

CAN FREEDOM BE PLANNED?

RATHER than pursue a theoretical analysis of this question, we look first at a practical situation in which planning obviously produces one kind of freedom. The red and green light control of the flow of traffic on the highways is of manifest value. Who could possibly object to this kind of planning for human mobility? Without it, the inhabitants of all but the most deserted, rural areas would elect to stay home. Traffic regulation is a form of planning which meets an essential need of people massed in cities who must travel both short and long distances in order to pursue their ends. In some cases, a similar sort of planning supersedes the need of control by lights, since the freeways make possible non-stop journeys for hundreds of miles.

Q.E.D. You can plan for freedom.

But is this illustration adequate for all phases of the problem? If, for example, you read Lewis Mumford and Scott Greer on customary methods of providing free mobility to the motorist, you will find that there are often unforeseen, usually unrecognized, and sometimes slyly minimized disasters to the human community from this sort of catering to motorists (and General Motors). Certain values of community living tend to be destroyed by compulsively ruthless service to the efficiency of automobile transport. But here, unlike the unequivocal evil of a traffic snarl, some subtlety is present. Such matters are arguable. The interest of the real-estate developer is inevitably involved in freeway planning, and his notion of "community" is not founded upon Mr. Mumford's dreams. And while Mr. Mumford is a professor, the developer is a businessman in whom reside the very principles of our free society. His interest is the shrine before which we announce our determination to reject the hideous alternative of the totalitarian way of life. And even if, out of communitarian, aesthetic, and socio-moral

considerations of value you find yourself adopting a somewhat cynical view of the sacred freedom of the real-estate developer, the slackening of this allegiance will not of itself disclose any easy way to replace the chaos which now dominates city and regional existence. The planning of "good" urban and regional life, no matter *what* assumptions you make about those freedoms which you hold to approximate common denominators of human need, will remain incredibly difficult. For you will encounter a magnitude of organized complexity—both practical and motivational complexity—that is simply beyond the compass of any single human being's understanding. "Its not that the problems of the city cannot be divided up into some finite number of variables. This, one may suppose, could be done. (No doubt city planners do it all the time.) But in many or even all of these variables there will be hidden incommensurable factors, either positive or negative, of human awareness—of caring, of private and interest-group concern—such that even a preliminary approach to city planning requires the cutting of many Gordian knots and the stipulation of reasoned agreement as to what a "good" city ought to be, when, as a matter of fact, that agreement does not exist at all. How could there be agreement on questions that probably more than half the population have never asked? And how can the rhetoric of "freedom" relate to such a situation? Obviously, the planner must submit in *some* degree to playing a Machiavellian role. (Would the manipulation of a friendly kindergartner supply a more appropriate comparison?) This, we may say, is his right and his necessity, if there is to be city planning at all. In part, then, we are in the hands of his conscience, but since the sway of his influence is so small in comparison with the mindless rule of the confusion that now prevails, we shall probably

allow him to do what he can. Or rather, *some* of us will be willing to trust him. And we know that he can't explain all his problems to us; that would be like expecting the national government to abandon secret diplomacy.

We have come a long way from the luminous simplicity of the red and green lights. And in getting to where we are now, many phases of the problems of planning for freedom have been exposed. These may be generalized by asking the question: How can you plan for freedom, unless you have first a genuine consensus concerning the good—actually, this seems quite impossible—which would enable the technician-planner to create a practical hierarchy of means (freedoms) for its pursuit?

Well, people may nonetheless argue that we *do* have a consensus. It is expressed in our social compact by the ideals of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." True enough, we have declared these ideals, but we still have our problems. This society devoted to "life" has in a little less than two hundred years developed into the most tightly organized machine for the production of death that the world has ever known. The anomaly is so obvious that it interests many more than poets and dreamers. We may leave examination of "liberty" aside, since this is a continuum in which the problem of freedom arises and also where we must find the means of increasing (or "planning") it. These two aspects of liberty are no doubt dependent on one another, varying in both metaphysical and practical relation, and to measure our "liberty" beforehand by some arbitrary criterion would beg the question. We might say that we probably have far more liberty than we suppose (and also far less), and let it go at that.

