middle East

WE take from a last year's issue of the *War Resisters League News* portions of the account of "Peace Movements in the Middle East" by Joseph Gerson, who is Peace Secretary of the American Friends Service Committee in New England and a member of the WRL. The point is that these are things we never learn about from the commercial press. Peace movements, wherever they emerge, are *always* made up of minorities, and, since they are usually unpopular, get little attention in the news. The best known group in Israel is Peace Now, formed in 1978 in response to Egypt's President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. Gerson says:

> The commitments of Peace Now have changed little since 1978. It calls for a compromise between Israelis and Palestinians, Arabs and Jews. It sees the construction of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories as obstacles to peace. The occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip, they believe, threatens rather than enhances Israeli security. Peace Now calls for direct negotiations with every country or representatives of every movement which recognizes the right of Israel to exist, leaving open the possibility of a role for the PLO in such negotiations.

In 1975, after a speech calling for Palestinian coexistence with Israel, given in London by a PLO representative, a retired Israeli general, a publisher, and a former secretary general of the Israeli Labor Party united to form the Israel Council for Israel Palestine Peace. The leaders of this group—

> published a manifesto which clearly stated their commitment to a Zionist Israel, but which also stated their belief that the Palestinians are entitled to exercise the same right to self-determination. They published the manifesto in six languages to ensure it would not be missed by the PLO. This in turn led to a decade of dialogue between these activists and the leadership of the PLO.

A meeting arranged by a member of this group gave Yasir Arafat an opportunity "to demonstrate his willingness to negotiate a peace agreement with Israel."

Gerson continues:

> While there are a number of other peace organizations in Israel, including a small chapter of the War Resisters' International and religiously based organizations, Yesh Gvul should be briefly described here. The organization, whose name translates as "there is a limit" and "there is a border," began with a statement. This statement like the one that initiated Peace Now, was signed by Israeli soldiers and said: "We have conquered and bombed and destroyed too much . . . a people's problem cannot be solved militarily. . . . We were not conscripted in the Israel Defense Force for this purpose. . . ." More than 2,000 Israeli soldiers have now signed the statement, pledging to refuse orders to serve in Lebanon. To date more than 115 signers have been jailed for their refusal to fight in Lebanon.
>
> For every soldier who has openly refused to fight in Lebanon another ten to twenty are estimated to have found ways to avoid service. The military is said to have avoided ordering some units in which opposition exists to the continuing war in Lebanon. Given the central role the army plays in Israeli life and culture the refusal of these soldiers to serve is a greater challenge to the state than was Vietnam-era draft resistance here in the United States. Like our draft resistance movement, Yesh Gvul has won the respect of many Israelis who appreciate the risks taken by these war resisters. Like our opposition to the Indochina war, the emergence of Yesh Gvul reflects a growing understanding within Israel of the limitations of military force and a fundamental questioning of the integrity of the state.

There are other workers for peace in the Middle East. Gerson speaks of the Middle East Council of Churches in Beirut, "a remarkable institution led by a remarkable man, Rev. Gabriel Habib."

> Throughout a decade of some of this century's most brutal civil and international war, the Middle East Council of Churches has worked for peace. It has provided channels for warring factions to speak and negotiate with one another and has hosted countless delegations from all over the world anxious to meet with Palestinians and Lebaneses. It has provided a means for Lebanese and volunteers from around the world to tend the wounded and homeless victims of the seemingly endless war of Lebanon.

> The anger, anguish and frustration accumulated during nine years of civil war in Lebanon have led others to begin the dangerous process of building a Lebanese peace movement. In response to a poem written by a Lebanese teacher, thousands of children, their parents and teachers demonstrated against the Lebanese war in May. Though their organization is tenuous, it certainly represents the hopes and aspirations of middle class Lebanese.

To questioners who ask if the Palestinians have an identifiable peace movement, Gerson replies:

> Israelis have a state and they are the occupiers of a conquered people. The Palestinians have no state. Their lands and homeland are occupied. They suffer the immediate and brutal consequences of military occupation. The work of "peace activists" thus must be different in the communities of the occupied and the occupier.

An aspect of modern military activity that is either unknown or too easily forgotten was brought to mind by a brief note in the *Peacemaker* for last September. It has to do with the experiments on living animals at the Letterman Army Institute of Research at the Presidio in San Francisco. "Behind its windowless walls at the northwest end of the building," the report says, "animals of every description are forced to live out their lives in a shroud of isolation, confinement, suffering, and impending death." As one research worker put it: "No animal ever leaves Letterman alive."

What sort of experiments go on there?

> Within the confines of Letterman's laboratories, monkeys are held in restraining devices—sometimes for weeks on end—while their experimenters try out procedures ranging from blinding them with high-powered lasers to "challenging them" with chemical and biological substances, to irradiating them until they sicken, weaken, and eventually die slow agonizing deaths.
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> In other experiments, pigs have routinely been used for target practice inside Letterman's "wound laboratory," where the animals are restrained and then blasted with high velocity rifles to produce wounds and trauma for study. Dogs are used in crippling spinal-cord studies and mice and rabbits are routinely bled to death to produce subjects for trauma and shock experiment.

This writer suggests letters to People for Ethical Treatment of Animals, Box 420525, Sacramento, Calif. 95842.