

TOWARD INCLUSIVE SIMPLICITIES

IF we knew how to make every simplicity of conviction disclose the cost of obtaining it, the interminable argument about the way to reach knowledge or the "truth" could probably be abridged to an elementary text. The insistence on simplicity in explanation is doubtless as basic in human life as the philosophic longing for unity—in both cases we seek it before we know what it involves. For cognitive intelligence, simplicity comes to be acknowledged as a good in itself, perhaps because without it there seems little chance of having the feeling that one at last *knows*. The main argument of Copernicus for the heliocentric theory was the simplicity of its solution, in contrast to Ptolemaic complexity.

There are, however, strong emotional or moral factors, usually of historical origin, which determine the *kind* of simplicity which is sought. The entire materialistic movement, from the time, say, of William of Ockham, rejected simplicities which seemed to have only a ritual meaning—which you couldn't *do* anything with. And with adoption of the Baconian criterion of knowledge as the means to power, it became reasonable to ignore in the name of science all generalizations without relation to the experimental method. Love of freedom was bound up in this decisive historical tendency. Ockham was critical of the doctrine of papal supremacy and was tried for heresy because he charged that theological doctrines could not be demonstrated by reason. Anticipating the scientific spirit, he declared that one should make no more hypotheses than are necessary, leading, as Dampier says in his *History of Science*, to stress on the objects of immediate perception "in a spirit that distrusted abstractions and made eventually for direct observation and experiment, for inductive research."

The simplicity growing out of scientific empiricism is therefore the simplicity of reduction

and isolation. It supports the pluralistic view of knowledge, in which it is maintained that we can know a great deal about some things without knowing about "everything." In recent times, the mathematics of probability has become a crucial ally of empirical science, smoothing out the irregularities of observed data and providing a formal simplicity. As Dampier remarks: "Indeed, the intellectual basis of all empirical knowledge may be said to be a matter of probability, expressible only in terms of a bet."

The seventeenth century was the time when the drive for mechanistic simplicity took definite form in the Western mind, through Descartes in France and Hobbes in England. We owe to Bertrand Russell and some others the recognition that behind this materialistic tendency in thought was a vast, inchoate hatred of religious thought-control and ecclesiastical tyranny, making men deaf to occasional warnings that this "mechanical" escape from domineering religious psychology might bring other problems just as great. The last serious intellectual opposition to materialism was made by the Platonic thinkers of seventeenth-century England. Dampier summarizes in a sentence the thrust of learned works by Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, and John Glanvil: "The Cambridge Platonists pointed out that a theory which made extension and its modes the only real properties of bodies could not explain life and thought, and tried to reconcile religion and mechanical philosophy by an apotheosis of space." Robert Boyle, sometimes called the Father of Chemistry, also had his qualms, observing that after all "there are *de facto* in the world certain sensible and rational beings that we call men," which was a way of arguing that the secondary qualities are just as "real" as the primary qualities of interest to the physicists. But the moral promise of Materialism (freedom of thought) was

too great, the attraction of its wonderful simplicity too delighting, for the emerging *Zeitgeist* to be reversed by such cautionary expressions. It was not until the twentieth century, after the climax of negation of subjective reality was reached in the Behaviorism of John B. Watson—a *reductio ad absurdum* of the very idea of Man—that the way opened for another kind of thinking in psychology.

Two things, basically, have happened in the twentieth century. We have exhausted the moral emotion behind the drive for mechanical simplicity, and we are confronted by complex disasters which seem directly related to the *reductive* character of experimental knowledge. The human longing for simplicity remains—is, in fact, indispensable—but what we are looking for, now, is a simplicity which is *inclusive* rather than *reductive*. The great question before us is whether such a simplicity is possible without loss of scientific exactitude. Can we "philosophize" the scientific point of view? Can we "humanize" technology?

We hardly have vocabulary for dealing with such questions. Humanizing thought results from holistic thinking and scientific practice has been in an opposite direction. Reductive simplicity affords no openings for inclusive simplicity—they represent different universes of discourse.

This becomes plain when we consider that the men who, starting in 1935 with Alexis Carrel's publication of *Man the Unknown*, have tried to introduce inclusive simplicity to modern scientific thought, were all obliged to make a dramatic break with conventional scientific thinking. Such figures have been various, some being regarded as exhibiting merely an enthusiastic tendency, while others, as for example Lecomte du Noüy, seemed to signal a return to sectarian religion. The physicists in this group have on the whole given little cause for apprehension on the latter count. Jeans and Eddington could hardly be accused of theological tendencies, and Einstein declared unequivocally against any such inclination. The most recent philosophizing scientist is of course

Teilhard de Chardin, and it must be admitted that he speaks more to universal human longing than to potentialities apparent in the scientific disciplines practiced by his colleagues.

