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TWO VIEWS OF EVOLUTION

THERE are rhythms in our psychological history as well as in the recurring events which affect the life of the planet. Since the prevailing outlook of an epoch has an identifiable uniformity—called "mindset" or "climate of opinion"—we are able to study the past as a movement from one set of conventions to another, as for example in the intellectual and moral drama of the latter half of the nineteenth century, which persuaded most of the thinking portion of Western mankind that the principle of Evolution, as taught by Charles Darwin (*The Origin of Species* came out in 1859), was a natural and necessary replacement of the Will of God as the cause behind the world of living things. From one point of view, the discovery and elaboration, on the basis of observed evidence, of evolutionary processes was an extension to biology of the method of Galileo, who had declared for study of the Book of Nature in preference to theological treatises by men who knew little or nothing of natural phenomena from their own observation and experiment.

Yet from another outlook, Evolution was an idea *whose time had come:* the abuses of clerical power had become so notorious that disarming the hierarchy of organized religion by discrediting the will of God with Darwinian science became an obvious and welcome goal for social thinkers. While this meant politicalizing philosophic issues, the Church had already extended its authority into the political realm, freeing the reformers from any sense of restraint. Yet the politicalization of any issue always results in its vulgarization. Politicalization means the reduction of the terms of controversy to the level of mass appeal. The lowest common denominators of argument inevitably prevail, so that the victory of one side tends to become not a victory for impartial truth but a triumph of the ideology of the hour. This means the installation of another orthodoxy which takes the place of the old discredited faith, and then, after the passage of time, when the flaws and false assumptions of the new system have become manifest, another great struggle must ensue.

The question arises: Is it possible to avoid the simplifications of mass persuasion in the struggle toward freedom? Attempts at reply to this question tend to be discouraging. The politicalizers will contend that advances in thought must be brought down to a "practical" level if any actual good is to be done for the masses of human beings. This usually turns out to mean that the engine of self-interest must be started up and continually fueled by propagandists for the cause. No need is seen to recognize any legitimacy at all in the positions and statements of the opposition. Persons who try to see "both sides" have neither place nor voice in the political process, which polarizes conflict into extremes of good and evil. A century or so later the essential good sense of such individuals may become evident, but this seems a lesson gained only by the few.

But what if it is the only lesson worth learning? This, although couched in somewhat different terms, was the lifelong contention of Mahatma Gandhi, whose conceptions of truth and non-violence led him to adopt the principle of fairness to his opponents, without exception. The very novelty of this spirit in political controversy was largely responsible for what success he achieved. His fundamental assumption about all human beings, both friends and enemies, was that, sooner or later, they will respond to goodness and justice, and any other element in one's relations with an opponent only puts off the fulfillment of this possibility. The study of controversy in the light of his example might be richly instructive, for the one who seriously undertakes it.

One way to begin would be to consider the human qualities and motives of a group of innovators, say, the evolutionists of the nineteenth century. There seems always to be a striking contrast between the character given such individuals in the polemics of controversy and their day-to-day efforts and attitudes in pursuing the implications of their views. A little book by John W. Judd, published in 1910 by Cambridge University Press *The Coming of Evolution*, serves well in making this comparison, since the author, a geologist, knew personally and enjoyed the friendship of the most distinguished leaders of the campaign for Evolution. These included Charles Lyell, J. D. Hooker, G. Poulett Scrope, Charles Darwin, Alfred Russel Wallace, and Thomas Huxley. Judd tells the story of the impact of Darwin's theory, and of the obstacles it encountered, ending in the virtual triumph of the evolutionary teaching. In his opening chapter, he says in summary, speaking of the nineteenth century:

> At the beginning of the Century, the few who ventured to entertain evolutionary ideas were regarded by their scientific contemporaries, as wild visionaries or harmless "cranks"—by the world at large, as ignorant "quacks" or "designing atheists." At the end of the Century, evolution had not only become the guiding principle of naturalists, but had profoundly influenced every branch of physical science; at the same time, suggesting new trains of thought and permeating the language of philologists, historians, sociologists, politicians—and even of theologians.
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> How has this revolution in thought—the greatest which has occurred in modern times—been brought about? What manner of men were they who were the leaders of this great movement? What the influences that led them to discard old views and adopt new ones? And, under what circumstances were they able to produce the works which so profoundly affected the opinions of the day?