The Pursuit of Happiness may be neglected for a different reason. It is too easy to turn this expression into a canard by quoting contemporary moralists from Erich Kahler to J. Edgar Hoover (his mounting crime statistics). Happiness is an undistributed value in our society because it *has* to

be. That is, it cannot be distributed by the social compact. To tell a man what constitutes his happiness is to declare him less than a man. Either he finds this out for himself or he is sub-human. The only way in which the political compact gets to define happiness is in sneaky, demagogic phrases which indicate that *of course* we have to do this or that in order to be happy. But in defense of the sneakiness of the politicians who practice such persuasions, it must be said that the pursuit of happiness (quest for the good) is an *essential* animating principle of human behavior, and when it has only a narrow, frivolous, or self-destructive expression on the part of too many people, the state finds itself constrained to make a number of gross, mechanical adjustments to reduce the resulting disorder, some of which require some thought-control and other devious devices.

We are talking, of course, about political planning. What are the limitations of political planning? They are the limitations of the political means. Politics is the harmonization, at *some* practical level of order, of the mixed and often conflicting motives of mankind. Politics is the arrangement we are able to achieve *without* the full consensus we need to create an ideal society. Intelligent politics is politics which refuses to make pretentious and self-righteous plans on the basis of a consensus that does not exist. Totalitarian politics is politics which declares that if the consensus does not yet exist, it damn well better had—or we'll *shoot* these people! Hypocritical politics is politics which claims to be intelligent but submits to the growing temptation to explain that its version of the consensus is what all *good* people know to be true, so where's the harm of enforcing it?

But what if we just *have* to make these plans, on account of we have all these emergencies?

This, alas, is the voice of the Grand Inquisitor, who by no means died in the sixteenth century. What we *have* to do is define our problems such that the solutions we choose do not

compel us to lie about the consensus and defame the human species by trying to cajole it into agreement.

Does this mean we should all sit around and do nothing? Of course not. We are going to plan for freedom, just as surely as Sisyphus is going to push his rock up the hill. Our only hope is to learn how to do it with less arrogance, less cocksure certainty that we know how to save the world.

Our only hope lies in open admission that every freedom we isolate and plan for may close out some other freedom we are not interested in planning for, but perhaps should be. We would then have a decent humility in making our plans. We would have in our triumphal chariot of Progress a monitor who understands us well and who would whisper, at regular intervals, "Remember, you are only a man." The Bill of Rights is a legislative memorial to that monitor, but it would be better to have him present in every planning conference, instead of waiting for us, in lonely isolation, at the far end of some long, revolutionary night.

Let us look at another illustration of the problem of planning. For its substance we quote from Dorothy Samuel's article in *Contemporary Issues* for the Spring of 1965, in which the writer gives a characterization of some of the students who are involved in the civil rights movement:

On every college campus will be found unfashionably clad students lolling in cheap rooms, reading inexpensive paperbacks or second-hand editions of great books. . . . They browse among the courses and the disciplines. If a book speaks to their condition, they may skip a few weeks' required work to peruse everything the author wrote. When the grade card reflects what they did not learn rather than what they did learn, they couldn't care less. Top grades are meaningful only to employers; these students have not seen any jobs worth doing. . . . And so, the exodus has begun. In ones and twos, undramatically, thoughtful lads and lasses are dropping out of college, at least off and on, so they will have time to think. . . .

They are, in short, philosophic in an age which seems to offer no forum for discussion of principles and values and verities. . . . They would be Emersons and Thoreaus in a day when journals and podiums seem open only to statisticians and reporters.

Apparently, our planning for free education has been closing out Emersons and Thoreaus to make room for statisticians and reporters. The institutions of higher learning are of only marginal use to the students Mrs. Samuel describes. They give access to books, encounters with one or two unusual teachers, but educational *esprit de corps* is something these students have had to work out for themselves. They sound like the cream of the crop—but they are *not part of the crop*. They are totally unplanned for, so far as our educational system is concerned. They do not believe that there will be an end to history, and the planning we know how to do is for a static society. At any rate, that is the kind of planning we have done. Are we ready, able, willing, to do any other kind?

One of the heads of the Computer Sciences Department at the Rand Corporation, Paul Armer, has an article in a special "Computer and Society" section of the *New York Times* for April 24. At the end of his discussion, he says:

As the tempo of change increases, men must adopt the view that education is a continuing process throughout life. Computers are likely to make the educational system much more efficient and tailored to the individual. If this does occur, it may well be the greatest achievement of the twentieth century.

