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A MEASURE OF PROGRESS

THE argument about whether or not there can be progress for human beings is frivolous, even a waste of time. Human beings seek ends; they seek them at various levels, sometimes in contradictory and self-defeating ways, but they nonetheless seek. To tell a man that he has no hope of progress would be like telling him to stop breathing—a completely foolish idea. But to inquire into the matter of what are the most fulfilling ends for human beings, to ask how these may be reached, and what obstacles lie in the way; to take note of the differences among men as to individual capacity, as to the objectives they hold desirable; and to consider what we know about possible *rates* of progress, for both individuals and groups, and to attempt to find out under what conditions progress is accelerated, and how it is blocked—these are all matters of vital importance.

It is clear, for example, that circumstances have a lot to do with the ends men seek. Continually hungry men seek mostly food. Cold men seek warmth. Oppressed men seek freedom and wronged men seek justice. But after men achieve these ends—and they sometimes do—what then do they seek?

We should stop, here, to acknowledge that while having enough food and comfortable surroundings and living in a free and just order are commonplace and universally approved ends, *they have no widely agreed-upon definition.* Various psychological factors play an enormously confusing role whenever there is an attempt to declare "norms" in relation to these ends. In some societies, eating beef is held to be an impious, end-defeating activity. In others, beef is regarded as a necessary and most satisfactory source of protein. In some societies, freedom means the right to acquire, subject to varying, limitations, as much property as one is able, while in other countries private ownership of land and the instruments of large-scale production is prohibited as socially immoral. In some societies, all ideas of virtue and human good are subordinated to certain symbols which are represented as having transcendent value—often very different from the symbols revered elsewhere—and in *all* societies will be found individual men who dissent from certain common allegiances of their countrymen, having transcendent views of their own which they prefer to group ideals and conceptions of the good.

It becomes obvious, in short, that the human enterprise, while it is always end-seeking, cannot be neatly summed up by categories of ends, ranged in some plausibly ascending scale. The men who say, First we shall eat well and make ourselves comfortable, and *then* we shall think high thoughts, become creative, and even interest ourselves in mystical matters of truth and spiritual attainment—people who take this view, and they are very much in the majority, shut out from their company other men who are willing to eat very little, if this happens to be the price of thinking deeply, and who devote themselves to activities which show little relation to the measured goals of the rest. Often, even as a rule, to these people who are different, it is said, "You eat our food, why don't you worship our God, or at least conceal your odd interests, which could easily become upsetting to the young?"

The important consideration, here, is the fact that the way in which people think of non-physical ends or meanings has a profound effect on everything else they do. It governs whom they like, what they fear, and has a controlling influence on the way they regard people who seem different from themselves. Their gods are shaped according to the priorities in their thinking about ends, and likewise their attempts at self-definition. In the final analysis, a man's idea of God or the

Highest can hardly be better informed than his idea of himself. If he has a gross conception of his own being, his deity will turn out to be just about as gross; and if he has a cruel god, he is likely to be a cruel man.

This is a way of saying that there is no escape from philosophy, that there can be no successful flight from the responsibilities of asking the age-old questions, since the failure to ask them always amounts to giving them superficial answers, for which, in time, a terrible price must be paid. If lesser ends are pursued in neglect of the highest ends men can envision, human life is inevitably degraded, not because the lesser ends have no importance, but because people try to fill the emptiness in their lives by heaping up accumulations of things that can never satisfy their inner longings. When this happens, a few among them may stop to ask the important questions, and then make changes in their thinking and their lives, but the rest, from a growing sense of failure, instead of questioning themselves, seek scapegoats. If they are powerful, they soon use up the supply of obvious scapegoats and finally develop the ability to identify enemies almost anywhere.

During this cycle, which is plainly not progress but a process of social decline, a great deal of anxiety comes into play, with much righteous condemnation. The problems of human beings, it is claimed, are not being *properly managed.* We need to do *this,* for the people, not *that; so* goes the never-ceasing argument of concerned men. It is taken for granted that the apparent inability of most people to manage for themselves is a simple fact of life, and that the management must be done *for* them. Political argument, today, is almost entirely between competing theories of management. Not much is said about why men are not more self-reliant, or whether they have been unfitted for independent decision by what they have been left or helped to believe about themselves and their good. If it should turn out that the real turning-points and issues in human life are governed by what men think themselves to be, and what their real purposes are, then it might follow that our politics has no more dignity than an emergency soup-kitchen presided over by handymen who are endlessly occupied with their busywork of fixing things up.

For some reason—a vanity, perhaps, that itself needs explanation—the would-be managers seldom ask how they came to be qualified, and why their plans, which neglect so many human realities, should be better than any others. They seem not to recognize, ever, that the only good plans are the plans which lead to less and less planning, which would mean more autonomy, less dependence, increasingly, for all. It is as though they, in their sophistication, having gotten rid of childish beliefs, are driven by some strange compulsion to tell other people what is good for them and what to do. It is all very tiresome and repetitious of the past.

