

## A NATURAL RELIGION

THE central concern in the world of thought today is the search for acceptable synthesis. There are of course many versions of synthesis now available, but no one of them is generally acceptable. Naturally, we keep on looking. One might take as a background guide in this search some general ideas proposed by Albert Einstein, as reported in a recent book, *Einstein and the Poet* (1983), by William Hermanns. In 1930, in Berlin, the great physicist said to Hermanns:

Whatever geometrical system man chooses, it is always a construction of the mind and has no connection with reality, for geometry possesses internal order, which seems to be lacking in reality. Reality does not furnish geometry with axioms. . . . We measure the experience of our thoughts against the experience of our observations. Thus we bring order into the world of reality, and make it comprehensible. But always remember: as far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality. . . .

He also said at that time:

Many people think that the progress of the human race is based on experience of an empirical, critical nature, but I say that true knowledge is to be had only through a philosophy of deduction. For it is intuition that improves the world, not just following the trodden path of thought. Intuition makes us look at unrelated facts and then think about them until they can be brought under one law. To look for related facts means holding on to what one has instead of searching for new facts. Intuition is the father of new knowledge, while empiricism is nothing but an accumulation of old knowledge. Intuition, not intellect, is the "open sesame" of yourself.

With a little elaboration, perhaps, we can see the enormous usefulness of this formulation. The "laws of mathematics," as both Galileo and Descartes successfully contended, are the language of reality. Every rational system of thought adopts this assumption. Yet in vindication of Einstein's warning, both John

Calvin, who thought it fitting to burn those who did not admit the truth of his system, and Robespierre, who fatigued even the inanimate guillotine with his continuous head-rolling of aristocrats and revolutionary dissenters alike, were rationalists above all else. With this as sufficient evidence, we may say with Einstein that closed rational systems are "uncertain" when applied to historical reality. As Ortega points out in *The Modern Theme*, for the Cartesian Robespierre, critics of the revolutionary schemes of the Constituent Assembly assumed "a positively criminal aspect." Looking back at that time—and at parallel horrors in Russia and Cambodia—we may agree with Ortega's comment:

We are beginning to suspect that history, human life, cannot and "ought" not to be ruled by principle, like mathematical textbooks.

It is illogical to guillotine a prince and replace him by a principle. The latter, no less than the former, places life under an absolute autocracy. And this is, precisely, an impossibility. Neither rationalist absolutism, which keeps reason but annihilates life, nor relativism, which keeps life but dissolves reason, are possibilities.

The sensibility of the age that is now beginning is characterized by its rejection of this dilemma. We cannot satisfactorily adjust ourselves to either of its terms.

Ortega in effect repeats Einstein's warning. Writing in *The Human Situation*, W. Macneile Dixon said much the same thing:

What is a concept? It is an image or picture by which we endeavor to make things clearer to ourselves, or, as we say, to understand them. They are postulates, or lanterns, and have in science an instrumental value. But in regard to these postulates men of science have made the important discovery that you must not trust them too long or too completely. They are useful servants but bad masters. Unless periodically examined they may lead you astray. And in science, when her concepts, her

working hypotheses, cease to keep in step with observed facts they are ruthlessly discharged. I submit we might do well to follow the example of our scientific friends, and enquire whether a number of the concepts which have so long dominated ethical and religious thought are not in need of revision.

One set of concepts that we have already trusted "too long or too completely" is the formulation by Galileo which became, as E.A. Burt has said, the foundation of "the most stupendous intellectual conquest of modern times, the mathematical science of physical nature." Briefly: "The natural world was portrayed as a vast, self-contained mathematical machine, consisting of motions of matter in space and time, and man with his purposes, feelings, and secondary qualities was shoved apart as an unimportant spectator and semi-real effect of the great mathematical drama outside." A comment by Lewis Mumford (in *The Pentagon of Power*) helps in understanding Galileo's failure to grasp the implications of his system of "explanation":

Though Galileo's own limited concepts helped to establish the machine as the ultimate model for scientific thought, his actual environment was still richly furnished with traditional esthetic forms, religious rituals, and emotionally charged symbols: so he could have no anticipation of what the world would be like if his standards were universally accepted and if the machine and machine-made men succeeded in de-naturing or banishing every organic attribute. He never suspected that the ultimate consequence of the mechanical world picture would be an environment like our present one: fit only for machines to live in.