Judd's book is not only instructive in the stages of the development of evolutionary theory, but gives insight into the character, modesty, and intensity of purpose of these scientists. They were, practically all of them, fine men, striving to be impartial in mind. Actually, one wonders what the course taken by evolutionary theory might have been if there had been no fierce opposition from the orthodox clergy. Perhaps evolution would not have become a bastion of materialistic doctrine had the clerics taken into account the moral quality of men like Darwin, and tried to appreciate what they were attempting to do, offering friendly suggestions instead of angry denunciations. After all, Wallace, co-discoverer of Natural Selection with Darwin, believed that its processes would not explain the distinctively human development of mankind. "Wallace," Judd points out, "maintained that while man's body could have been developed by Natural Selection, his intellectual and moral qualities must have had a different origin." Darwin, while no atheist, was deeply troubled by this suggestion and would have none of it. As Stephen Jay Gould, a geologist of today and a spokesman for evolution, remarked in a recent essay: in Darwin's thought "no intervening spirit watches lovingly over the affairs of nature," and "whatever we may think of God, his existence is not manifest in the products of nature."

But Darwin was not able to settle this question. The issues raised by Wallace, as Loren Eiseley notes in *The Immense Journey*, are with us yet. Eiseley points out that Darwin tried to explain the rise of man "through the slow, incremental gains of natural selection," and this required him "to assume a long struggle of man with man and tribe with tribe." Our development, on this view, was entirely due to competitive struggle. Eiseley comments:

> To most of the thinkers of Darwin's day this seemed a reasonable explanation. It was a time of colonial expansion and ruthless business competition. Peoples of primitive cultures, small societies lost on the world's margins, seemed destined to be destroyed. It was thought that Victorian civilization was the apex of human achievement and that other races with different customs and ways of life must be biologically inferior to Western man. Some of them were even described as only slightly superior to apes. The Darwinians, in a time when there were no

satisfactory fossils by which to demonstrate human evolution, were unconsciously minimizing the abyss which yawned between man and ape. In their anxiety to demonstrate our lowly origins they were throwing modern natives into the gap as representing living "missing links" in the chain of human ascent.

It was just at this time that Wallace lifted a voice of lonely protest. The episode is a strange one in the history of science, for Wallace had, independently of Darwin, originally arrived at the same general conclusion as to the nature of the evolutionary process. Nevertheless, only a few years after the publication of Darwin's work, *The Origin of Species*, Wallace had come to entertain a point of view which astounded and troubled Darwin. Wallace, who bad had years of experience with natives of the tropical archipelagoes, abandoned the idea that they were of mentally inferior cast. He did more. He committed the Darwinian heresy of maintaining that their mental powers were far in excess of what they really needed to carry on the simple food-gathering techniques by which they survived.

"How, then," Wallace insisted, "was an organ developed so far beyond the needs of its possessor? Natural selection could only have endowed the savage with a brain a little superior to that of an ape, whereas he actually possessed one but little inferior to that of the average member of one of our learned societies." . . .

Finally, Wallace challenged the whole Darwinian position on man by insisting that artistic, mathematical, and musical abilities could not be explained on the basis of natural selection and the struggle for existence. Something else, he contended, some unknown spiritual element, must have been at work in the elaboration of the human brain. Why else would men of simple cultures possess the same basic intellectual powers which the Darwinists maintained could be elaborated only by competitive struggle?

In our own time, "some unknown spiritual element" keeps coming into the picture of evolution, simply to make it acceptable to our intuitive sense of the fitness of things. And one finds, here and there, in the work of the thoughtful evolutionists, as in Eiseley, a quiet sympathy for this idea. For example, J. Arthur Thompson, writing on evolution in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1953 edition), has this to say:

The evolution of moral qualities may be divided into epochs. First there was the pre-human period, marked by the rise and progress of parental affection, kin-sympathy, courage, self-subordination, and other primary virtues. Second, in the early ages of tentative men, hominoid rather than homines, there was a re-definition and re-thrilling of the moral fibres under the influence of the new synthesis or mutation—Man. With reason and language and consciousness of history both past and possible, there must have been a re-tuning of the moral nature.

The implication, here, is that, whatever the unknown cause of the "mutation," our evolution is now within our own hands. This idea is wholly in key with the first great humanist declaration made five hundred years ago by Pico della Mirandella. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, first delivered in 1486 (Pico was then twenty-four years old), he made the central point of this work in an allegory of Creation, in which the Deity tells Adam:

We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.

If the search for knowledge of man's origins had been able to proceed without polemics, the scientists themselves might not have felt it so necessary to "animalize" the conception of human evolution. Huxley might not have declared himself "proud" to have an ape for a grandfather, but have given expression to certain more philosophic of his ideas.