We are making a first-things-first kind of argument, out of the conviction that the first thing, for human beings, is a consideration of what it means to be a human being; or, to use other words—the first thing to do is to arrive at a view of both man and the world which assures dignity to both. Can we not see that the chief offense of modern behavior is an easy disregard of the *universal* aspect of human dignity? The pretense of honoring the dignity in some men, but not in others, always breaks down, because it is partisan and therefore false. It has no real knowledge of or respect for the quality of being human.

What is the quality of being human? We should like to argue that it is the possibility of becoming godlike in all men. Religion, when it is worthy of the name, is concerned with how men may grow godlike—with what individual effort and struggle are involved, what vision will beckon men on, and what friendliness and brotherhood are becoming to them while pursuing this high end. Religion is or ought to be a kind of school for the actual becoming, for the nurture and encouragement of the half-gods men are now, helping them to feel the divine potentialities within themselves; while philosophy is the use of the mind to explore the entire gamut of meanings in the quest. The mood for this endeavor was set, for the West, at the height of the Italian Renaissance by Pico della Mirandola, who wrote in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man:*

> Who then will not look with awe upon this our chameleon or who, at least, will look with greater admiration on any other being? This creature, man, whom Asclepius the Athenian, by reason of this very mutability, this nature capable of transforming itself, quite rightly said was symbolized in the mysteries by the figure of Proteus. This is the source of those metamorphoses, or transformations, so celebrated among the Hebrews and among the Pythagoreans; for even the esoteric theology of the Hebrews at times transforms the holy Enoch into that angel which is sometimes called *"malakhha-shekhinah"* and at other times transforms other personages into divinities of other names; while the Pythagoreans transform men guilty of crimes into brutes or even, if we are to believe Empedodes, into plants; and Mohamet, imitating them, was known frequently to say that the man who deserts the divine law becomes a brute. And he was right; for it is not the bark that makes the tree, but its insensitive and unresponsive nature; nor the orbicular form which makes the heavens, but their harmonious order. Finally, it is not freedom from a body, but its spiritual intelligence, which makes an angel. If you see a man, dedicated to his stomach, crawling on the ground, you see a plant and not a man, or if you see a man bedazzled by the empty forms of the imagination, as by the wiles of Calypso, and through their alluring solicitations made a slave to his own senses, you see a brute and not a man. If, however, you see a philosopher, judging and distinguishing all things according to the rule of reason, him shall you hold in veneration, for he is a creature of heaven and not of earth; if, finally, a pure contemplator, unmindful of the body, wholly withdrawn into the inner chambers of the mind, here indeed is neither a creature of earth nor a heavenly creature, but some higher divinity, clothed with human flesh.

In this elevation of man to the godlike, there is neither arrogance nor lack of recognition of the universal character of the divine. As Hegel put it in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Sibree, 1890):

> It is not the individuality of the subject that is revered, but that which is universal in him; and which, among the Tibetans, Hindus, and Asiatics generally, is regarded as the essence pervading all things. This substantial unity of spirit is realized in the Lama, who is nothing but the form in which Spirit manifests itself; and who does not hold this Spiritual Essence as his peculiar property, but is regarded as partaking in it only in order to exhibit it to others, that they may attain a conception of Spirituality, and be led to piety and blessedness. The Lama's personality as such—his particular individuality—is therefore subordinate to that substantial essence which it embodies.

Agreeably to Hegel—and to Plotinus, from whom Pico derived much inspiration—and to the expounders of philosophical religion as far back as historical records go, this realization of the Universal Spirit by the individual human being has been regarded as the highest end of human life. One might even say that all history is the reflection of this quest, variously pursued by human beings, and that it is the inescapable mission of all men, although, during periods such as the one Western man seems to be in the process of completing, or bringing to a decisive finish, the objective of self-realization has been turned into a secular goal and an effort is made to convert the processes of discovery into externalizing investigations of the natural world, and to turn the disciplines of spiritual search into politically defined forms of socio-economic good. This practical inversion of the philosophical and religious counsels of antiquity seems to result mainly from anthropomorphizing corruptions of the God-idea, which lead in turn to partisan religious claims such as the idea of a "chosen people," the development of an elite religious class, and uncompromising rejection, by those who think they have exclusive truth, of other men and nations who indulge similar delusions. The angry and bitter self-righteousness which characterizes political opinion in the present may be seen to have its roots in dwarfed conceptions of the highest good, and since reason is no ally of such blind partisanship, the paranoid style in politics becomes the natural consequence of the inversions and degradations of the spiritual quest.