Some attention should be paid to Francis Bacon, Galileo's contemporary, himself no scientist, yet the man who, as Mumford says, turned the new scientific outlook into the program for the technology of the future. Again, Mumford's concise remarks are helpful:

In a very real sense, the success of the mechanical world picture was ensured in advance by Francis Bacon, whose very lack of any qualification as either a mathematician or an experimental physicist perhaps made him readier to extend the scientific method to every department of life. Bacon deserves a special place, not for any fresh scientific

discoveries he made or even contributed to, but for outlining an ideal institutional foundation for the systematic achievement and application of ordered knowledge. In addition, Bacon declared in no uncertain terms that the final goal of science was "the relief of man's estate" and the "effecting of all things possible." Thus, in the characteristic vein of British empiricism, he outlined the pragmatic justification for society's commitment to modern science as technology. No sky-gazer like Galileo, no sun-worshipper like Kepler, Bacon brought science down to earth. . . .

Behind all Bacon's expectations, however, there was a little-noted factor that was to mark the inauguration of an age committed increasingly to the pursuit of science and the perfection of machines: an ambition for conquest that coincided with a growing sense of power which the machines already in existence, particularly cannon and firearms had greatly stimulated. . . . Bacon's aphorism, "knowledge is power," must not be taken as a mere descriptive figure: it was a declaration of intention, and it meant emphatically that power was important. . . . it was Bacon's pragmatism and his intellectual imperialism that gained the upper hand, spreading the desire for physical conquest and human control, and raising to the nth power the pursuit of power itself.

To bring this account up to the present, we quote Lynn White, Jr.'s *Machina Ex Deo* (MIT Press, 1968):

. . . it was not until about four generations ago that Western Europe and North America arranged a marriage between science and technology, a union of the theoretical and empirical approaches to our natural environment. The emergence in widespread practice of the Baconian creed that scientific knowledge means technological power over nature can scarcely be dated before about 1850, save in the chemical industries. . . . By 1285 London had a smog problem arising from the burning of soft coal, but our present combustion of fossil fuels threatens to change the chemistry of the globe's atmosphere as a whole, with consequences which we are only beginning to guess. With the population explosion, the carcinoma of planless urbanism, the now geological deposits of sewage and garbage, surely no creature other than man has ever managed to foul its nest in such short order.

There are many calls to action, but specific proposals, however worthy as individual items, seem too partial, palliative, negative: ban the bomb, tear

down the billboards, give the Hindus contraceptives and tell them to eat their sacred cows. The simplest solution to any suspect change is, of course, to stop it, or, better yet, to revert to a romanticized past: make those ugly gas stations look like Anne Hathaway's cottage or (in the Far West) like ghost-town saloons. The "wilderness area" mentality invariably advocates deep-freezing an ecology, whether San Gimignano or the High Sierra, as it was before the first Kleenex was dropped. But neither atavism nor prettification will cope with the ecological crisis of our time.

What shall we do? No one yet knows. Unless we think about fundamentals, our specific measures may produce new backlashes more serious than those they are designed to remedy.

Prof. White thinks that a return to the idea of sacred groves and adopting St. Francis of Assisi—"the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ"—as our instructor in religion would help. He says in conclusion: "Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny."

He is certainly right. Anything short of this as a foundation for change would be to pour our energies into wholly inadequate solutions, and probably produce more "backlashes" of the sort with which we are already becoming familiar. This was essentially Mumford's conclusion, the one reached by Joseph Wood Krutch, and declared unequivocally by Aldo Leopold. Needless to say, it was also Einstein's view. But how does one actually *change* the way one thinks and feels about oneself and the world? That, after all, is the project, and it has little to do with what is called "public relations" and no connection with the conventional forms of education.

The best thing we can think of to do is to collect examples of "rethinking" and "refeeling" and print them here. The examples should be of individuals who are willing to seek in intuition the appropriate synthesis of sets of ideas which are in manifest contradiction, to reject the totalitarianism of closed intellectual systems, to recognize where these systems depart from reality, however useful

they may be; and to see and declare their limitations. This is already the approved intellectual attitude toward science (see Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and J. Bronowski's development of the implications of Gödel's Theorem in the Spring 1966 *American Scholar*), and the task now is to apply this realization to ourselves.

This means examining critically the common assumptions concerning our everyday lives. Our findings will not be "mass" solutions or public truth. Nearly all our problems have arisen from "mass" assumptions and programs. These are based on conceptions which can be sloganized and turned into propaganda, and will not be significantly altered by more propaganda. Our worst enemy may be the tendency to say that we live in an age of successive emergencies and have no time for thinking. It would be far better to say that we have no time for anything else.