Actually, Pico's suggestion seems to be more and more center stage in present-day speculation. The argument about the apes has become largely stale and unprofitable, although it still casts a shadow on the freedom of the modern mind. It is suitable here to recall a passage in Theodore Roszak's *Unfinished Animal* (1975) in which he recognizes Pico's great importance as sounding a keynote:

In Pico's statement, we have, for the first time in the modern West, a vision of human nature as unfulfilled potentiality, of life as an adventure in self-development. Humanness, Pico tells us, is not a

> closed box, but an open door . . . leading to an open door. And he invites us to make our way through all these doors, discriminately experiencing the fullness of our identity. For Pico, the human condition is not what it has always been for both conventional Christianity and conventional humanism: a sternly prescribed choice between two airtight compartments, one the province of absolute virtue, the other the province of absolute evil: nature against grace, reason against the irrational, sanity against madness. Rather, he asks us to see ourselves as a grand spectrum of possibilities whose unexplored regions include the godlike as well as the diabolical.
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> Had Pico's program for human development become, as he wished, the educational standard of our culture, Western society might have freed itself from the literalism and dogmatic intolerance of Christian orthodoxy, without rushing into the dismal materialism that dominates our scientific world view. We might have found our way to a new culture of the spirit, open to universal instruction, grounded in experience, capable of liberating the visionary dimension of the mind. But the fate of Pico's way was to become a dissenting countercurrent to the cultural mainstream: either a saving remnant or a lunatic fringe, depending upon one's viewpoint.

How can we generalize this fateful process? Is it, actually, the story of the "hero with a thousand faces," the at first reluctant and then wholly committed struggle of Arjuna to engage the field of alien and unassimilated elements of experience, and to make them his own—the recovery of his kingdom? If for instructive purposes a society can be typified by an individual, then it may seem that human life is made up of successive descents into the arena, each one beginning with vision and the inspiration of high resolve, seeking an ideal synthesis, yet with energies altered and redirected by the shape and motives of the opposition, until, from the very winning of particular battles, the warrior finds satisfaction in only partial and temporary goals.

The only true revolutionists are those who, like Mazzini, after victory die of a broken heart at the failure, not of a man but of an age. Why must the vision be eroded and even inverted by opportunistic action? Why is "practicality" so often the mortal enemy of truth? Why, as a radical critic disconsolately noted, does the Left always make the Revolution and the Right always write the Constitution?

This is the old question of the similarities and differences between the individual and society. Vision, when converted into a code, a set of rules made up of do's and don't's, loses its divine fire. It takes on the temporal garb of an epoch, complete with establishment, academy, and authoritative faculty, learning the arts of propaganda, exploiting the comforts of orthodoxy, the securities of uniform belief. The "leaders," such as they are, learn never to ask the questions which lead to independent invention and improvisation. The approved formula was piously recorded by Adam of St. Victor in the twelfth century (translation by Henry Adams):

> Of the Trinity to reason
> Leads to Licence or to treason
> Punishment deserving.
> What is birth and what procession
> Is not mine to make profession,
> Save with faith unswerving.
>
> Thus professing, thus believing,
> Never insolently leaving
> The highway of our faith,
> Duty weighing, law obeying
> Where heresy is death.

The blessings of orthodoxy are well known, and while we love, admire, and quote the great dissenters, we at the same time use daily and largely depend upon the practical uses of conformity. Yet in all the high religions—religions which begin with philosophy and moral psychology—there is an escape hatch from the confinements of orthodoxy. Jesus spoke of this when he told his disciples that to the multitude he could speak only in parables, while to them he revealed the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And in the *Bhagavad-Gita* (second chapter), Krishna, after declaring the countless benefits which come from observing all the Vedic rites, tells Arjuna:

> "When thy heart shall have worked through the snares of delusion, then thou wilt attain to high indifference as to those doctrines which are already taught or which are yet to be taught. When thy mind once liberated from the Vedas shall be fixed immovably in contemplation, then shalt thou attain to devotion."

And the Buddha would explain his silence when confronted by questions leading to metaphysical controversy and partisanship only to his initiated disciple, Ananda, saying that *any* answer, in the terms of the human understanding of that time, would support some kind of sectarianism, so that it was better not to speak at all.

Yet there are times, as we all know, when it is important and right to speak out. Socrates became the archetypal symbol of speaking out for the Western world. In the midst of a great revolution of thought Wallace spoke out, declaring the vision that comes to individuals, never to partisans or organized campaigners. Thomas Paine spoke out twice, once at a golden moment of history (which seem very few) when a crisis in the affairs of a would-be nation would open the minds of the many to authentic vision; a second time when he pointed to intellectual bonds actually more confining than political servitude; but then he spoke to an age that was not ready for the inner freedom he proposed.