But despite the lack of conceptual and verbal tools for inclusive simplicity, a great moral energy supports the quest. The longing is upon us, a new *Zeitgeist* is emerging, and in the spirit of what might be called a higher pragmatism the search for subjective meaning is breaking out all over. What is wanted, of course, is a method of reality-testing comparable to that afforded by scientific method. Assuming it to be possible, its development will take time. We are now in the period of brave, determined, and widely diverse attempts.

For illustration of the mood of these inquiries, we have the September number of the *Council Journal*, published by the Council for Higher Education (Todd Hill Road, Lakeside, Conn. 06785). The four contributors to this issue are all self-consciously determined to make holistic considerations penetrate the modern technological scene. The common theme is "Choice, the Imperative of Tomorrow," which in itself is of interest—not "freedom" and how to get it, but what to do with the freedom we have. These writers imply that we have too narrow and habitual a conception of the options which lie before us. Past actions have been controlled by the rigidities of unexamined assumptions. One of the writers quotes Hans F. Hofman to set the inquiry in general terms:

The tension in human existence that man must creatively employ persists between values and meaning. A value suggests that a certain person, object, or event is more important or precious than another. We must be willing to sacrifice the less-valued objects in our possession for the higher-valued one we want to gain. In Biblical language: A man must be willing to sell all he has in order to buy the one precious pearl. Or someone may forego the pleasure of a trip in order to buy an expensive fur coat or racing car. Values impress on man the need actively and decisively to choose.

Meaning, on the contrary, is discovered when we dare to cease actively selecting. With a reflective

distance from immediate involvement we begin to ask ourselves why we are so eagerly seeking to better our life. The tension between values and meaning represents the stark difference between an attitude of reflective meditation and active pursuit without reflection. . . . Man must keep in fragile balance the suggestiveness of values and the over-all sense of direction that expresses meaning.

The general implication of all the *Council Journal* articles is that the problem is no longer to attack a few, well-defined and omnipresent evils—such as poverty, the harshness of the natural environment, and disease—but to choose among a multitude of often deceptive goods. As Donald W. Shriver says in his article, "What We Are Yet To Be":

A society where starvation no longer reigns, . . . has a set of problems to which the traditionalism of the politicians and educators no longer speaks. *The range of unprecedented choices has widened*: those who walk off the land into factories must decide how to relate to job foreman, and no leader in the old village can tell them how. Students in professional schools who want to follow the footsteps of their fathers discover that the profession has meanwhile proliferated into a hundred specialties; and father's experience is no sure guide for choosing between them. Young politicians who want to govern a metropolis look in vain for sure guidance from the old pros, because the latter have not yet understood why there should be such a thing as "city planning."

In short, modern economic, political, and technical change have forced upon us certain choices which we are free to make for the first time, but which we are not free not to make. Like other men in other times, by increasing our power to act, we have increased our need for the power to deliberate. New capacity to do good deeds requires new capacity to think good thoughts.

Two things might be said here. One is that the fundamental choices spoken of by Mr. Shriver have always been available to human beings. The ethical ideas of the high religions prove this. But it has been possible for a great many men to avoid them. In many cases the extensive authority of traditional societies reduced the problem of philosophical choice to obedience to custom and code. But today, when rational decision by the

people is an avowed principle—and when the material circumstances of life have largely altered popular conceptions of good and evil—obedience to custom and "leaders" has become the path to disaster of many kinds. So the pressure to think about the meaning of choice becomes urgent indeed.

This pressure has an interesting accompaniment. When ancient moral simplicities are let down like a net into the confused seas of modern life, and then raised up for inspection, they seem to display a new significance of ethics. Nothing else, many people are beginning to believe, will really *work*. Here, conceivably, is the tap root of the inclusive simplicities. While the vast practicality of ethics is seldom discovered except in practice, realizations of this sort seem to be seeping into the conscious awareness of our time, affecting the very language of ethical discourse. Mr. Shriver writes on this point:

. . . partly to their sorrow, America and its great middle class are learning to forego the luxury of isolationism. . . . The impact of this development on the self-consciousness of us all is already profound. At the World Conference on Church and Society in the summer of 1966 in Geneva, hundreds of churchmen who had never been outside their countries seemed to awake suddenly to the fact that internationalism is a fact, not simply an ideal, of our time. Old men may treat it as an ideal but the young in particular insist on treating it as a fact. Thus students on university campuses throughout the world are defining the "generational gap" between them and their elders partly in their refusal to cooperate with the tribalism of their elders. For them, authentic human selfhood involves the affirmation of a loyalty to the human race that is prior to loyalty to any part of the human race.