We turn, then, to an example of thinking which begins with an idea parallel to what Einstein said about geometrical systems (quoted at the outset). The writer is Wendell Berry (in the June 1983 *Country Journal*):

The defenders of nature and the wilderness—like their enemies, the defenders of the industrial economy—sometimes sound as if the natural and the human were two separate estates, radically different and radically divided.

The defenders of nature and wilderness sometimes seem to feel that they must oppose any human encroachment whatsoever, just as the industrialists often apparently feel that they must make the human encroachment absolute or, as they say, "complete conquest of nature." But there is danger in this opposition, and it can be best dealt with by realizing that these pure categories are pure ideas and do not otherwise exist.

*Pure* nature, anyhow, is not good for humans to live in, and humans do not want to live in it—or not for very long. Any exposure to the elements that lasts more than a few hours will remind us of the desirability of the basic human amenities: clothing, shelter, cooked food, the company of kinfolk and friends—perhaps even of hot baths and music or books.

It is equally true that a condition that is *purely* human is not good for people to live in, and people do not want to live for very long in it. Obviously, the more artificial a human environment becomes, the more the word "natural" becomes a term of value. It can be argued, indeed, that the conservation movement, as we know it today, is largely a product of the Industrial Revolution. The people who want clean air, clear streams, and wild forests, prairies, and deserts are the people who no longer have them.

People cannot live apart from nature, that is the first principle of the conservationists. And yet, people cannot live in nature without changing it. But that is true of *all* creatures they depend upon nature, and they change it. What we call nature is, in a sense, the sum of the changes made by all the various creatures and natural forces in their intricate actions and influences upon each other and upon their places.  
...

Humans, like all other creatures, must make a difference; otherwise, they cannot live. But unlike other creatures, humans must make a choice as to the kind and scale of the difference they make. If they choose to make too small a difference, they diminish their humanity. If they choose to make too great a difference, then they diminish nature, and narrow their choices; ultimately, they diminish or destroy themselves. Nature, then, is our source, but also our limit and measure.

What, then, is the balance between the two, and how do we find it, or first convince ourselves that we need it? Quoting Thoreau, who said that "in wildness is the preservation of the world," Berry adds that "in human culture is the preservation of wildness," suggesting that our cities and our farms will survive only if we preserve what Thoreau meant by "wildness" in ourselves.

This can be demonstrated practically by saying that the same attitudes that destroy wildness in the topsoil will finally destroy it everywhere; or by saying that if *everyone* has to go to a designated public wilderness for the necessary contact with wildness, then our parks will be no wilder than our cities.

But I am trying to say something more fundamental than that. What I am aiming at—because a lot of evidence seems to point that way—is the probability that nature and human culture, wildness and domesticity, are not opposed, but are

interdependent. Authentic experience of either will reveal our need for the other. A fact both lovely and hopeful is that a human economy and wildness can exist together, not only in compatibility, but to their mutual benefit. We know that this is possible because we have examples, both past and present, that prove it.

After giving some of these examples, he says:

If balance is the ruling principle and a stable balance the goal, then, for humans, attaining this goal requires a consciously chosen and deliberately made partnership with nature.

That is to say that we can only be true to nature by being true to human nature—to our animal nature plus those cultural patterns and restraints that keep us from acting like animals. When humans act like animals they become the most dangerous of animals because of another critical difference between humans and animals: whereas animals are usually restrained by the limits of physical appetites, humans have mental appetites, which can be far more gross and capacious than physical ones. Only humans squander and hoard, murder and pillage because of notions.

Well, we know this is true, or at least intuit it, and the wise may base their practice upon it, and meanwhile we are learning from experience, if very slowly. Berry says:

But we also need culture-borne instructions about who and what humans are, and how and on what assumptions they should act. The Chain of Being, for instance—which gave humans a place between animals and angels in the order of Creation—is an old idea that has not been replaced by any adequate new one. It was simply rejected, and the lack of it leaves us without a definition.

"Culture-borne instructions" are precisely what we don't have. They were once supplied by religion—philosophical religions such as Buddhism and Taoism—but our history shows that the emancipation from religious corruption, which was very great in the West, was absolutely necessary for our growth in understanding. Now, after hundreds of years of this emancipation, the use we have made of our moral freedom—having rejected inner as well as outer restraint—is costing us heavily, already our health, and eventually our lives.

But we can't just "invent" a new religion as a utility for survival. Religion must grow from the heart, arising from intuition and gaining the validation of mind. This takes time, even centuries. What can we say to ourselves in the meantime?