Gandhi found similar opportunity, but his followers, save for a very few, were ready only for the political application of Gandhi's truth. And Bayard Rustin, working with Martin Luther King, in 1965 told a conference of religious leaders: "I am not fooled—I know that most of them [the Blacks] are in nonviolence for reasons far removed from why King and I are in it—they are in it because they see this as the only practicable way; it is strategic nonviolence. . . . But every project we have ever set up we have set up to reveal truth, not to win major victories. . . ."

The heart of the matter, it seems clear, *is* the need to find and speak to individuals who are capable of vision, not to masses whose strength is always borrowed from emotional uniformity with others and depends upon limitation for its focus. Even one who works with groups is able to preserve this distinction, this paradox which lies at the root of all cultural change.

REVIEW
THE NEUROSIS OF NATIONS

THE idea of a nuclear freeze—an arrangement whereby the major nuclear powers would agree not to accelerate the arms race, not to develop more murderous weapons—seems like a wholly constructive proposal. For the man in the street, who can't help but be disturbed by the increasing threat of nuclear war, and by the ever more articulate warnings of how horrible it would be, to talk of and support the proposal of a freeze seems a way of telling the government how he feels and what he thinks ought to be done. If enough people agree—and they seem to—he can't get into any serious trouble, and anyhow the idea is only a form of "persuasion"—he isn't *demanding* anything.

So far as the average citizen is concerned, asking for a freeze represents at least the beginning of a "change of heart," that transformation of outlook, even of character, that the serious books on the subject of nuclear war all say is necessary before much of anything good can happen—books like Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* and Dyson's *Weapons and Hope.* The supporter of the freeze says, "Look, the doctors and the technical experts—nuclear physicists and such—say that so much will be wiped out in a nuclear war that any real recovery is hard to imagine; leading military men say that nuclear weapons are no good for achieving actual victory, since you destroy what you are fighting for; and diplomats tell us that the prospect of being attacked is so frightening that the more leaders are threatened by the weapons of the opposing side, the more desperately irrational they become, and how can you talk things over with people like that? The thing to do is to cool it—cool it with a freeze."

It may be said, then, that since 1981, when the freeze movement first got going on a national basis, this sort of thinking has come to the surface throughout the country, with some activity in every one of the fifty states.

The pacifist journal, *Fellowship*, in the last July-August issue, presented an article by Randall Kehler, national coordinator of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, in which he attempts to evaluate the progress achieved during the three years of the campaign thus far. Speaking of underlying human attitudes, he says:

> A tremendous shift of consciousness, an enormous leap of awareness, has taken place during the last three years at home and abroad. And growing out of this shift, a great deal of pressure—though still not *enough* pressure—has already been brought to bear. The strategic focus of that pressure is the simple, yet dramatic, call for a U.S.-Soviet freeze on all nuclear weapons. From the vantage point of 1981, we have made amazing progress, even though the nuclear arms race continues almost unabated.

Yet hoping to avoid false optimism, Kehler remarks:

> It is easy to say that we have made great progress during our first three years, but have we really? How do we measure progress when the goal is stopping the nuclear arms race? If we use as our gauge the actual number of nuclear weapons that have been cancelled by either nuclear superpower, it would appear that there has been no progress at all. By this measurement we have slipped backwards, for the last three years have seen a massive *buildup* of nuclear weapons on both sides. But I submit that this is an inappropriate and unrealistic way to measure our progress. If we start with the assumption that our own government will become committed to pursue a mutual freeze only when enough pressure has been brought to bear, and if we assume that such pressure can only be mounted after there has been a demonstrated shift in public consciousness, it becomes more apparent what kinds of progress we should be looking for. . . .
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> What are the essential characteristics of the Campaign? In my view there are three. The first is the Freeze proposal itself, in its focus not on individual weapons but on the whole nuclear arms race, its emphasis on *both* sides and *all* nuclear weapons. The objective is a simple, comprehensible first step, an objective large enough to be worthwhile and dramatic enough to arouse public support, yet modest and practical enough to be achieved. It is a proposal based in the inescapable logic of making that first step a complete halt to all nuclear weapons testing, production and deployment as a necessary

prerequisite to the reduction and eventually the abolition of nuclear weapons that may follow.

This is the thinking of an ordinary man about how ordinary people may be expected to think. It is based on the instinct of common decency and common sense and it may, indeed, be a "prerequisite" to whatever will become necessary to put an end to nuclear or any sort of war. You could say that getting going the thinking process about war and what it means—especially nuclear wee—must come first, even though ideas about ways and means may be radically altered as the thinking proceeds against a background of actual experience.