An article by Richard Kean, which starts off with a quotation from Goethe as a guide—

If we take man as he is, we make him worse.
But if we take man as if he already were what he could be, then we make him what he can be

—has some warning paragraphs concerning the unpreparedness of the world for the decisions being pressed upon us:

All too often, we fail to realize that our abundance, as an accumulated and dynamic presence, bestows upon us a power beyond creation or destruction, the power to fulfill self-fulfilling prophecies. . . . We forget that—just as likely as we will foul the atmosphere to the end that the world's population will suffocate or drown, or, for that matter, as likely as we will devise means to restore it to pine-forest freshness—it is equally possible that some of us "good" guys will live in air-conditioned geodesic domes arched on stilts over Manhattan and other "important" cities, and that the rest of those "bad" guys will have to fend for themselves. It is entirely conceivable to me, because of the self-justifying nature of our present attitudes toward our abundance, that we could conduct the war in Southeast Asia for the next 150 years, moving the drama occasionally as each theater wears out, transfusing our self-energizing investments from economy to economy, without ever invoking enough wrath from our comrades-in-arms to bring the Last Exeunt crashing down upon us. And it would of course, be quite a nice life, for those of us who didn't have to face the prospect of getting our heads blown off, or seeing our daughters prostituted to foreign soldiers.

. . . we have not even begun to deal seriously in the universities with the question of whether an integrated understanding of (at least) his personal universe is essential to a man if he is to call himself part of the human race.

An unexpected and disquieting array of new choices forms the content of George M. Schnurr's article, "Biotechnology—the Temptation to Play God." The possibilities of physiological manipulation are cited from Robert Sinsheimer:

Would you like your son to be six feet tall? Seven feet? Eight feet? What troubles you? Allergy? Obesity? Arthritic pain? These can be easily handled. For cancer, diabetes phenylketonuria there will be genetic therapy. The appropriate DNA will be provided in the appropriate dose.

Here, again, the optimism generated by a past devoted to attacking known and universally condemned evils moves us unquestioningly to order up from medical technology a wide variety of supposed goods:

Modern medicine has achieved its greatest successes precisely where it has been possible to isolate specific pathological conditions in an

otherwise stable organism or environment. This history of particular battles won has bred confidence in the tactics used. Hence the clear-cut recommendations for the use of biotechnology which frequently come from scientific pundits. . . .

In enabling us to accentuate the positive, big-technology tempts us to practice the ancient ancestor of technology—magic. Do you wish for tranquility? It shall be granted. But what if it will be by another Thalidomide? The magic alchemy which would allow us to do whatever we desire can have Midas-like consequences.

The reductive simplicities, suitable for the manipulation of matter, are ominously unpredictable when applied to man. There are so many side-effects we seem unable to take into consideration. We are bound to try many of these goodies, of course, since the habit of faith in science remains strong. But we need to protect ourselves with some strong inclusive simplicities about man. Otherwise the multiplicity of variables that reductive science leaves lying all about will be beyond our capacity to deal with. (City planners such as Christopher Alexander have already made this discovery.) Mr. Schnurr phrases the difficulties in this way:

Recent psychological studies have indicated that the brightest minds can interrelate no more than seven or eight variables at a time. Most of us have difficulty with two or three. The ideal of science is to cut the variables under consideration at any one time down to one which can be precisely controlled. The art of living includes sensitivity to the possibility of variables we have not noticed and may only now be noticeable. Technology contributes to the art of living when our activism for a defined future is balanced by a perceptive appreciation for the latent present. Perhaps the best word for this willingness to be surprised is "love."

The fourth contributor to the *Council Journal*, Melvin Kranzberg, thinks the Humanists are failing to appreciate the possibilities of technology for human good. He is a milder critic than C. P. Snow, but seems lacking, along with Snow, in an understanding of what the Humanists—or the best of them—are driving at. This becomes clear when he somewhat

ridiculously threatens the artists and writers with cultural boycott:

If the humanists no longer fulfill their role of interpreting nature and society to man, that task will be taken up by the social scientists and psychologists. Instead of reading poetry to acquaint themselves with the wellsprings of human behavior and man's relations to nature, we will read psychology. Instead of viewing drama and paintings which endeavor to interpret nature and man's relations to society, we will peruse sociological tracts and look at photographs. Indeed, we have already begun to do so, largely because the humanities have abandoned their traditional role and left a gap in the fulfillment of this humanistic imperative.

There is little evidence in Mr. Kranzberg's article that he has ever heard what the humanists are saying—what, for example, Lewis Mumford has said about the meaning of modern art, or what lies behind the agony of the Theater of the Absurd. The fact is that while no one has final answers, the humanists usually understand how and what the technologists think far better than the technologists understand the humanists. And there is a sense in which science will never comprehend either life or man until it joins the Humanities in the way that J. Bronowski has joined them. It may be true, as Mr. Kranzberg says, that the machine, through the prosperity it has engendered, "is making possible the attacks upon it," but to demand genuflections of the humanists on this account is to cast technology in the role of the successful businessman who can now afford the generosity of having a few radicals over to dinner, and admits to a late interest in "culture."