Berry suggests that the union of the human economy with the natural economy, so that both thrive, will require that the human economy be built to *proper scale*. Spontaneously ethics has at least a chance in communities scaled to human freedom and responsibility. This is a design solution that is not moralistic or preachy, yet appeals to the moral sense. Moreover, as Berry says, our sanity requires the preservation of the right sort of wildness; there should be not only public wildernesses but "millions of small private or semiprivate ones."

Every farm should have one; wilderness can occupy corners of factory grounds and city lots—places where nature is given a free hand, where no human work is done, and where people go only as guests. These places function, I think, whether we intend them to or not, as sacred groves—places we respect and leave alone, not because we understand well what goes on there, but because we do not.

Could there be a better way to find harmonious balance between the system of nature and our own? Or to evolve what might be called natural religion?

## *REVIEW*

### AN UNDATED THINKER

JACQUES BARZUN'S book, *A Stroll with William James* (Harper & Row, 1983, \$19.95) seems mistitled. It ought to be *An Expedition*, or even *An Inhabiting of*, but modesty, or something like it, prevented, of course. This is a book that an admirer could review six or eight times without repeating himself. The seminal quality of James's mind opens avenues in very nearly all directions, while the anecdotes of his wit and penetration seem inexhaustible. One soon feels immeasurably indebted to Mr. Barzun. While he, as he explains at the beginning, is paying his own debt to James with this volume. Its quality is worthy of its subject—not one dull page in a total of 344.

We came across a sentence (in Clara Park's *American Scholar* article on Werner Jaeger) which needs quotation here: "Each stage of learning has its integrity." This was the heart of the matter for James, of his informed tolerance, of his grasp of how other minds work, and of his patience. He was a mind that *entered* into thought at every level he could identify, and he respected its integrity, although himself often seeing beyond.

James was born in 1842 in New York City. He was schooled there and abroad and studied medicine at Harvard, obtaining his M.D. in 1869. He taught anatomy and physiology for a while, but began teaching psychology at Harvard in 1875. His major work, *Principles of Psychology*, appeared in 1891. He had already become a "philosopher"—as any psychologist worthy of the name must—starting to teach it in 1885. As a psychologist, James saw that thought and brain are related, but by no means identical. At this point Barzun gives James's conception of Psychology:

Where then is the science in psychology? This question will occur to some, because we have grown used to looking for explanations "from below," in some darker level than the one surveyed, where it is hoped things may be simpler. But the first duty of science is to its own domain. Make *that* clear and

perhaps other connections will be disclosed. James established psychology as an independent science by adhering to this principle, which meant refusing to treat psychology as a branch of physiology, keeping a steady eye on a distinct subject matter, and making only those assumptions appropriate to it.

The subject matter can be defined simply enough: thoughts and feelings as experienced. And the main assumption is that these experiences occur "in a physical world existing in time and space, with which the thoughts and feelings co-exist and which they 'know'." Such is the *naturalist's* point of view. I revive the old word and avoid "naturalistic," because the term has come to stand for accounts of experience based on the analogy of man and machine—the materialist interpretation. James throughout is dead against such imports from philosophy—and not the materialist alone, but the idealist, associationist, and (as in Spencer) the crudely evolutionist. "To explain our phenomenally given thoughts as products of deeper-lying entities is metaphysics," and thus belongs outside his book. James was well fitted by his long study of philosophy to detect its secret influence where it had no business. He shows again and again how it has beclouded psychology and distorted our ideas. And because of that age-old entanglement which he must undo, the *Psychology* gives us along the way a virtual history of the warring conceptions of the mind since Plato.

To do full justice to James, we should call attention to some remarks he makes about his "psychology" in his introduction to *Psychology: Briefer Course*, which came out in 1892. It is, he said, axiomatic for the medical profession that "a state of consciousness is an activity of some sort in the cerebral hemispheres." He adopted this view in writing his book, acknowledging, however, that it was only a "partial truth." He went on:

But the only way to make sure of its unsatisfactoriness is to apply it seriously to every possible case that can turn up. To work an hypothesis "for all it is worth" is the real, and often the only, way to prove its insufficiency. I shall therefore assume without scruple at the outset that the uniform correlation of brain-states with mind-states is a law of nature. . . . But ... we do not in the least explain the nature of thought by affirming this dependence, and in that latter sense our proposition is not materialism.