The lesson in all this is certainly instruction in the futility of anyone trying to define the highest good for other men. The substitution of authority and controls for individual self-discovery is the ultimate perversion of the dignity of man, and it is doubly in error for the reason that institutional arrangements based on such authority invariably bring about situations of frustration and failure which conceal the radical fault underlying the entire development. When this happens, the noblest qualities of human beings have no choice but to emerge in a conventionally accepted framework of the negation of those very qualities, and history moves swiftly toward one of its great denouements.

What is "progress" at such a juncture? If the highest expressions of the human heart and mind are to be taken as a criterion, we might say that the signs of progress would, first of all, come from individuals. We should say, further, that the expressions and acts of these individuals would combine high affirmation and uncompromising rejection—affirmation in terms understandable by others of the deep potentialities of knowing and discovering truth in all; and rejection, often radical and revolutionary, of the constraints to anti-human action which have become widely adopted by reason of the moral pretensions of institutional authority. It is not difficult to illustrate these forms of awakening in the present. A naturalistic kind of mysticism is emerging in both the arts and literature, and has long had a ruggedly independent expression in the existentialist philosophers. "Looking within" has become unashamedly the method of certain humanistic psychologists, with climactic moments of self-awareness acquiring identification by the non-theological term, "peak experiences." The scientific theory of knowledge, which has for generations absurdly ignored the importance and even the reality of knowing subjects, is undergoing fundamental reform by such men as Michael Polanyi, A. H. Maslow, Carl Rogers, and others. A new intellectual integrity is appearing in men brought up in the Christian tradition, leading to such mold-breaking declarations as those of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Robinson, and the iconoclasm of the new, non-theist clergy in the United States. On every hand, the burdens of moral responsibility for doing right and of intellectual responsibility for determining what is right are being returned to the individual. In such circumstances, there is no way under heaven in which a forthright return to ultimate philosophical questions can be prevented.

This means a return to the prime resources of mankind for inspiration and perhaps some guidance. It means the enrichment of new thought with old, by recourse to such great texts as the *Tao Te King,* the *Upanishads,* the *Bhagavad-Gita,* the *Dhammapada,* the Platonic philosophy, certain of the Gospels, the writings of Plotinus, and, in modern times, the works of Emerson and Thoreau. This selection hardly exhausts the list, but it does establish the keynote of an inquiry that has already begun. Such sources can be relied upon never to violate the integrity of the individual seeker's intellectual and spiritual independence, while urging him on. They also make it plain—as it must be made plain—that no theology, however subtle, can ever take the place of self-knowledge, which the individual must acquire for himself. They also show that, finally, there is no important distinction to be made between self-knowledge and knowledge of the universal ground of life and truth.

Plotinus, in the sixth *Ennead*, largely devoted to the soul's longing to identify with the One, has this passage suggestive of the fulfillment that is involved:

> Nor should we speak of an object of his vision, if we have to mean thereby a duality of the seer and the seen and do not identify the two as one. It is a bold thing to say, but in the vision a man neither sees, nor if he sees, distinguishes what he sees from himself nor fancies that there are two—the seer and the seen.

> On the contrary, it is by becoming as it were another than himself, and by neither being himself nor belonging to himself that he attains the vision. And having surrendered himself to it he is one with it, as the center of two circles might coincide. For these centers when they coincide become one and when the circles are separated there are two centers again. And it is in this sense that we too speak of a difference. It follows that the vision is hard to describe. For how could a man report as something different from himself, what at the time of his vision he did not see as different but as one with himself?

It is the Pantheists, it seems clear, who have maintained touch with the living truth in the hearts of human beings. Their conceptions are continually being reborn, exhausting the resources of language, pressing out the juices of paradox and performing endless alchemical experiments with the forms of human communication. The pantheists make do—and do very well—without priests. The humane religions seem always to have a pantheistic ground. Impersonal, all-pervasive Deity is an idea that excites the nobility of man, since it is an echo of the infinitudes which he faintly intuits within.

Mysticism is one side of the coin of pantheistic reality. Metaphysics is the other. And it is here, perhaps, that our faith in a transcendent reality tends to falter and to break down. For, unlike the profound feelings vouchsafed by mystical experience, the conclusions of metaphysics are only ideas—similitudes, one hopes, of the necessary, inner structure of things. How can mere ideas stand against the devastations of adverse experience? As Coleridge said: "Our quaint metaphysical opinions in an hour of anguish are like playthings by the bedside of a child deadly sick." What is a theory of evil beside the impact of the real thing?