Now *why* did he have to add that last sentence? Isn't it obvious that getting a few Emersons and Thoreaus is the best possible result of education, anywhere, any time, and that the computer, for all its mnemonic grandeur, is really irrelevant to this objective? Mr. Armer apparently thinks we already know what a good education is, and supposes that the main thing needed is an intellectual pump to get it into the students. But you couldn't even program a computer for a Grand Inquisitor, much less an Emerson or a Thoreau!

There is more to quote from Mrs. Samuel about these students:

Even among the active, dedicated ones—SNCC workers and CORE demonstrators—there is little sense of hope. Obviously, not all of the students in civil rights work [have this mood], which is fortunate for the morale of these movements. Over coffee, in the wee hours of the night, the [students] on furlough from foreign service in Mississippi reveal how small they consider the area in which they can "overcome."

"I know I'm not really changing the world out there," one said to me in emotionless tones. "But at least I'm doing *something*; I am working with living human beings whose needs are clear and obvious. But whatever I accomplish, it won't change the greed and cruelty and lying and exploitation that run through our whole bomb-happy civilization." And another pointed out, "It's easy to bleed for the Negroes now. But I have the horrible certainty that, once they get a square deal in our society, most of them are going to play the game just as the whites have been playing it for years."

Right now, in a society obsessed by the promise of planning, we need people like this who feel the truth of the Sisyphus myth in every bone. Then, when we have assimilated this law of every objective human enterprise, it will be time to remember that the Greeks had other myths. The endless defeat of Sisyphus finds its remedy in the undying hope of Prometheus. But to understand how Prometheus can hope, one must taste the last full measure of Sisyphus' despair.

REVIEW

THE FROG IN THE WELL

THOMAS MERTON'S *Way of Chuang Tzu* (New Directions, 1965, \$4.00) is a book that belongs in a category of its own. As Father Merton himself makes clear in his introduction, his selection of tales and anecdotes by and about the semilegendary Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu (who lived in the fourth and third centuries B.C.) is neither a new translation nor a work of scholarship. Father Merton's versions of the poems are worked up from four or five existing translations and have been rendered with the advice of the sinologist John Wu. Nor does Father Merton offer the poems as anything more than a very personal selection taken from the total body of Chuang Tzu's writing. The book is, as he calls it, a "venture in personal and spiritual interpretation."

The value of such a book may seem slight to a scholar. But its importance to the philosopher and general reader is threefold. First of all, the literary style of Father Merton's "readings" is considerably more graceful than that of other versions of Chuang Tzu—and much more contemporary in sound. He has sought especially to bring out the anarchist cynicism of the Taoist tradition: the hermit's shrewd-minded revulsion at the corruption and power-hunger of all officials and self-proclaimed "leaders." So Chuang Tzu reminds us that "A poor man must swing for stealing a belt buckle; But if a rich man steals a whole state he is acclaimed as statesman of the year." Second, Father Merton's introduction to the volume is a provocative essay in comparative religious thought, well worth reading in its own right. And finally there is the example the book sets as a sensitive and deeply intelligent investigation of Taoist wisdom by a Trappist monk who wishes "to see life from a viewpoint that has been common to solitaries and recluses in all cultures." This is an excellent example of the sort of ecumenical openness—indeed the kind of

true catholicity—one associates with the influence of John XXIII's pontificate.

But what to say about the substance of the work? "Those who speak," said Lao Tzu, "do not know; those who know do not speak." Is there anything one can *say* about Zen and Taoist teachings without seeming, from the very moment one begins to speak, to have missed the entire point? Perhaps it is only the composer John Cage who, of all Westerners, has found an authentic way to talk Zen, seeking in his comic and baffling lectures about music not to describe Zen wisdom, but to *express* it directly. It has always struck me that the anti-logicity (taking "logic" here in its most literal sense: from "logos," Greek for "word" or "speech") of the Zen-Taoist tradition is precisely what proves most befuddling and maddening to the Western mind. For Taoism, language is *not* a mode of communication—not where the depths of philosophical insight are concerned. It is rather a bag of tricks. The Taoist master uses words the way the Dadaists once used the paraphernalia of art: as a batch of pranks with which to mock all art, and so to deflate quasi-religious pomposity to which so many modern artists and their idolizing publics are prone. So the Taoist master perversely uses words to frustrate and subvert all logicity. In this respect the project of the Taoist mystic is remarkably like that of the severest sort of contemporary linguistic philosophy. "Philosophy," Wittgenstein observed, "is the struggle to keep oneself from being bewitched by words." And he concluded his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with the tantalizingly ambiguous remark: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one should keep silent."