This issue needs no analysis in institutional terms. It is only confusing to treat Technology and Humanism as two kinds of Establishments. All that the Humanists have ever said is simply put in Richard Kean's words. They declare that "an integrated understanding of (at least) his personal universe is essential to man if he is to call himself part of the human race." Technology has not changed this requirement, and the Humanist adds that letting technology, whatever its practical

contributions, distract from this primary task is a sure course to dehumanization.

Yet it is clear from Mr. Kranzberg's discussion that technology has played a large part in precipitating the crisis in human decision. It has brought a challenge it cannot meet, created dilemmas it cannot resolve. *This* is the reality-principle that is now knocking at our door. We can welcome and understand it only with inclusive simplicities concerned with the nature of man.

REVIEW

EXIT THE ANTIQUARIANS

ALONG with the revival of introspection in psychology has come the study of old religions, myths, and cultural practices for access to the *living* convictions of men of the past. Increasingly, in these pursuits, the object is to avoid the "outsider" point of view and to attempt to "feel with" the peoples being studied. This is a scholarship free of the egotism which supposes that the thought of mankind before the scientific revolution is of only historical interest. Earlier works of cultural anthropology may have embodied premonitions of this spirit, but a book which, through its enormous influence, may be taken as the turning-point of the change in attitude is Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Pantheon), first published in 1949.

Credit must also be given to Carl Jung, as the first of the psychotherapists to seek vital meaning in past and even ancient belief. Jung's use of myth and symbol in his endeavor to understand the complexity of the psyche not only added greatly to the resources of modern psychology; it also wore away at the assumption that ancient ideas about soul and self were no more than elaborate superstitions or poetic fancies. Works which used the symbolism of subtly structured metaphysical systems of the past were in time recognized as mirroring unchanging psychological functions. The antiquity of these ideas is no longer an objection to their use as tools of contemporary self-understanding, it following that a wide range of related ideas, long exiled from serious consideration, has suddenly acquired new acceptability. Pioneering this tendency in his *Integration of Personality* (1939), Jung dared to explore psychological implications of alchemical imagery. He explained in his Introduction:

Alchemy is not an old hobby of mine; I began a thorough study of the subject only within the last few years. My reason for making a fairly extensive use of alchemical parallels is that in my psychological practice I have observed quite a number of actual

patients' cases which show unmistakable similarities to alchemistic symbolism. . . . I must confess that it cost me quite a struggle to overcome the prejudice, which I shared with many others, against the seeming absurdity of alchemy. There is no hope of an approach to the subject if it is considered from the standpoint of modern chemistry, and it appears hopeless when one first tries to understand it psychologically. But my patience has been richly rewarded. I am now satisfied that alchemy is the requisite medieval exemplar of this concept of individuation.

By his courage in taking alchemy seriously, Jung opened the way to other investigations. Today, there is hardly an important idea of ancient religion which is not gaining fresh attention, and the specialists who approach past faiths and doctrines as expressions of living belief—of whom Mercea Eliade is a good illustration—are becoming the most quoted scholars of the times. Joseph L. Henderson, whose book, *Thresholds of Initiation* (Wesleyan University, 1967), reviewed here on Oct. 4, gives another example of the new scholarship, in this case the work of a psychotherapist who makes daily clinical use of the psychic dynamics found in pre-scientific cultures. One has only to read such books to see that this is no antiquarian interest in the past, but the adoption of ideas seen to be functional to the understanding of human nature.

There is little, then, of metaphysical attraction in this turning of psychologists, cultural anthropologists, and others to the lore of ancient cultures—the interest is pragmatic. The concepts of alchemy, of the cycle of the hero, the rites of initiation, and ideas of regeneration have rather become symbolic generalizations which help us to understand ourselves and to shape slowly emerging norms of an ideal human life, providing definitions of "health" more useful than merely biological conceptions. A side-effect of these assimilations from the past, however, has been an invitation to consider more openly the metaphysical transcendentalism associated with ancient psychological dynamics. For example, in studying the various conceptions of initiation, Dr.

Henderson found himself repeatedly confronted by their close connection with reincarnation. As he explains in *Thresholds of Initiation*:

The structure of the archetype of initiation, then combines a series of levels, stages, grades, or degrees. . . . this structure is found in mystical traditions of initiation as having seven stages (found in Egyptian and Mesopotamian tombs) and by the seven steps of the alchemical process, . . .

Literature pertaining to the subject of reincarnation abounds in imagery derived from this archetype, persuading us to believe that the soul in its migrations learns the capacity to transcend its previous incarnations and perhaps, through death and rebirth, to reach some ultimate or penultimate goal of spiritual perfection. This was most perfectly expressed by Carl Gustav Carus as "the old Indian teaching of the perpetual training of the soul through endless forms of existence."