Barzun notes that in the Postscript to *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) James said that "so far as I understand the Buddhist doctrine of Karma, I agree with it in principle," and we might add that in the preface to the second edition of his Ingersoll Lecture, *Human Immortality* (1898), James declares that psychological study in no sense renders untenable the idea of human immortality, although it may bring objection to the sort of immortality conceived in Christian tradition. He speaks of the "transcendent self which can assimilate experiences of which the brain has been mediator," suggesting "the continuance of our personal identity beyond the grave." He then says:

It is true that all this would seem to have affinities rather with pre-existence and with possible re-incarnations than with the Christian notion of immortality. But my concern in the lecture was not to discuss immortality in general. It was confined to showing it to be not incompatible with the brain-function theory of our present mundane consciousness.

In the *Briefer Course* he discusses free will, noting that the method of scientific psychology excludes "variables" which are impossible to compute, and therefore "abstracts from free-will, without necessarily denying its existence." He continues:

Practically, however, such abstraction is not distinguished from rejection; and most actual psychologists have no hesitation in denying that free-will exists. For ourselves, we can hand the free-will controversy over to metaphysics.

When, then, we talk of "psychology as a natural science," we must not assume that that means a sort of psychology that stands at last on solid ground. It means just the reverse; it means a psychology particularly fragile, and into which the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint, a psychology all of whose elementary assumptions and data must be reconsidered in wider connections and translated into other terms.

At present psychology is in the condition of physics before Galileo and the laws of motion, of chemistry before Lavoisier and the notion that mass is

preserved in all reactions. The Galileo and Lavoisier of psychology will be famous men indeed when they come, as come they some day surely will, or past successes are no index to the future. When they do come, however, the necessities of the case will make them "metaphysical."

Barzun's comment on the temper of James's mind belongs here. In a chapter given to the psychologist's explorations "Beyond the Conscious Mind," he suggests that James was no "true believer," remarking:

Santayana was right to say of him: "He did not really believe. He merely believed in the right of believing that you might be right if you believed." A man who says as James did that the best argument he knows for immortality is the existence of his friend Francis Child is not what I would call a shining example of Christian faith. On the three related questions of God and immortality, psychic phenomena, and the realm beyond the conscious mind, James suspends judgment to the last. He says over and over again that he wants more facts. The unconscious is actual and potent, but it is not an entity—how could it be when consciousness itself is not one? So the reality of the unconscious is not a positive answer to the three great questions. It is only a domain to explore, on the chance that the wanted facts will fill out the outline of a beginning science.

The chapter on Pragmatism is of particular value in showing what James really meant by this term. It illuminates the fact of the countless relativities in thinking and drawing conclusions. It is a word that has been and will be endlessly misused, yet serves a purpose in compelling attention to the complexities it represents. A "truth" in one framework becomes a falsity in another. What is important is the relevance of the framework, and this means far more than that something "works." Barzun says:

Actually, what James had established [in his lecture at the University of California in 1898] was that all thinking creatures—scientists, philosophers, doctors, ditchdiggers, architects, lawyers, children—alike proceed pragmatically whether they know it or not. But if Pragmatism is not an ism one adopts like Marxism or Zen Buddhism, not a world-view but a description of the common path to truth, there is nothing to join and "believe in." If the description is correct, everybody is a pragmatist, for the same

reason that M. Jourdain in Moliere's comedy had spoken prose all his life: there was no way he could do anything else.

The truth, as every real thinker from Socrates to Korzybski has shown, is endlessly elusive. Barzun quotes James's demonstration of this in one of his lectures:

For me, this whole "audience" is one thing, which grows now restless, now attentive. But in your eyes, ladies and gentlemen, to call you "audience" is an accidental way of taking you. The permanent real things for you are your individual persons. To an anatomist, again, those persons are but organisms, and the real things are the organs. Not the organs so much as the individual cells, say the histologists; not the cells but their molecules, say in turn the chemists.

We have, alas, given no space to the sheer delight of this book—the wonderful tales about James, the things he said, the paradoxes he invented and used. C. S. Peirce said of him: "Who, for example, could be of a nature so different than I? He so concrete, so living; I a mere table of contents, so abstract. . . . Yet in all my life I found scarce a soul that seemed to comprehend naturally the mainspring of my life better than he did. He was even greater in the practice than in the theory of psychology." Those who knew him best loved him most. James's sister, Alice, wrote of William in her diary: "All that there is to be said of him, of course, is that he is simply himself; a creature who speaks another language, as Henry says, from the rest of mankind, and who would lend charm to a treadmill."

Jacques Barzun makes it plain that at no time in the foreseeable future will William James be a dated thinker. The important question is why.