For many a contemporary Western philosopher that famous dictum has led to an unfortunate abbreviation of the philosophical project. It has meant that only those things that can be talked about clearly and distinctly—and ideally, scientifically—can have any importance: logicity is all. But the Taoist master would interpret Wittgenstein's cryptic principle in exactly

the opposite way: logicity is *not* all. And in fact it is very little. The great psychic breakthroughs that give life its depth and savor—those moments of insight which the psychologist Abraham Maslow has called the "peak experiences"—utterly elude language (unless it be poetry) as the wind would escape from a net. So, the Taoist master concludes, let us restrict logicity to its subordinate and utilitarian place.

One could easily find in Western art and religious life a hundred expressions of the peak experience. I think most immediately, however, of the work of Tolstoy, which seems always to hover about these moments of life-saving enlightenment with the single-minded intensity of a hawk scouting its prey, waiting to swoop and strike. There is the absolutely shattering climax of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, where the moment of spiritual awakening overlaps the moment of death; and "in place of death there was light." Or one thinks of Prince Andrew in *War and Peace*, lying wounded on the field of Austerlitz:

He opened his eyes, hoping to see how the struggle of the Frenchmen with the gunners ended . . . But he saw nothing. Above him there was now nothing but the sky—the lofty sky, not clear yet still immeasurably lofty, with gray clouds gliding slowly across it. "How quiet, peaceful and solemn, not at all as I am," thought Prince Andrew— . . . "How was it I did not see that lofty sky before? And how happy I am to have found it at last! Yes! All is vanity, all falsehood, except that infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing but that. But even it does not exist, there is nothing but quiet and peace. . . ."

Moments like this have no "meaning"; rather they have a *value*. But how does one even begin to describe that value to anyone who has no sense of the experience? "Can you talk about the sea," asks a Taoist master in Father Merton's collection, "to a frog in a well? . . . Can you talk about the way of life to a doctor of philosophy?"

For the Taoist master, the task of the teacher is not primarily to transfer knowledge; it is rather to stand guard against the rude aggression of the logical mind—the mind that insists on pigeon-

holing all experience by means of words and neatly verifiable concepts—and, when he sees it coming, to post the peak experience about with "no trespassing" signs . . . and perhaps to lay a few linguistic traps to catch logicity in its own presumption.

Walter Kaufmann (in his *Critique of Philosophy and Religion*) suggests that what many have mistaken as the "doctrine" of the Upanishads is nothing more than the defensive tactics of clever teachers striving to foil the efforts of brash young students who want to lay quick and greedy hands upon their teachers' wisdom. Hence, the frustrating negativism of the Upanishads: Brahman is neither this nor that, it neither exists nor does it not-exist, etc., etc. The negativism is really directed against words, against creeds and precise doctrines: no formulas! no slogans! the *real thing* and not its linguistic shadow. This rejection of logicity binds Hindu mysticism together with Taoism and Zen. Thus, in Father Merton's collection, Chuang Tzu asks: "Does Tao exist? Is it then a 'thing that exists'? Can it 'non-exist'? Is there then 'thing that exists' that 'cannot not exist'?" and finishes with the only possible conclusion for such a hopeless muddle of questions and cross-questions: "Tao is beyond words . . . It is not expressed either in words or in silence."

But if ordinary language is useless, how is the questing mind to be enlightened? The marvelous and maddening thing about the peak experience which Taoism so jealously guards is its habit of breaking through—seemingly of its own power—at the most unlikely and unforeseen moments. It is that moment, that flash of sudden knowledge, the Taoist master waits for and gambles on. He knows, as every good teacher knows, that education—*real* education, the sort of education that transforms the personality rather than simply polishing up the intellect a bit—always takes place quite accidentally. There is really no telling how or when educational lightning will strike. All the teacher can do is to discourage superficiality,

ward off premature lunges at the truth, surround the student with variety and rich possibility . . . and wait. Thus, the teacher provides an educational *field* through which the student may freely move; the rest is patience . . . and perhaps good timing.