It is of more than incidental interest that Dr. Henderson feels inclined to add a surprising bit of evidence concerning the *rationality* of reincarnation—with this aside:

Even scientists have recognized the basic rational validity of such images of thought. The Darwinian champion, Thomas Huxley wrote: "Like the doctrine of evolution itself, that of transmigration has its roots in the world of reality, and it may claim such support as the great argument from analogy is capable of supplying."

Huxley's ostentatiously open mind on this question is a curious trait in the nineteenth-century advocate of ape-ancestry theory and of epiphenomenalism in psychology; for him it must have been some sort of intellectual or academic generosity; but for men of the present, who adopt philosophical ideas mainly because they see a way of *using* them, to consider the doctrine of rebirth is to contemplate a daring metaphysical leap. (This expression is partly borrowed from Erich Fromm, who spoke of the necessity of the patient in therapy to take what he called the "therapeutic leap.") A perfectly legitimate reason for assuming the stance of the believer in reincarnation is the likelihood that the ardor and depth of conviction supporting antique metaphysical systems often cannot really be grasped in any other way. How

extensively true this may become plain from an inspection of a book we have for review—*Reincarnation in World Thought*, by Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston (Julian Press, 1967, \$8.50), a much revised and amplified edition of an earlier work, *Reincarnation, an East-West Anthology* (reviewed in MANAS for Feb. 2, 1962).

An interesting way to get at the impact of the doctrine of rebirth in serious thought is to look at the influence it exercised during the decline of the Roman empire. Like the present, this period was a time of break-up in belief, of widespread cynicism and unearned skepticism. From the days of Cicero to Julian, even while a shallow sophistication was condemning the old myths as ridiculous fairy tales, the civilized and educated members of society sought principles of integration in Greek philosophy. The editors of *Reincarnation in World Thought* take from the French scholar, Franz Cumont (in *After Life in Roman Paganism*), the following account of the idea of the self which the readers of Posidonius (b. 135 B.C.) obtained from his revival of Pythagorean and Eastern ideas of reincarnation:

This theology attributed to man a power such as to satisfy his proudest feelings. It did not regard him as a tiny animalcule who had appeared on a small planet lost in immensity nor did it, when he scrutinized the heavens, crush him with a sense of his own pettiness as compared with bodies whose greatness surpassed the limits of his imagination. It made man king of creation.

During the Hellenistic period the Neoplatonic philosophers added their eclectic contributions to a Platonic revival, establishing, as Thomas Whittaker remarks, "the maturest thought that the European world has seen." With them, as with Plato, reincarnation is an underlying assumption of the view of man and nature, and the lucidity and refinement of their thought brought a renaissance of transcendental thinking which lasted until the onset of the Dark Ages and the systematic suppression of pagan wisdom by jealous and angry officials and priests of the temporally powerful church. The appeal of Neoplatonism to

sophisticated Romans is described by Alice Zimmern. Speaking of the most famous of the new Platonists, Plotinus, she says:

At the age of forty he settled in Rome, and there opened a school of philosophy. . . . In spite of the abstruse nature of his teaching, crowds flocked around Plotinus. Men of science, physicians, senators and lawyers came to hear him; even Roman ladies enrolled themselves among his disciples. . . . This popularity of an abstruse philosopher is a curious and perhaps unique phenomenon. . . .

The Neoplatonic philosophers were driven from Rome and Athens by the edict of Justinian (529) and this ambitious pillar of Christian orthodoxy eventually joined with the Church in anathematizing the doctrine of pre-existence (in 553)—for, indeed, the philosophic appeal of this idea had penetrated the Platonizing Alexandrian Fathers such as Origen. Curiously enough, the heresy of metempsychosis could not be permanently suppressed, and it appears in association with many of the revivals of the idea of the dignity of man—which reached a climax in the Italian Renaissance, again by Platonic and Neoplatonic inspiration, at the courts of Cosimo and Lorenzo de Medici. Little more than a hundred years later, Bruno was martyred for his muscular declarations of Pythagorean doctrine, including that of the plurality of inhabited worlds.

The roots of this belief in the East are of course well known, and a full sampling of expressions of reincarnation in Hinduism and Buddhism is given by this volume. This was to be expected, but some readers are likely to be surprised by the frequency of its expression in Western thought. The view of Schopenhauer, that the idea of reincarnation "presents itself as the natural conviction of man whenever he reflects in an unprejudiced manner," seems vindicated by this book. Even the great eighteenth-century skeptic, David Hume, said that pre-existence affords "the only system to which philosophy can hearken." The list of Western thinkers, artists, and creative writers who gave suggestive expression to the idea seems almost unlimited. *Reincarnation in*

World Thought, as a compendium of what some of the greatest minds of all time have believed on the subject of immortality, may have an extraordinarily liberating influence on the subjective longings of men of the present—a contribution which may prove to be of more importance than the scholarly aspect of this work.