So we are returned to our unfinished business, to the anguish of the hour and our existential fate. The resolution of human problems seems as chancy as the lottery of love or the labyrinth of hope. Only a fool would go about parading any certainties, these days. What must be recognized, however, is that only fools indeed can imagine it is possible to go on living without some private longing, some vision of inner fulfillment, and a growing commitment of the heart. What cannot be denied is that we have come very nearly full circle during the centuries since the days of Plotinus, and have tried about every other hypothesis concerning the meaning of life. We have some seventeen hundred years of history to look back over, to see how men's ideas of the good affected their actions, and how these actions affected their lives. There is now far less excuse for repeating old mistakes, and some basis, at least, for establishing as the measure of progress the universalizing spirit men show in their pursuit of the good.

REVIEW

ON VISUAL KNOWING

ALTHOUGH he may understand little or nothing about "art education," it is possible for the reader of *Education of Vision* (Vision + Value Series, edited by Georgy Kepes, published last year by George Braziller, $19.50) to say with some assurance that the contributors to this volume are all seriously engaged in giving form to a kind of knowledge that has not, until recently, been recognized as knowledge at all. This work is part of a revolution in thinking which is essentially humanistic in character, and which challenges the human individual to rely on his own capacities for understanding, obliging him, finally, to realize the comparative worthlessness of knowledge obtained in any other way. The temper of the volume may be generally illustrated by a quotation from one of the fifteen contributors, William J. J. Gordon, who is a psychologist, scientist, and inventor. Interested mainly, as an educator, in stirring his students to resourceful, independent thinking, he writes:

> Perhaps the greatest danger in the teaching of science is to present students with a *fait accompli* universe. It is a didactic tradition that undergraduate students must accept the phenomenological universe as described by someone with special knowledge, i.e., the teacher. The teacher is saying to students that they must surrender to his rules or they can't play in his backyard. By the time a student has clerked his way through his undergraduate work in a science, it may be impossible for him to tolerate the ambiguity of constructing his own ways of understanding.

Mr. Gordon gives several examples of how students encouraged to use analogy and metaphor in solving scientific problems reach correct conclusions and obtain a vivid sense of the wider meanings of what they are finding out. As a classical instance of this method of research and discovery, he recalls the dream of the chemist, Kekule, in which he saw a serpent biting its tail, this image then leading him to the idea of a ring of carbon atoms, which was the key to the construction of the benzene molecule.

Robert Jay Wolff, professor of art at Brooklyn College, writes with feeling and point about the misconceptions of human good which lie behind much of modern education:

> Any college student with the gift of swift verbal comprehension, a retentive memory and a strong concern for personal status, may statistically earn the title of "superior." Yet, insofar as the quantitative scope of his achievement may cover the absence of qualitative depth, to call him superior could indeed be less than the whole truth. When this swift mind is held back by the slower pace of his "average" classmates, a new half-truth appears in the form of a specifically accelerated study program for his benefit. The hope here is that superiority, vastly accelerated, will lead to higher and more advanced levels of superiority. But what is often accelerated is not superiority of mind and spirit but rather tidy, academic superficialities. More critical is the fact that the independent, courageously exploratory mind is sometimes slow in its growth, and its slowness in the presence of the agile standard is downgraded to an inferior if not hopeless standard.

(Charles Darwin was an example of slow-minded greatness. Subjected to the "agile standard" spoken of by Mr. Wolff, Darwin would probably have flunked out of school!)

This writer is arguing for a kind of knowledge that cannot be reduced to intellectual abstractions. In fact, this whole book is largely a consideration of such knowledge, concerning which verbal communication is useful only for supplying cues. What the reader begins to realize is that he is in the presence of a number of rather remarkable individuals who have practiced the arts or other callings which have similar components and have developed a body of rather precise understanding which does not submit to ordinary communication, yet is nonetheless vital and real. Mr. Wolff is concerned with pressing this point home:

> I believe that the normal child who refuses to be rushed into verbalization and who is slow to learn to talk, prolongs, to his own later advantage, a vital, wordless learning period where experience transcends identities, and the instinct germinates to know before speaking, to give words finally to patient thought rather than thought to impatient words. How many

> grown men and women in pursuit of truth attempt a return to the impregnable semantic privacy of their infant beginnings—the locked study, the remote cabin, the proverbial ivory tower? From Walden Pond, Thoreau could say: "Perhaps the facts most astounding and most real are never communicated by man to man. The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star dust caught, a segment of a rainbow which I have clutched." . . . It is this harvest of the sensory intelligence, gathered largely by the sensibilities, by the eyes in particular, that education, as it proceeds from one stage to the next, ignores, until finally it is all but lost sight of as a factor in the learning process.