Called for, however, sophisticated critics say, is increased awareness of what can be expected of the political process in the United States. Two writers, Ada Sanchez and Norman Solomon, ask in the same issue of *Fellowship* where the Freeze movement is actually going. They say:

> Under the guise of providing an alternative to continued nuclear weapons escalation, the nuclear freeze approach is increasingly serving as an adjunct to it. National freeze-oriented groups have tended to wind up playing political patty cake with many members of Congress. While hailed as a freeze "victory," for example, the ambiguous freeze resolution passed last year by the House of Representatives came right before the approval of the MX missile by the same legislative body.
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> Many in Congress also found that nonbinding resolution to be useful as a fig leaf to cover their unwillingness to oppose the cruise, Pershing 2, and Trident nuclear weapons systems going into place in the mid-1980s. A vote for freeze platitudes often has appeared to more than compensate for approval of America's latest state-of-the-art nuclear weapons. Fixated on nebulous generalities, freeze tacticians have given low priority to holding Congressional feet to the fire about first-strike weaponry. . . . It is a tragedy that during the first several years of the 1980S, the freeze movement—eager to adhere to the "bilateral" lexicon of the powers that be—placed more emphasis on opposing the SS-20s than the first strike Trident system.

At another level these critics say:

> As long as we stay infatuated with a political system that has never responded to through-the-channels entreaties to stop U.S. escalation of the arms race, all problems for disarmament get lost in handshakes, political action committees and campaign pledges. Guided by such activities, the freeze movement will be perpetually in a fog, chasing promises that remain beyond the movement's grasp. . . . An irony is that the national Freeze Campaign has chosen not to help build a broader movement challenging US military intervention overseas, even though such intervention is likely to provide the catalyst for nuclear war. Freeze campaigners are often *proud* that they do not put forward a coherent conception of the US role in the world, because they want to avoid getting tangled up in controversies that might alienate people inclined to support the freeze. Too many activists have been content to tend their nuclear freeze knitting, perhaps lifting their heads occasionally to murmur disapproval of blatant US military intervention. . . . Those who pursue the phantom hope that at last established legal and political systems can be made to work against the schemes of US nuclear weapons pushers will discover that reliance on those systems is only suited to perpetuating the nuclear arms race, not to stopping it.

Suppose these critics are absolutely right—what then? Can it be said that seeing the point of these comments on working against nuclear war "within the system" will not come strongly except to those who have *tried* to use the system? That taking part in the freeze movement is a necessary stage in moving toward disillusionment? The critics seem in partial agreement in their conclusion, saying:

> Freeze organizations deserve credit for helping to increase people's awareness about the gravity of nuclear weapons dangers. The freeze movement is big now, but shallow in its analysis and actions. Instead of building on its early success in raising public consciousness, it promotes patterns that remain safe and ineffectual. . . . Moving beyond rituals for the freeze, we have the opportunity to develop nonviolent direct action for real disarmament. The choice is ours.

Since these writers refer to the "schemes of US nuclear weapons pushers," an aspect of their politics may be noted. In a contribution to the *Los Angeles Times* for Aug. 5 David Loeb, author of *Nuclear Culture*, describes the procedure used in Hanford, Washington, where half the plutonium

used in America's warheads is produced. When a peace group in a neighboring community, led by the wife of a skilled Hanford engineer, got going, the engineer was subjected to a weekly search of his car by security personnel. (Routine called for search once or twice a year.) His co-workers no longer joined him for lunch; one member of the group was fired, the others were often ostracized by friends and neighbors. Loeb says:

> To a degree, employees' relationships to these institutions resemble those of any citizen silenced by immense bureaucratic forces in an age where our world seems rarely within our control. We can understand readily why nuclear-freeze supporters in Charleston, S.C., fear even to display "freeze" bumper stickers on their cars: A third of the local economy depends on the massive naval complex that serves as the Atlantic Fleet's home port.
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> The weapons culture demands loyalty not only of its employees but of the community that benefits economically from the military presence. Absence of loyalty is equated with disloyalty to the home team—even treason.

It seems well to recognize the problem of nuclear war as only a major symptom of cultural sickness, and that recovery will involve more than a "change in thinking." Required, as Erich Fromm put it, is a "therapeutic leap." The witty modern theologian, Sam Keen, has said: "A neurotic is one who invests the majority of his energies in defense mechanisms, and so it is with nations." The question is: Can a recovery from such well-established habits be *hurried;* if not, what then?

COMMENTARY
THE POLITICS OF ILLUSION

JUDGING by what Terence Moran is quoted as saying in this week's Frontiers, we ought not to honor television by calling it part of the "communications revolution"—by revolution we usually mean a great step forward—but to identify it for what it is: a frightening advance in the techniques of manipulation. Mr. Moran writes: "The overall message of television politics is not to think but to feel; the purpose is not to *inform* our minds but to *form* our perceptions." This is no more than manipulation.