**COMMENTARY**  
**HOW PEACE WILL COME**

WE now have an advance copy of the 1984 War Resisters League Calendar and Appointment Book, the best one, we think, in some years. The full title is *Against the Tide—Pacifist Resistance in the Second World War, an Oral History*. Single copies are \$5.00, four for \$18.00. Send the money to WRL, 339 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10012, adding for state taxes (which vary) and 83 cents postage each if you want the WRL to send them to friends abroad as a Christmas gift.

With quotations and pictures the editors, Deena Hurwitz and Craig Simpson, have recreated the feelings, hopes, and fears of these men of forty years ago who refused any form of military service, and who either went to federal Civilian Public Service Camps to do the alternative service required by law, or to prison. Many of the best men chose prison, others got there by walking out of camp in protest against conscription or by refusing to work. The men were not paid, and some of them felt that this was giving legal precedent to slavery in the United States.

Who were these men? The Calendar gives many of their names, along with their recollections. But the poem by William Everson (on the inside front cover) tells who they were:

For we are the ones  
Who, outside the narrows of nationalism and its iron pride,  
Reject the compulsion;  
Who stamp our allegiance  
Only at last on a concept wider than it can hold,  
Denying the right of its militant creed,  
Its arrogant will,  
Its ignorant laws and its dangerous myth.  
Who, facing the edges of that decision,  
Will pay the wry price,  
Will reap the loving reward of faith;  
And pray as we reap it that time and its pain,  
And the deadly erosion of will,  
Traitors us not to our need.

And each in his room . . .  
Unwilling to preach,  
Disliking the odor of any crusade,  
Knowing only as each man unto himself,  
Perceives its truth, will the Peace come . . .

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### PAIDEIA

THE reader of Werner Jaeger's *Paideia*—in three volumes embodying his lifework, still available from Oxford University Press—is made to feel he has entered a stately hall, austere yet gently inviting, a place of privilege and promise where one feels shyly that he has not earned the right to feel at home. You stay, because the author is essentially friendly, for all his knowledge and wisdom.

So it was a particular pleasure to read in the *Summer American Scholar* the account of how Werner Jaeger taught at Harvard, by Clara Claiborne Park, who went to school to him. *Paideia* is the meaning of ancient Greece—what the best of the Greeks sought to accomplish. It was to bring to the surface of the common life the calm, the truth, the immeasurable strength of eternity. It was "that way of making ourselves immortal," as Clara Park says that "has nothing to do with life after the death of the body." It was the immortality, not of fame but of "the life of philosophic *theoria*." Clara Park came to know the author of *Paideia* because while going to Radcliffe, she knew enough "to know that I ought to take a course with Werner Jaeger—it didn't matter what."

What was he like? An anecdote serves best here:

Exam time came. Two very young women bending over blue books, slowly puzzling out our translations, we looked up startled as the door opened. The exam was not half over; we had still an hour and a half to go. Nothing in our years of Harvard education, not even four months of Professor Jaeger's courtly friendliness, had prepared us for what we saw: his pale luminous presence advancing upon us in soft benignity, bearing a tin of wafers. They were delicate, long, thin cylinders with chocolate inside; I cannot imagine how he had acquired such quintessentially European confections in wartime America.

Those were days when Harvard students seldom presumed to speak to their teachers.

I was accustomed not to being taught but to being lectured at, from notes yet unpublished or yellowed with age, brilliantly or dully, but always from a distance, whether I sat in a group of two hundred or (as in Ralph Barton's Perry's course in ethics) at a table within three feet of the professor. It may not have been always so at Harvard; I had a friend who said he played tennis with a professor. But at Radcliffe the distance between student and teacher was unbridgeable. . . . I remember with shame John Wild, then in what must have been his early years of teaching, trying, not to start a discussion—there would have been no chance of that—but to elicit from his class on the *Gorgias* the obvious parallel between rhetoric, as Plato excoriated it, and modern advertising. He had breached Harvard etiquette, he must have studied elsewhere. We sat silent, sourly complacent at withholding the answer we knew he wanted, and after a sickening interval he had to supply it himself. But most professors seemed well content. So we were totally unprepared for a teacher who seemed to think it natural to offer us refreshments, to ask his classes—even the larger ones—to tea at his home, the only home of a Harvard professor I ever entered.