COMMENTARY

THE EXAMINED LIFE

THE almost unique contribution of Ortega to his time—which is still our time—was the consistent demonstration throughout everything he wrote that the knowledge we need to live constructive, useful lives is already in our possession—it is not something we must wait for, anxiously, to be discovered by some extraordinary "researcher" who will show us how to clean up our messes and solve all our problems.

The difficulty in getting this knowledge is not in discovering it but in *recognizing* it. It cannot be exactly defined, but it is endlessly illustrated in the works of certain men. In Ortega, for example, you find it in his refusal to let any dehumanizing idea invade and control any of his thought processes. Many men do this on intuitive grounds, but Ortega rejects dehumanization on rational grounds and as a philosopher and educator explains why. The quality and influence of an idea, Ortega saw, was not so much *in* the idea as in a man's relation to it. Has he made the idea his own, or merely inherited it? Ortega's resistance to dehumanization is fundamentally right here, in attitude and act. The man born into a culture confident of its knowledge is in danger of becoming a barbarian. As he puts it in *Man and Crisis* (Norton Library):

He who receives an idea from his forebears tends to save himself the effort of rethinking it and recreating it within *himself*. This recreation consists in nothing more than repeating the task of him who created the idea, that is, in adopting it only in view of the undeniable evidence with which it was imposed on him. He who creates an idea does not have the impression that it is any thought of his, but rather he seems to see reality itself in immediate contact with himself. There then, are man and reality, both naked, one confronting the other with neither screen nor intermediary between them.

On the other hand, the man who does not create an idea but inherits it finds between things and his own person a preconceived idea which facilitates his relationship with things as would a ready-made recipe. He then will be inclined *not to ask himself*

questions about things, not to feel genuine needs, since he has in hand a repertory of solutions before he feels the needs which call for these solutions. So that the man who is already heir to a cultural system accustoms himself progressively, generation after generation, to having no contact with basic problems, to feeling none of the needs which make up his life; and on the other hand, to using mental processes—concepts, evaluations, enthusiasms—for which he has no evidence because they were not born out of the depths of himself.

The question is, has a culture which comes upon this view as some kind of "discovery" any awareness at all concerning the nature of human life?

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

PLAYS GIVEN BY CHILDREN

[This account of the children's plays and other dramatic activities at the School in Rose Valley, Pennsylvania, is condensed from a considerably longer discussion in the School's September *Parents' Bulletin*. It shows the multi-faceted benefits obtained from ingenious extension of natural "play" propensities in children.]

PLAYS provide an opportunity for individual children to express themselves freely, released, by virtue of being a "character" in a fictional situation, from the inhibiting pressure of speaking and behaving as they've come to think adults want them to.

At preschool level, dramatic play is spontaneous and continual. Being a mother, father or baby, a fireman or sailor, a lion or a monkey, a small child acts out his feelings about himself and others all day long. Singing and dancing games and the dramatizing of familiar stories let each child choose a role he likes and put into it as much of himself as he wishes.

In the lower grades there is still much free dramatic play, more periods. Acting out scenes in pantomime and short, simple group plays gives a child the chance to find out that, often, he can express himself less self-consciously before others as a shepherd or a cowboy than in his own person.

The Third Grade's traditional Indian play, with its longer period of preparation and rehearsal, means becoming someone else for quite a while and the timid boy may turn for that period into a fierce warrior, the aggressive little girl into a gentle, loving mother.

At the older age-levels there are endless examples of a child expressing feelings and showing abilities not normally in evidence. A quiet, repressed sixth-grade girl announces—in a post Revolutionary play—that she hopes a bear has eaten her little brother, and later gleefully chops off her doll's heads on an imaginary

guillotine. A serious-minded boy turns into a fine comedian, capering about with a butterfly net as a teen-age Lord Fauntleroy in a gay-Nineties sketch. A formerly stiff and self-conscious actress suddenly lets herself go, with loud mock sobs and generally hilarious carryings-on over her uninterested lover—Matt O' the Pig Pen; another child, who had felt at ease only in comic parts, does a moving scene as the farmer friend of an accused Salem witch.

These are only a tiny sample of the surprising revelations about children that occur every time a play is given.

The creative opportunities in the field of dramatics at Rose Valley are many: in language—making up one's own part and helping with poetry and songs for the whole cast; in art and crafts—scenery to design and paint, the building of sets and properties, the making and adaptation of costumes.

The youngest children feel no great need for formal scenery, properties or costumes, but show great ingenuity and imagination in their use of planks and boxes, playground apparatus and toys, and odds and ends from the costume chests.