Moran's characterization of the political exploitation of television recalls a passage in Wendell Berry's *A Continuous Harmony*, a book which came out more than ten years ago. Berry speaks of the close attention television gives to "image-making, or remaking," going on:

> It has given up almost altogether the disciplines of political discourse (considerations of fact and of principle and of human and historical limits and possibilities), and has taken up the cynical showmanship of those who have cheap goods for sale. Its catch phrases do not rise from any viable political tradition; their next of kin are the TV jingles of soup and soap. It is a politics of illusion, and its characteristic medium is pre-eminently suited—as it is almost exclusively limited—to the propagation of illusion.
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> Of all the illusions of television, that of its much-touted "educational value" is probably the first. Because of its utter transience as a medium and the complete passivity of its audience, television is doomed to have its effect within the limits of the most narrow and shallow definition of entertainment—that is, entertainment as diversion. The watcher sees the program at the expense of no effort at all, he is inert. All the live connections are broken. More important, a TV program can be seen only once; it cannot be re-examined or judged upon the basis of study, as even a movie can be. The report of a momentous event or a serious drama slips away from us among the ordinary furniture of our lives, as transient and fading as the most commonplace happenings of every day. For these reasons a political speech on television has to be first and last a show, simply because it has no chance to become anything else. The great sin of the medium is not that it presents fiction as truth, as undoubtedly it sometimes does, but that it cannot help presenting the truth as fiction, and that of the most negligible sort—a way to keep awake until bedtime. . . .
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> The political condition in this country now is one in which the means or the disciplines necessary to the achievement of professed ends have been devalued or corrupted or abandoned altogether.

What politicians of today, confronted by this criticism, would do more than smile and shrug?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THINKING AND KNOWING

TWO subjects, closely related and basic to our lives, are poetry and thinking. Since neither is well understood, and both are likely to have been misrepresented to the young, it may be important—and possible—to tell them a few things about poetry and thinking, even though they don't at first go down easily.

"Language," Emerson declared, "is fossil poetry." What did he mean? He meant that good language is language in which there is a *natural* fit between what is named or described and the word we use for it. He meant that the poetic fit is the right fit, and thus becomes embedded in our language.

The best study or demonstration of this (that we know of) is in Owen Barfield's book, *Poetic Diction*, first published in England in 1928 and now available in paperback from Wesleyan University Press. Shelley, speaking of metaphors—which are the foundation stones of poetry—borrowed a sentence from Francis Bacon (in his *Advancement of Learning*): "Neither are these only similitudes, as men of narrow observation may conceive them to be, but the same footsteps of nature, treading or printing upon several subject matters." Barfield then says:

> This is the answer. It is these "footsteps of nature" whose noise we hear alike in primitive language and in the finest metaphors of poets. Men do not *invent* those mysterious relations between objects and feelings or ideas, which it is the function of poetry to reveal. These relations exist independently, not indeed of Thought, but of any individual thinker. And according to whether the footsteps are echoed in primitive language or, later on, in the made metaphors of poets, we hear them after a different fashion and for different reasons. The language of primitive men reports them as direct perceptual experience. The speaker has observed a unity, and is not therefore himself conscious of *relation.* But we, in the development of consciousness, have lost the power to see this one as one. Our sophistication, like Odin's, has cost us an eye; and now it is the language of poets, in so far as they create true metaphors, which must *restore* this unity conceptually, after it has been lost from perception.

The *true* metaphor, then, is the one which recaptures the original unity between the object and its metaphorical correspondence. Ancient perceivers saw them as one, and this the poet's imagination divines—how, who can say?

It is no accident that the more sublime the topic inquired into, the more the inquirer is drawn to use antique poetic forms in speaking of what he discovers. For him, the ancient unities assert themselves. Interestingly, Wallace Stevens, in an essay on philosophy, quotes from some notes supplied to him by Jean Paulhan, a French literary critic, who said:

> It is admitted, since Planck, that determination—the relation of cause to effect—exists, or so it seems, on the human scale, only by means of an aggregate of statistical compensations and as the physicists say, by virtue of macrocosmic approximations. (There is much to dream about in these macrocosmic approximations.) As to the true nature of corpuscular or quantic phenomena, well, try to imagine them. No one has yet succeeded. But the poets—it is possible. . . .
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> It comes to this, that philosophers (particularly the philosophers of science), make, not discoveries but hypotheses that may be called poetic. Thus Louis de Broglie admits that progress in physics is, at the moment, in suspense because we do not have the words or the images that are essential to us. But to create illuminations, images, words, that is the very reason for being of poets.

The poet, in short, is one whose disciplined imagination is able to recognize primordial unities and qualified to name them. To name them, as the poets of Africa long ago realized, is to give the power of authentic being to what is named.