The contributors to this volume, to whom and to which we cannot possibly do justice in this short review, are probably among the most creative members of modern culture. As much, and perhaps more, than political reformers, they represent shapers of the future. As we said in relation to another of these Vision + Value volumes, while the reader may start out expecting to be instructed in some store of stable information represented by the title, he soon finds himself in the midst of whirling uncertainty, radical protest, and insistence upon change. Equally evident, however, are the well grounded convictions of the writers, who show themselves to be masters of the disciplines from whose eminence they speak. In short, their strictures concerning art and other education and the default of visual education generally grow out of an obvious grasp of the subtleties of communication by visual means. From this understanding and the resulting practice in professional and teaching activities come insights into a kind of human knowing which plays little part in the lives of a great many people. It is this sense of the depleted, intellectualized desert now taken for granted as "all there is" by the great majority which arouses informed protests like the following, by Rudolf Arnheim, who teaches psychology and the psychology of art at Sarah Lawrence:

> In a well-known letter to Jacques Hadamard, Albert Einstein said: "The words or language as they are written or spoken do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as entities in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be 'voluntarily' reproduced and combined." And further: "The above mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and some of muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a secondary stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will." If Einstein's procedure is representative of intelligent reasoning we may be strangling the potential of our brainpower systematically by forcing our youth to think primarily with verbal and numerical signs.
>
> It will be evident that I am not merely talking about "art education." Art, as the most conspicuous island of creative vision, is given an excessive importance in our civilization. What happens in the art room, in the studio, and in art galleries and museums matters and accomplishes relatively little as long as art dwells as a stranger in a social setting suffering from sensory illiteracy. Art can make sense only as the supreme manifestation of a culture pervaded throughout by creative visual thought.

The themes of the essays in *Education of Vision* have an extraordinary similarity although they all have distinctively independent development. For example, Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr., writing on Art and Education, starts out with this sentence: "Education too often consists of the mere imparting of knowledge, whereas in its essence it is the personal assimilation of new experiences in terms of experiences already digested." Another writer, Mirko Basaldella, a sculptor and painter, has this to say:

> Present day society tends evermore toward a rational mentality, organization, and character. Everything is brought to a focus, circumscribing and limiting man by specialization and rationalization. The impulsive and fantastic element inborn in human nature is repressed and atrophied, and man with ever-growing anxiety feels constriction and a lack of personal autonomy resulting in a sense of depression and uselessness. The necessity of being ever conscious and aware of unimportant details leads to the dissipation of the basic human drives. Astonishment before the marvels of life is smothered; every impulse is thwarted, considered harmful to organized society. The unforeseen, the stupendous

> emergence of things, and the magic sense of life, are judged, emptied of their worth, and discarded.

We lack the space to sample all the contributors, nor can these quotations give much idea of the informative spread of the fifteen essays, many of them effectively illustrated with visual examples of what is discussed. To a man, they are all concerned with developing an order of visual experiences which may do duty for what Walt Whitman called the "primal sanities of nature." As Georgy Kepes says in his introduction to this volume, mankind was once surrounded by a world in which the rhythms of life were all about, and the colors, forms, and movements of his sense experience were expressions of organic events. Yet, as he adds:

> Today, we have lost the benefit of these natural guides because we are surrounded by the "second nature" of our manmade environment, an environment that has not grown according to nature but has been shaped by one-sided and shortsighted interests. The appearances of things in our man-made world no longer reveal their character: images imitate forms; forms cheat functions; functions are robbed of their natural sources emanating from human needs. Our cities, our buildings (counterfeit inside and out), objects for use, the packaging of goods, posters, the advertising in our newspapers—even our clothes, our gestures, our physiognomies—are often without visual integrity. The world that modern man has constructed by and large lacks sincerity and scale. It is twisted in space, without light, and cowardly in color. It combines mechanically consistent patterns of details within formless wholes. It is oppressive in its fake monumentality; degrading in its petty, fawning manner of face-lifting. Men living in this environment, injured emotionally and intellectually by the terrific odds of their compassless society, cannot avoid injury to their sensibilities, the basis of their creative faculties.

With these intensely felt words, Georgy Kepes sums up the judgment of an articulate artist and designer, and what he says, on the whole, conveys the consensus of all the contributors to *Education of Vision.*

We should not end this review without taking notice of what seems an exceptionally clear account of what happens during the creative process. The contribution of Anton Ehrenzweig, lecturer in art education at the University of London, is called "Conscious Planning and Unconscious Scanning," and this title helps to describe the writer's insight into the psychological components of originality in the arts (and the sciences, as well). Involved is "a mysterious capacity for operating precisely with imprecise structures." Dr. Ehrenzweig continues:

> The creative thinker has to take steps and make interim decisions without being able to visualize their precise relationship with the end product. Yet somehow he manages to extract from such half-baked structures information far in excess of their face value and so is capable of making the correct decisions and choices all along the route. His lack of precise visualization is bound up with the fact that creative work opens up new avenues of further progress at each step. These endless ramifications may be astronomical in number. He cannot possibly examine all these future possibilities and make a conscious choice. Conscious visualization can only deal with one alternative at a time. Hence he must rely on unconscious intuition for scanning these many possibilities. I will maintain that unconscious visualization has a wider focus and so is capable of scanning with a single glance all the many ramifications of the way ahead and assists in making the right choice. Hence the assistance of the unconscious mind is not merely needed for a greater measure of imagination, as is commonly assumed but is indispensable for efficient work, owing to the superiority of unconscious scanning over conscious visualization.