Mrs. Park goes on:

Mr. Jaeger was unique among the professors I have known in the harmony—the identity indeed—between what he professed and what he was. *Paideia* was the subject of the more than fifty years of his scholarship, the Hellenic *paideia* realized first in itself, and later as it was transformed into what he called "the *paideia* of Christ." . . . He quotes in *Paideia* that culminating section of Plato's *Apology* which is Socrates' description of his "service to God": "For all that I do is to go round and persuade young and old among you not to give so much of your attention to your bodies and your money as to the perfection of your souls." Jaeger comments: "Socrates says that he 'philosophizes.' Obviously, he does not mean by this that he engages in abstract thought, but that he exhorts and teaches." And for Plato, he observes: "All human effort to reach the truth is ultimately justified . . . not (as for the great natural philosophers of the era before Socrates) by the urge to solve the riddle of the world, but by the necessity of knowledge in maintaining and shaping human life." Plato's work was a public, a political activity he told us, as all Greek literature had been, its

aim "to bring the true society into being as the proper milieu for the achievement of the highest virtue possible to man."

Jaeger was a man, the Harvard *Crimson* reported in amazement, who would "stop work to talk for hours—literally hours—with any student who comes in on any pretext whatever." He was at the same time aware that American students were lacking in the background his European experience had led him to expect:

Professor Jaeger knew our limits well enough—he wrote in 1960, the year before his death, that to learn what classical scholarship was like in a country where classical humanism did not exist, one must come to America. Stumbling through our Greek or Latin—or worse, studying, through the veil of translation, words on the untranslatability of each one of which he could have given a full lecture—we were not like the students he had had, that he might still have had, in Germany. Yet he never made us feel our inadequacy. If our Greek was imperfect and slow, very well, he would have us buy the Loeb with its double text; important as the words were, more important was what could survive translation. If Dante, or Hegel, or Nietzsche, or St. Thomas were only names to us, he would give us a phrase or a sentence or a reflection to make us vow that one day they would be more. Like all great teachers, he met us where we were, selecting from his vast storehouse what we were ready for, which was, of course, a tiny proportion of what he knew, of what was relevant, and even, surely, of what he deemed essential, recognizing that each stage of learning has its integrity.

Those who do not recognize this will never be teachers, no matter what they do.

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We go from this sublime height to the only-by-contrast ridiculous—the subject of what teachers are paid or ought to be paid—in an essay by Aristides up front in the same issue of the *Scholar*. Aristides was labeled "The Just" by his Athenian contemporaries—so this pen name sounds like an editorial vanity—but whoever he is, the following is worth repeating:

I used to hear the argument made fairly regularly that teachers are greatly underpaid, and at

some point in this argument someone would inevitably say, "Why even garbage collectors make more!" As someone in favor of better education—a courageous stand for me to take, don't you think?—this argument always made me a trifle edgy. I thought that garbage collectors deserved more. For one thing, teachers are usually teachers by choice, while garbage collectors collect garbage for want of anything better to do. For another, a good teacher is rather rare, but who knows a bad garbage collector? But if we are going to talk about the underpaid, what about that national treasure, that lonely yet proud figure, on whose shoulders so much of the quality of a country's culture depends—I speak of course of that splendid and stalwart chap, the essayist.

A concluding paragraph:

Still, teaching has its moments, and these come in various forms: exhilaration, surprising intellectual discovery, appreciation for things one felt confident went unnoticed. Yet of the jobs I do, teaching is the one I approach with a tinge of fear. I shall hold back on a quotation from Kierkegaard here, but even after seven years on the job I often walk into classrooms slightly tremulous. Colleagues have told me that they continue to do so after thirty or more years of teaching. What is there to be fearful of? Of being boring? Of seeming boobish? Of, somehow, blowing it? I do, after all, know more than my students—at least most of the time I do. Yet the touch of fear is still usually there, and the troubling thing is that I tend to teach worse when it isn't.

## *FRONTIERS* Organs of Culture

A LITTLE over a century ago, John Wesley Powell, a Civil War veteran with only one arm (the other shot off in the war), the first American to explore and travel the Colorado River in a boat, wrote his *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States* (1878), made to the Congress (reprinted by the Harvard University Press in 1962, but now out of print). Recently, Peter Warshall, an expert on watersheds, called it "the most beautiful environmental impact report ever written," noting that cultural historians have compared *Arid Lands* with *The Federalist* by reason of its excellence. In his book on Powell, Wallace Stegner says that he was advocating watershed regionalism, with the West organized into "hydrographic basins which would be virtually self-governing and hence able to negotiate with other similar basins, as well as to control their own watersheds clear to the drainage divides."

Was anything done in this direction? Nothing. The *Report* did lead to the establishment of the U.S. Geological Survey, but Powell's ideas on watershed management were ignored. He reported to Congress, but the Government was preoccupied with other things.