It would be fascinating to draw up a list of all the unlikely things and occasions that have led people to the peak experiences of their lives. Jacob Boehme found his blinding illumination in an ordinary tin plate flashing with sunlight. Ruth St. Denis discovered the inspiration for her life's work in the dance when she happened upon the image of an Egyptian princess in, of all places, a cigarette advertisement. Dostoevsky touched the deeps of life while he stood waiting in line to meet a Czarist firing squad. Dante glimpsed beatitude when he first caught sight of the young Beatrice, a commonplace Florentine girl with whom he never exchanged a word. St. Francis underwent profound spiritual revolution as he languished in sick bed after being wounded in battle . . . Who could have foreseen or designed the odd twists of events, the chance constellation of circumstances which illuminated these lives so vividly and changed their course? Compared to the unaccountable thing that happens during such experiences, all the conventional business of formal "education"—classes, courses, text assignments, lectures, research, examinations—become a distinctly secondary project in life. So the Taoist master waits and watches, lets his student grope, stumble, agonize . . . until the right moment. The talent of the master lies in recognizing right moments. And then—well, perhaps a slap or a kick will do the trick: Zen masters are notorious for such outbursts of beneficent brutality. Or a simple, silent gesture will strike home: Chuang Tzu would have appreciated the little tale Vsevolod Garshin tells.

A young disciple asked of the saintly sage Jiaffir: "Master, what is life?"

In silence the master turned back the soiled sleeve of his sackcloth burnoose and showed the disciple a revolting sore that was eating into his arm.

And, at that very time, the nightingales were trilling in full song, and all Seville was fragrant with the sweet odor of roses.

The psychic dualism on which Taoism is based—the opposition of logicity and intuition—is nothing strange to the Western tradition, where it has gone by many names. Pascal called the two antagonists "the spirit of geometry" and "the spirit of finesse." Bergson called them "intelligence" and "instinct," Neitzsche "the Apollonian" and "the Dionysian." In Freud they appear as ego and id, in Jung as the self and the Unconscious. The opposition underlies the traditional tension between the classical and the romantic as styles of life and art and between the theological and the mystical as modes of religion. But Taoism departs radically from the Western tradition, I think, in its description of the way of life that follows upon—and so verifies—the enlightened state.

In the West, "enlightenment" has meant nothing so much as a deepened sense of personal identity and purpose. The great-soured man has been, especially since the Renaissance, one who cultivates and asserts his personality. This has been very much the case with our leading artists and philosophers, for whom style and originality, not to mention fame, have been the ideals. Nothing is more prestigious in our high cultural tradition than "creativity," an achievement that necessarily involves an assertion of the self. To create is to do as God does: to impress one's image upon formless nature, to leave the world different, better than it was before. Artists and philosophers have been prepared to seek a secular immortality through their work, often with a self-destructive passion. Since the mid-nineteenth century at least, many writers and painters have willingly sacrificed contemporary recognition in favor of the satisfaction that comes of knowing that their style, their insight, their influence will endure by capturing and shaping the tastes of future generations. Artists and philosophers have been quite as ready as politicians to cry "history will vindicate me."

The struggle of the great creative figure for recognition is, of course, only the public side of his quest. Psychically, the measure of Western enlightenment has lain in an ever richer experience of self: a sense of one's own depth and variety and prowess. At the foundations of life itself Nietzsche perceived a "will to power" that aimed at the endless production of "higher types" of individuals: strenuous, self-mastering heroes of the arts and philosophy, forever in search of new ways of "giving style to one's character." Nietzsche's work stands as the greatest of hymns to this Western tradition of creative personality:

This secret self-ravishment [as he calls it], this artists' cruelty, this pleasure in giving form to oneself as a difficult, recalcitrant, suffering matter—burning into it a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a No—this work of a soul which is willingly divided against itself, which makes itself suffer . . . has . . . been the real womb of all ideal and imaginative events and has thus brought to light a fullness of new and strange beauty and affirmation—and perhaps altogether *beauty itself*.

All that Nietzsche is saying here and especially the anguished, savage tone of his writing—clashes radically with the Taoist ideal. Nietzsche, voicing a centuries'-old Western tradition, believes the world grows richer and more beautiful as it multiplies its population of heroic individuals. But Chuang Tzu speaks of "getting lost in Tao"—and the submergence he speaks of is meant to be *both* psychic *and* public. The enlightened man *subtracts* elements of individuality in favor of a broader, trans-human identity, until he blends away into Tao.