This same ingenuity and imagination is shown by the older children who have painted some truly beautiful scenery and have invented ways of making everything they need, from an Indian tepee to a Deus ex Machina platform, from convex Greek shields to a two-headed Chimera and a one-eyed Cyclops. There is something for everyone to do when a play is in the making!

Children as young as five and six begin making up the dialogue needed for their plays, so that by the time they reach the oldest groups, they are able to "write" plays which many adults have thought showed, at times, a depth of feeling and beauty of expression or, in the comedies, a sophisticated humor, unusual at this age. The most moving play ever given at Rose Valley was a three-act pantomime, with musical background, about the Salem witch trials.

Probably the most completely satisfying project on which a large group of children can work together is a play. But it is not easy. When a start is made, at six and seven, on longer and more organized productions, the children do not think of the play as a whole but only of "me" and "my part." It takes much executive ability and even more patience for the teachers to help them function as a unit. The children are, however, proud and pleased when the play is finally given. One First Grade reported, with honest joy, in the School newspaper: "We gave our Christmas play on Wednesday. It was wonderful!"

Even at ten and eleven, "my part" is still of great importance. In an ideal play for this age all of the roles should be leading ones. However, in the oldest groups, there is more ability to see and understand the over-all picture and to realize that, since they are writing the play themselves, anyone can make his role a good one.

From the day the plot of a forthcoming play is first outlined and the characters decided upon (either by the group as a whole or by a small, elected play-planning committee) until the final curtain falls, there are endless opportunities for contributing to the success of the play. Many new and unexpected abilities appear—for thinking of things to do and say; for directing others; for designing and painting scenery; for inventing a way to make Egyptian bead necklaces from oaktag and paints or turning old sheets into togas; for arranging the stage, making the pull curtains work. The play gradually becomes "ours," all of it important, not just one's own part; and the children come to depend upon and feel grateful for the new-found talents of people not previously considered of much importance to the group.

While the oldest children tend to be very critical of their own performances, often seeing faults an adult would not notice, the whole group is really elated after each successful play. There is a most rewarding feeling of group accomplishment, which usually carries over into classroom and playground attitudes and actions.

Acting out experience and, later, acquired information is an essential part of the learning process. Judging from what they say, our graduates remember for years the plays in which they took part while attending the School in Rose Valley. Since, in the older groups, these plays were almost always based on what was being studied, this usually means that they still remember quite a bit about such things as the Westward Migration, Indian civilizations, the Middle Ages or the Greek gods. Once you have jostled in a medieval courtyard, recited from the hornbook in a Puritan school, floated down a blue muslin river in a Chinese junk or welcomed runaway slaves at a station on the Underground Railroad, you have given reality to these far-away times and places by making them part of your personal experience. Whether or not any details about the Media Water Works or the Chester Ferry still linger in the minds of our alumni as a result of the delightful pantomime re-enactment of their trips in first and second grades is not known. Probably, at least a feeling of kinship with paddle-wheels and water-purification systems remains!

These are a few of the subjects for plays, skits and dances in the oldest groups during the last twenty years: cave men, American Indians, Egyptian history; Greek history and mythology; the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages; Old Testament stories, and those of Hannukah and Christmas; the New World explorers; the Thirteen Colonies; American Revolution; Westward Migration, Civil War; the gay Nineties; Space exploration.

From the start, the Rose Valley staff has been sure, and has tried to make it clear to successive generations of parents, that our plays are for the benefit of the actors, not the audience. Often there are spontaneous moments in rehearsals which are more moving or more hilarious than any which occur in the final performance. The children have their learning experiences—and their fun—during preparations and rehearsals. They come, quite often, to feel and think themselves

into the characters they are portraying so completely that this comes across to the audience but that is really a happy by-product of the process of making a play.

One father commented, years ago: ". . . most important, so it seemed to me, was the feeling I had that the participants were really in the Puritan schoolroom and in that Catholic church."

A mother wrote this for the Parents Bulletin: "I found myself once more moved and carried away in a fashion never approximated by the many (adult-written) children's plays I have sat through in my life. I wondered again what it is that evokes not merely recognition or admiration, but a mood or emotion in the observer. I don't mean that this happens all the time in Rose Valley plays. I merely mean that somehow this intangible, this magic is given a chance to happen. . . . Our children's efforts are crude enough ... but they are moving because they are a struggle toward a form of communication of themselves . . . and so a faint beginning glimmer of understanding of what the actual creation of a work of art is."

PEG NOWELL

FRONTIERS

The Nature of Historical Crisis

AN impressive confidence pervades the writing of Ortega y Gasset. None of the small self-betrays of intellectual vanity mar his work, yet he moves from surety to surety with a delighting aplomb, and when he is uncertain he establishes the grounds of indecision with care, so that there is even a kind of surety in this. Plainly, Ortega's confidence is not of a sort which arouses the suspicion of the reader.