There seems a sense in which, at last, we are now in better shape. Reports go on being made to the government, and go on being ignored, but the faith of the people in government has diminished in the century since Powell's work, and today we are developing a breed of journalists who make reports to the people themselves; and steadily, if slowly, the people are beginning to accept responsibility for the conditions of their own lives. This observation comes as a result of reading in recent issues of *High Country News*, a biweekly regional newspaper published in Paonia, Colorado, by Ed and Betsy Marston, founders of *Western Colorado Report*, now merged with *High Country News*, which began thirteen years ago and

earned wide respect but not quite enough support. High Country is mountain country and the paper covers the human, social, and socio-economic concerns of five states—Wyoming, Utah, Montana, Idaho, and Colorado—dealing with such issues as water supply, dams, power generation, mining, agriculture, ranching, forestry, and environmental issues. (The address is Box V, Paonia, Colo. 81428, subscriptions \$18 per year.) The enterprise is non-profit, the publisher the High Country Foundation.

Here, we want to talk about, not the useful and colorful content of *High Country News*, but the critical self-consciousness of this sort of regional publishing. Successful regionalism will of course *depend* upon critical self-consciousness, along with a growing sense of conscious purpose and an increasingly independent choice of goals.

It is quite evident that *High Country News* has for its mission enabling people to make their decisions and loyalties *informed*. There is not much hope for the country without journalism that performs this function.

In the Sept. 5 issue—the first under the guidance of the Marstons—the publisher, Ed Marston, reviews a *Wall Street Journal* story on the abuse by various "authorities" of the confidence felt by journalists that what they were being told by nuclear industry spokesmen (and doubtless by Atomic Energy Commission officials) was reliable and true. But after at least some of the facts about the Three Mile Island disaster were made common knowledge, the press of the country realized that reporters and editors had been "tricked and half-truthed into writing stories and editorials which are not true." After talking to journalists about the coverage of Three Mile Island, the *Wall Street Journal* writer decided:

Reporters know little about the innards of nuclear reactors. He also learned that reporters don't know how to choose between authority figures. One TV journalist told the *Journal*: "Who am I to be an arbiter between Ph.Ds?"

Another journalist was shocked to learn from TMI that not everyone comes to the press with their cards on the table. "We're being used by both sides on the issue."

#### Marston comments:

The sad little cry—"we're being used by both sides"—is a complaint that the good old days are over. In the past, only the industry-government side got to use the media. The other side couldn't get in the door. TMI opened the door. Marston's review article concludes:

Finally, the *Journal* could have asked the reporters who covered TMI how America can survive in an age that is both centralized and technological if those in charge of the power centers cannot be trusted.

Those are the questions we face. They go far beyond being for or against nuclear energy. TMI has helped us see that nuclear energy is a technological Watergate, raising fundamental social and political questions about the society in which we live.

*High Country News*, it seems to us, is the kind of journalism which can be trusted. It doubtless exists elsewhere—such responsible editing and reporting is a quiet trend struggling to get stronger—but this paper is before us as an example. What, in terms of social philosophy, does it mean?

A distinction made years ago, by Ortega y Gasset, in *The Mission of the University* (1944), helps to answer this question. In the chapter, "Culture and Science," he said that while our culture is largely founded on science, and continually borrows from science, the two are not the same.

There are entire portions of science which are not culture but pure scientific technique. And vice versa, culture requires that we possess a complete concept of the world and of man; it is not for culture to stop, with science, at the point where the methods of absolute theoretic rigor happen to end. Life cannot wait until the sciences may have explained the universe scientifically. We cannot put off living until we are ready. The most salient characteristic of life is its coerciveness: it is always urgent, "here and now" without any possible postponement. Life is fired at us point-blank. And culture, which is but its

interpretation, cannot wait any more than can life itself.

This sharpens the distinction between culture and science. Science is not something by which we live. If the physicist had to live by the ideas of his science, you may rest assured that he would not be so finicky as to wait for some other investigator to complete his research a century or so later. He would renounce the hope of a complete scientific solution, and fill in, with approximate or probable anticipation what the rigorous corpus of physical doctrine lacks at present and in part, will always lack.

The internal conduct of science is not a *vital* concern; that of culture is. Science is indifferent to the exigencies of our life, and follows its own necessities.

Good journalism is the organ of culture. It is quite competent to act as arbiter between competing Ph.Ds. (See, on this point, Wendell Berry's *Standing by Words*, in which he exposes the absolute incapability of the A.E.C. executives to explain intelligibly to the public what happened at Three Mile Island.)