Further analysis of these considerations may be found in Dr. Ehrenzweig's book, *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society* (International Universities Press, 1964), and in an earlier work, *The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing* (1953)

COMMENTARY
PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA

WE should give credit to Gateway Editions (Henry Regnery, Chicago) for the gracious translation of the portion of Pico Della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* which is quoted in this week's lead article. The translator, A. Robert Caponigri, says he has "tried to reproduce something of the stylistic flavor of Pico." We suspect he succeeded.

Pico was the brilliant Italian youth who appeared one day at Lorenzo de Medici's villa at Fiesole, just outside of Florence, astonishing both Lorenzo and the scholarly Marsilio Ficino with his extraordinary learning. Only twenty-one, he knew Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Chaldee, and Arabic. Pico gave the Florentine Platonic Academy both impetus and direction, maintaining touch with the similar educational efforts of Johann Reuchlin in Germany. (Reuchlin was later called the "Father of the Reformation.") While Ficino had already translated Hesiod, the Hymns of Proclus, Orpheus and Homer, and had set to work on Plato, Pico persuaded him to translate the *Enneads* of Plotinus, whom he greatly admired.

At the age of twenty-three, Pico offered for public disputation a list of nine hundred questions in all branches of philosophy and theology, but the pope prohibited any such debate, "heretical" material having been found in the compilation. The "oration" was a kind of foreword or introduction to the nine hundred propositions he wished to defend. While a complete translation of this work appeared in English in the volume, *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, edited by Ernst Cassirir (University of Chicago Press, 1948), the Gateway edition now makes Pico's distinguished work easily available (75 cents) .

Pico died young. He was overtaken by a fever on Nov. 17, 1494. But in his thirty-one years of life he left an ineffaceable influence on the awakening mind of Europe, becoming, through his *Oration*, one of the chief founders of Humanist philosophy.

Justification for calling him a pantheist is obtained from a passage on "God" which Thomas More translated:

> God is not Being; rather is He the *Cause* of Being. As the one primal Fountain of Being, He is properly described as the One. God is all things, the abstract Universal Unity of all things in their perfection. To even think or speak of God is profanity. (*DeAuro*.)

To Pico, as much as anyone, is owing the Florentine revival of Neoplatonic philosophy in the Western world, and the conception of liberal education which the Oxford Reformers rooted in England under the leadership of John Colet.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ON TEACHING ETHICS

THE all-important distinction between moral codes and ethical aspirations—made recently here through quotation from Erik Erikson and Kenneth Keniston—is clearly embodied in a book intended for teachers of young people *The First Book of Ethics,* by Algernon D. Black (Franklin Watts, 1965). Mr. Black is Educational Director of the Ethical Culture Schools and has published variously with the same intention in mind—to affirm that ethical thinking *is* the "spiritual" life, and that ethical thought is as natural to minds unfettered by dogma as is breathing or loving. To illustrate the directness of his approach:

> Ethics is the study of how people treat each other, and what it means to lead a good life.
>
> "Is it about right and wrong?" you may ask. "Because if it is, I'm not interested. People have been telling me about right and wrong all my life. 'Do this!' and 'Don't do that!'—No more of that, thank you."
>
> But ethics isn't what you think. With ethics, nobody is telling anybody. Ethics is questions, and a hunt for truth. Every person becomes his own judge of right and wrong.
>
> Ethics is a way of being a free person. It helps a person know what his choices are in life. It makes him his own judge all during his lifetime. No matter what other people think and say and do, he is the one who decides for himself.

The reason for the usual lack of interest of the young in questions of "right and wrong," of course, is that they have almost invariably become familiar from a moral code; moral codes have a function, but they have little to do with evaluative thinking. So, in explaining the stasis which characterizes the merely moral person or moral society, Mr. Black says:

> In every tribe and every community some customs forbid acts that violate religion and what the people believe is sacred and holy. Such a code helps the tribe or the community feel secure. It helps toward unity and strength.
>
> Most people obey the moral code not because of laws and policemen, but because of habit. If they violate the code and do things that are forbidden or not approved by the community, they are punished by having people talk about them, and by being left out as if they no longer belong to the community.
>
> Each tribe or community usually thinks that its own customs and teachings are the only good and true ones. The people usually assume that their customs are part of an unchangeable law of God or of nature. They think things always were this way and always will be.