Now, about thinking: there are two kinds of thinking, or rather there is thinking and there is its imitation in the flat, additive mode of logic. Real thinking is the capacity of the *nous*, from which the word noetic is derived. In *The Meaning of History* (Braziller, 1964) Erich Kahler goes to the ancient Greeks for illustration of the *nous* in action:

> The Greeks did not yet seek knowledge simply for knowledge's sake, nor essentially for technological and economic advantage. They were not concerned with that aimless amassing of facts, such as is practiced in our historical and social sciences, with that theoretical pragmatism, collecting data for future use, which, even should they be called for, could hardly be reached in the

> endless files of incoherent material. Greek historical research was pragmatic in a way utterly different from ours: the Greeks wanted to know in order to achieve an orientation in their world, in order to live in the right way; knowledge was closely connected with action, it was indeed a part of action. And living and acting in the right way was not necessarily equated with acting *successfully*. It means acting and living in accordance with the cosmic order. Research, empirical as well as speculative, was therefore essentially search for the meaning of the cosmic order, meaning not as purpose and end—for within recurrence of events no purpose or goal of human life was conceivable—but meaning as established form. From pre-Socratic to Stoic thinking the quest for the meaning of the cosmic order, which human conduct had to follow, was the prime motive of inquiry.

We go now to Hannah Arendt's posthumously published *Life of the Mind* (which came out just fifty years after Barfield's *Poetic Diction*, in 1978). In a section on "Science and Common Sense," she says:

> Thinking, no doubt, plays an enormous role in every scientific enterprise, but it is the role of a means to an end; and the end is determined by a decision about what is worthwhile knowing, and this decision cannot be scientific. Moreover, the end is cognition or knowledge, which, having been obtained, clearly belongs to the world of appearances; once established as truth, it becomes part and parcel of the world. Cognition and the thirst for knowledge never leave the world of appearances altogether; if the scientists withdraw from it in order "to think," it is only to find better, more promising approaches, called methods, toward it. Science in this respect is but an enormous prolongation of common-sense reasoning in which sense illusions are constantly dissipated just as errors in science are corrected.

After drawing on Kant for the distinction between real thinking or reason, and cognition (knowing) through the intellect, Hannah Arendt says:

> In other words, the intellect (*Verstand*) desires to grasp what is given to the senses, but reason (*Vernunft*) wishes to understand its *meaning.* . . . truth is located in the evidence of the senses. But that is by no means the case with meaning and with the facility of thought, which searches for it; the latter does not ask what something is or whether it exists at all—its existence is always taken for granted—*but what it means for it to be.* This distinction between truth and meaning seems to me to be not only decisive for any inquiry into the nature of human thinking but also to be the necessary consequence of Kant's crucial distinction between reason and intellect. . . .
>
> By drawing a distinguishing line between truth and meaning, between knowing and thinking, and by insisting on its importance, I do not wish to deny that thinking's quest for meaning and knowledge's quest for truth are connected. By posing the unanswerable questions of meaning men establish themselves as question-asking beings. Behind all the cognitive questions for which men find answers, there lurk the unanswerable ones that seem entirely idle and have always been denounced as such. It is more than likely that men, if they were ever to lose the appetite for meaning we call thinking and cease to ask unanswerable questions, would lose not only the ability to produce those thought-things that we call works of art but also the capacity to ask all the answerable questions upon which every civilization is founded.

To drive home the point of this distinction, we go back to Erich Kahler, who uses other language to say almost the same thing, and gives a practical illustration:

> Reason is a human faculty inherent in the human being as such, rationality is a technical function, a technicalization and functionalization of the ways in which reason proceeds. . . . To give just one, the most salient, example of this development: A scientist, or engineer, working on the problem of nuclear weaponry is, in his special research, compelled to proceed with the strictest rationality. As a private person, however, he may well succumb to all kinds of emotional bias, professional or ideological indoctrination, or just the functional enthusiasm for his work. . . . To ponder over the general human consequences of his activity hardly occurs to him; indeed, according to the scientific canon of strict confinement to a limited field of research, such inferences are considered to exceed his competence. A scientist demonstrating that, given certain protective measures, a nuclear war will cost the nation only fifty, instead of a hundred and fifty million human beings, and therefore is "feasible," such a man, when confronted with the problem of human values, will reply, with the pride of his compartmental amorality and a-humanity, that these questions are none of his business. . . .

Accordingly, thinking, as distinguished from "knowing," is obviously very much *our* business. In the name of knowing, our specialists prepare actions which, as Kahler says, "human reason must regard as monstrous insanity."