His *Man and Crisis* (Norton paperback, \$1.55) reminds us of what Robert Cushman says about the Platonic Dialogue—that it is the art of inquiry into first principles rather than an exhibition of "logical demonstration." As Dr. Cushman wrote in *Therapeia* (Chapel Hill, 1958):

Plato is less intent upon propounding neat answers to the riddle of human existence than on locating the genuinely fruitful questions by the exploration of which others may be assisted to find answers for themselves. This is by intention, for, where things ultimate are at issue, Plato has no faith in so-called truths which a man does not achieve for himself as a personal possession. And here indeed is a fundamental difference from Aristotle, who was subtly lured by definitive answers of supposedly enforceable demonstrations and who, consequently, was impatient with dialogue and preferred the declarative treatise.

In this as in other works, Ortega is very much concerned with turning back the overlays of assumption about the nature of things and the nature of man, in order to expose what, ultimately, we really know about ourselves. He does this over and over again, but it is not a repetition which palls. *Man and Crisis* is accurately described by its title. There is common agreement that the modern world is in crisis and this book seeks a self-authenticating account of the meaning of historical crisis. For this, Ortega has first to dispose of forms of pseudo-clarity in history. There is for example the proud intention declared by Ranke—"History proposes to find out how things actually happened." Ortega shows, in

effect, that this slogan honoring exhaustive research evades the central problem of selection: events are multitudinous, skeins of causation without end, and which ones should be singled out as the important data of history? An uninstructed empiricism which only collects "facts" will smother us in detail. It is first necessary to understand the reality of human lives; it may then be possible to assemble the relevant facts for a study of history.

Ortega devotes himself to such primary considerations. He is after a rock on which to stand: "the investigation of human lives is not possible if the wide variety in these animals does not hide an identical basic structure; in short, if human life is not, at bottom, the same in the tenth century before Christ as in the tenth century after Christ, among the Chaldeans of Ur as in the Versailles of Louis XV." Pursuing this inquiry, Ortega finds that the essential quality of being human lies in deciding about oneself and about the world, from moment to moment, day to day, year to year—that is the activity in which our life consists. History attains meaning through the fact that when we are born, we always come into a world already filled with thoughts about these things—who we are, what we are about, what we must or ought to do. Growing up is largely a process of adopting these thoughts, while philosophy is the process of sifting and testing them for their validity. An age is characterized by a certain coherency of thought about the world; for all practical human purposes, the world *is* what men think about it at a given time. This world changes in various ways, through changing thought, and in this book Ortega writes about one sort of world change—the change called *crisis*, which is precisely defined:

An historical crisis is a world change which differs from normal change as follows: the normal change is that the profile of the world which is valid for one generation is succeeded by another and slightly different profile. Yesterday's system of convictions gives way to today's, smoothly, without a break, this assumes that the skeleton framework of

the world remains in force throughout that change, or is only slightly modified.

That is the normal. Well, then, an historical crisis occurs when the world change which is produced consists in this: the world, the system of convictions belonging to a previous generation, gives way to a vital state in which man remains without these convictions, and therefore without a world. Man returns to a state of not knowing what to do, for the reason that he returns to a state of actually not knowing what to think about the world. Therefore the change swells to a crisis and takes on the character of a catastrophe. The world change consists of the fact that the world in which man was living has collapsed, and, for the moment, of that alone. It is a change which begins by being negative and critical. One does not know what new thing to think—one only knows, or thinks he knows, that the traditional norms and ideas are false and inadmissible. One feels a profound disdain for everything, or almost everything, which was believed yesterday; but the truth is that there are no new positive beliefs with which to replace the traditional ones. Since that system of convictions that world, was the map which permitted man to move within his environment with a certain security, and since he now lacks such a map, he again feels lost, at loose ends, without orientation. He moves from here to there without order or arrangement; he tries this side and then the other, but without complete convictions; he pretends to himself that he is convinced of this or that.

This last is very important. During periods of crisis, positions which are false or feigned are very common. Entire generations falsify themselves to themselves, that is to say they wrap themselves up in artistic styles, in doctrines, in political movements which are insincere and which fill the lack of genuine convictions. When they get to be about forty years old, those generations become null and void, because at that age one can no longer live in fictions. One must set oneself within the truth.

One of the good things about Ortega's writing is that you can easily turn from his generalizations to the scene of life and make up your own mind about their accuracy. Even when only a half-truth is involved—as in the last couple of sentences above—you see that he means it as only a half-truth, but a useful one. For the reader attempting to organize his thought about himself and his times in terms which can be subjected to

verification at almost any point, Ortega is of obvious value.