It is possible to settle into a comfortable orthodoxy of opinion without knowing that we have done so, and when heroic men strike out for freedoms not yet culturally defined we are apt to be made uncomfortable. The hero, in other words, is the man for whom truths which morality reflects only partially must be made to *live.*

Mr. Black reviews the historical development of the practice of slavery, then shows how its gradual rejection, as part of our evolution toward the ideal of the human brotherhood, required heroic opposition and endless protest:

> For thousands of years in most of the world, human beings believed that it was perfectly right and good for some men to own other men. But as the centuries passed, slavery made more and more people uncomfortable in their consciences. Some religious people such as the Quakers freed their own slaves. Some people raised their voices for the abolition of slavery. In Europe, the nations had outlawed slavery by 1850. In the United States, men who had strong passions against slavery preached, printed newspapers and books, and became Abolitionists—people who wished to do away with slavery. To them, slavery was unethical even if the slave owners were kind. The Abolitionists were determined to change the customs and the code under which slavery was accepted by the community. One of their leaders, Elijah Lovejoy, was killed because he spoke and printed arguments against slavery. John Brown was hanged for daring to try to help the slaves by giving them arms so that they could fight for their freedom. It took a bitter and bloody Civil War to rid the United States of the idea that some men could own other men.
>
> The movement to abolish slavery is an example of the criticism and changing of a moral code. Although at one time almost everybody everywhere

> accepted slavery as a moral custom, more and more people began to feel and think that it was wrong. They dared to judge the moral custom of their society and to make sacrifices for their ethical beliefs. This is the way progress comes—the way the conscience of mankind grows and broadens and deepens.

What is the relation of the foregoing to religion? It is a very close one, if we define religion as do the authors of *The Challenge of Children* (Whiteside—reviewed in MANAS for Feb. 13, 1957):

> In itself, the word *religion* carries no possible suggestion of segregated groups, although it has been falsified and has come to mean that to many. The Latin *religio* meant: "I join and bind with the highest." Religion is man's inner urge to live out in his life the beautiful, the highest; to serve the good and clearly, not blindly, see the good in everything. This is our means of fulfilling and completing life, of feeling and finding our own spiritual roots. In an inward openness to the "Real" we are listening to the message of our own heart.
>
> The realization of the brotherhood of man is spontaneous and already within a child. It is a necessity that this be preserved and nourished for the continued unfoldment of his spiritual consciousness. In this way his own good becomes the good of all mankind, and his religion becomes a living religion which does not divide but joins together man with his source and with all life.

Mr. Black certainly directs his readers toward an appreciation of religion as regarded by such liberated thinkers as Paul Tillich. If religion is "ultimate concern," we realize its meaning individually by involvement and commitment. And this commitment, reflecting in varying degrees the ethical spirit found in the teachings of a Christ or a Buddha, makes it impossible—to use another of Tillich's phrases—"to be conformed."

In a more sophisticated manner Timothy Fettler links ethical aspiration, viable religion and the heroic spirit:

> Value-experience is related to the state and capacity of the knower. This kind of knowledge depends on being, and as being grows and changes, so does depth and scope of value-knowledge. The teacher's primary obligation to his own personal growth becomes evident, for he will be able to lead only as far as he has ventured himself. Here the challenge of life merges with education in its deepest sense.
>
> The value-continuum implies that man has a potential beyond the conditions which oppose and frighten him. If he is capable of transforming his being as an individual, he may be also on the way of transforming society, possibly the only way society can be transformed. (*On the Problem of a Value-Base*.)

Algernon Black's *The First Book of Ethics* touches these basic questions with simplicity, but not with oversimplification. The following is a last quotation which space permits:

> This book is dedicated to a great teacher who was killed in the year 399 B.C. by the people of the ancient city of Athens.
>
> *Why did they kill him?*
>
> They killed him for a crime.
>
> *What was the crime?*
>
> He was accused of corrupting the young people of the city.
>
> *How did he do that?*
>
> He asked questions.
>
> *Why would that hurt anybody?*
>
> By his questions he made them think.
>
> *What's wrong with that?*
>
> He made them think about things they believed.
>
> *How could that do any harm?*
>
> When people ask questions and think about things they believe, they may not believe the same after that.
>
> *And the people of Athens killed him for doing that?*
>
> Yes, they did.
>
> *Why did he do it?*
>
> Because he loved truth and he wanted to find truth.
>
> *Who was this* teacher?
>
> He was a stonecutter. He earned his living by cutting marble for the buildings and statues of the city. But in his free time he was a teacher.
>
> *What was his name?*
>
> His name was Socrates.
>
> *What subject did he teach?*
>
> His subject was ETHICS.