FRONTIERS

Orwell and Thoreau

As we say farewell to—or escape from—1984 we might note that practically every paper in the country has during the past twelve months found reason to pay respect to George Orwell, asking: Was he or wasn't he a prophet of our time? Verdicts have been various, some of the comment worth repeating, as in the case of the remarks of Paul Lippert, on the staff of *Et cetera*, in his foreword to the Summer issue, entirely devoted to articles by semanticists on Orwell's book, *1984*, published in 1948. Leffert says:

> The point is that there is no special prophetic significance to the date 1984, and anyone who thinks there is or acts as if there ought to be has missed Orwell's point completely. The book is an allegorical description of processes he saw going on around him, not a prediction of the future. It needs to be read and talked about now no more and no less than in any other year. And this should be done not as a ritual observance, but as a part of our day to day problem-solving activities in a constantly troubled world.

We are *not*, says Terence Moran, the first *Et cetera* contributor, victims of "open and naked suppression by police state power." We are not "a country terrorized by Thought Police and monitored by twenty-four hour a day, two-way television. . . " This is obvious enough; but Orwell, Moran says, was wrong in another way:

> What all too few readers of his cautionary tale fail to consider is the profound propaganda of abundant consumer products and endless diversions presented in a communication environment structured by images rather than by propositions. As George Steiner has written of Orwell:
>
> *"1984* is not . . . a parable of the totalitarian rule of Stalin, Hitler, and Mao Tse-tung. . . . Orwell's critique bears simultaneously on the police state and on capitalist consumer society, with its illiteracy of values and its conformities "Newspeak," the language of Orwell's nightmare, is both the jargon of dialectical materialism and the verbiage of commercial advertisement and mass media."
>
> The dominant metaphor for our own 1984 is not Orwell's image of a boot stamping down on the race of humanity but the magical and instantaneous solutions to all our problems through technology. In this technological society we have replaced freedom with license, dignity with position, truth with credibility, love with gratification, justice with legality, and ideas with images. In our 1984, Big Brother really does love us or, at least, he is prepared to gratify our desires. Nowhere are these changes in our symbolic environments more profound than in the area we call the political process.
>
> By its very nature, politics involves the persuasion of groups of people, largely through the manipulation of the symbolic systems that form the communication environments of a society. All recorded history bears witness to attempts by politicians to use all available communication systems to move people to action: to vote for a candidate, to support a party, to fight for a cause. The communication revolution wrought by the technological society has not altered these basic goals. What it has done is to change profoundly the way in which the appeals are made. . . .
>
> The overall message of television politics is not to think but to feel; the purpose is not to *inform* our minds but to *form* our perceptions.

This is surely the place to stop reading *Et cetera* and go back to Henry David Thoreau, taking his "Life without Principle" sentence by sentence, to show that has been no change at all in the way to resist or ignore such appeals. Yet he knew it was not easy:

> It is so hard to forget what is worse than useless to remember! If I am to be a thoroughfare, I prefer that it be of the mountain-brooks, the Parnassian streams, and not the town-sewers. There is inspiration, that gossip which comes to the ear of the attentive mind from the courts of heaven. There is the profane and stale revelation of the bar-room and the police court. The same ear is fitted to receive both communications. Only the character of the hearer determines to which it shall be open, and to which closed. I believe that the mind can be permanently profaned by the habit of attending to trivial things, so that all our thoughts shall be tinged with triviality. Our very intellect will be macadamized, as it were,—its foundation broken into fragments for the wheels of travel to roll over; and if you would know what will make the most durable pavement, surpassing rolled stones, spruce blocks, and asphaltum, you have only to look into some of

> our minds which have been subjected to this treatment for so long.
>
> If we have thus desecrated ourselves,—as who has not?—the remedy will be by wariness and devotion to reconsecrate ourselves, and make once more a fane of the mind.

That's fine for Thoreau, but what about all the rest of us who lack his magnificent immunity and uncompromising taste?

A mournful comfort comes from another *Et cetera* article, this one by Jay Rosen, "Advertising's Slow Suicide," in which he proposes:

> If everything is said, there is nothing sayable. If everything is claimed, no claim can assert itself. It is precisely this state, a state of semantic entropy, toward which advertising appears to be heading, and there does not appear to be anything to stop the process. The ad business is not about to restrain its emotional appeals or the stunning quality of its visual imagery, even if these are in some way bleeding the life out of the industry. But in the long term it doesn't matter; advertising's effects are being restrained anyway. A certain deadness develops, words lose their meanings, looks exhaust themselves, the population refuses to respond forever to certain ploys. It gets harder and harder to achieve the desired effect.

Rosen seems to be saying that when we are sufficiently numbed, we are no longer a market. He might also have noted that we are then no longer much of anything else. Is *that* what we are waiting for, while we temporize with Thoreau?