FRONTIERS

Protests of Various Kinds

LAST month a part-time philosophy instructor at Cal State L.A.—a California State College in Los Angeles with an enrollment of more than 18,000 students—resigned in protest against the refusal of the College administration to permit her to grade students simply on a credit/fail basis. This teacher, Miss Beverly Woodward, made two objections to the grading of students by the letters, A, B, C, D; or F. First, she maintained, she would refuse to give letter grades when these grades would determine which students are selected by draft boards for military service. Explaining her position further, Miss Woodward said in a statement printed in the campus paper, *College Times* (Feb. 14):

> I believe the teacher is placed in a morally intolerable position if he or she realizes that the grade given to a student may influence not just whether the student will continue in a particular major, not just whether the student will remain in school, not just whether the student will get a particular job, but also whether the student will be required to risk his life as a member of the armed forces. I know of no objective way of deciding what is the value of a given human life.
>
> A system which purports to decide which lives and which talents are dispensable and which lives and which talents are not dispensable must be the result of either confusion or arrogance. Yet the draft system purports to do that very thing. . . .
>
> The student who is less gifted, the student who must work because of financial obligations or the student whose native language is not English—all of whom may receive lower grades as a result of these factors—is this student any the less worthy of our concern and consideration than the student who is more fortunate? . . . Is the draft to be a kind of penalty piled on top of his other disadvantages? . . .
>
> I know that I personally cannot take part in this process of selection and still remain at peace with myself. As Camus has said, the crucial problem today is that we too often "are unable to really imagine other people's death. It is a freak of the times. We make love by telephone, we work not on matter but on machines, and we kill by proxy. We gain in cleanliness but we lose in understanding." . . .

Miss Woodward's other objection to grading by letter is that it often hinders the learning process, stifles original thinking, and fosters "that heedless competitiveness which is one of the hallmarks and one of the blights of contemporary society." The best work, she said, is seldom done when the grade is the chief objective.

In the *Paris Review* for Fall, 1965, the novelist, William Burroughs, a former heroin addict, made this reply to the question of an interviewer:

> *What do you think of the hallacinogens and the new psychodelic drugs—LSD-25?*
>
> I think they're extremely dangerous, much more dangerous than heroin. They can produce overwhelming anxiety states. I've seen people try to throw themselves out of windows; whereas the heroin addict is mainly interested in staring at his own toe. Other than deprivation of the drug, the main threat to him is an overdose. I've tried most of the hallucinogens, without an anxiety reaction, fortunately. LSD-25 produced results for me similar to mescaline. . . . I had my most interesting experiences with mescaline when I got outdoors and walked around—colors, sunsets, gardens. It produces a terrible hangover, though, nasty stuff. It makes one ill and interferes with coordination.
>
> *The visions of drugs and the visions of art don't mix?*
>
> Never. The hallucinogens produce visionary states, sort of, but morphine and its derivatives decrease awareness of inner processes, thoughts and feelings. They are pain killers; pure and simple. They are absolutely contraindicated for creative work, and I include in the lot alcohol, morphine, barbiturates, tranquilizers—the whole spectrum of sedative drugs.

A reader has sent us a brief extract from *Venture into the Interior* (Wm. Morrow, 195I), by Laurens van der Post. This passage represents an awareness that needs to reach into and penetrate many more people:

> One of the most striking features of the desperate age in which we live is its genius for

> finding good reasons for doing bad things. . . . For example, we have talked more about reason—we have, on the face of it, loved, honored and obeyed reason more in the last century and a half than at any other epoch, and yet cumulatively and collectively, in the grand total of all our individual lives, we have produced more unreason, bigger and fiercer wars, than any other age in history.
>
> The theme needs no elaboration. I can only say that it has become almost axiomatic with me to look for a person's overriding motive, his wider purpose, his deeper plan, in his achieved results rather than in the eloquent avowals that he makes to himself and others. . . .

The conclusion, here, is similar to that reached by Ignacio Silone in *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, last volume of his trilogy concerned with the revolutionary movement in Italy.

Last fall, a draft objector, David Mitchell, twenty-two, was tried in a federal court, found guilty, and sentenced to five years in prison and fined $5,000. Fyke Farmer, an attorney who entered the case after the trial, now contends that Mitchell was hurried into court without being allowed sufficient time to obtain counsel. It was an obligation of the trial court, Farmer maintains, to take note of the Government's military activities outside the borders of the United States and to tell the jury that there were two laws, not only one, which applied. In a statement, Mr. Farmer said:

> The trial judge, at the outset, took the view that the only law involved was the Universal Military Training and Service Act. The defendant, however, clearly brought out that by the Nuremberg Law as declared by the International Military Tribunal, "individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience imposed by the individual state." (*United States of America v. Hermann Wilhelm Goering et al.*, 6 Fed. Rules Decisions, 69, 110.)

Mitchell's case is being appealed by his attorney.