The man of Tao
Remains unknown.
Perfect virtue
Produces nothing.
"No-Self"
Is "True-Self"
And the greatest man
Is Nobody.

Chuang Tzu, offered a premiership by the Prince of Chu, compares himself to a "plain turtle"

and replies: "Go home! . . . Leave me here to drag my tail in the mud!"

Anonymity and invisibility are the ideal: the extinction of self. The personality is to be merged into an impersonal advance of the truth, so that the enlightened man "will flow like Tao, unseen . . . with no name and no home. He achieves nothing, has no reputation." Rather, by his submission he expands the province of Tao.

Even creativity recedes before the Taoist ideal. For the need to create implies, it would seem, that nature in some way is lacking: it needs more than is already there. It needs elaboration or clarification or variety: one must *do* something to improve or beautify the world. But for Chuang Tzu, Tao is nothing to be made, but to be *found*. And once found, it proves to be "Great in all things, Complete in all, Universal in all, Whole in all." He points out Tao to his disciples in an ant, a weed, a turd. No doubt Chuang Tzu would be very much taken by found-object art; but he would ask, I think, "Why trouble to put these things in museums? And why put your name on them?"

It is never pleasant to admit that all wisdom may *not* lead to a single conclusion; it is much more reassuring to feel that all that is best of West and East comprises a uniform "wisdom of the ages." But I believe it would be a mistake to identify the way of Chuang Tzu with Western mysticism or saintliness. Western religion never finally gives up the irreducible reality of the individual soul; nor does it surrender the conception of a personal God toward whom men have an objective relationship and obligations. Whatever the elusive Tao may be, it is, at last, an "it"—and not a personal God: a Father, a Lord, a Creator, a Lawgiver who stands above nature as a Supreme Being possessed of a will and a design and a purpose. Even in the mystic experience the otherness of God asserts itself in the West. The most frequent metaphorical expression of the Western mystic's union with God is that of the impassioned lover seeking his beloved. The

metaphor is usually one of struggle, of effort, or orgasmic fulfillment: the soul burns with the fire of love, it soars, it leaps toward a crisis of enlightenment from which it finally falls back exhausted. The mystic union is achieved only by way of supreme struggle against the ego and the otherness of God; hence the violence and the passion of the imagery: the mystic must be catapulted across a forbidden barrier. Yet, ultimately, the union proves to be a relation of love between two real persons whose reality is intensified by the experience.

But the most familiar image of Zen and Taoist enlightenment is markedly different: it is the familiar figure of the candle that is extinguished—once for all. The sense of self melts away—gently and permanently—into an impersonal, enveloping flow of reality; not in a breathless fit of passion, but by a silencing and calming of mind and sense. One does not, as in the West, flee from a pursuing "hound of heaven" until one is captured; one sits and waits for something to grow within. One does not fall in love . . . one simply falls asleep in Tao. So one Taoist master praises an old toothless beggar who falls asleep during religious instructions:

His mind is dead
As dead ashes . . .
In deep dark night
He wanders free,
Without aim
And without design.
Who can compare
With this toothless man?

It is surely significant that there does not exist in the West a landscape painting that is directly related to Christianity or to any prominent school of Western philosophy. But Zen painters fastened precisely upon the landscape as the prime expression of their religious art. Western religion thrusts forward the divine figure or a symbol. Chinese scroll painting immerses and nearly loses the human figure amid mountains and river valleys, mists and spaces. The prevailing feeling of the painting is one of calm and gentle

comprehension. What Western men—with their aggressive sense of personality—have had to learn cerebrally (and haven't learned at all well) from the science of ecology emerges naturally from the Taoist perception of reality.

I think Father Merton believes there may be an ultimate identity between the Western and the Taoist conceptions of enlightenment. I am inclined to believe there isn't, but rather that the two traditions differ radically. Western man's strenuous sense of ego, of self, of personal worth and reality has been embedded in the very foundations of our religions and metaphysics. Even the radical skepticism of Descartes could not press beyond the "I" that must be there to "think." The immortal soul is—in one form or another—the perennial premise of almost all Western philosophy—right down to the contemporary existentialist's tortured and near-psychotic sense of personal isolation. One cannot but be impressed with the tense and tormented inner-life of most Western saints, who seem always to be struggling against temptation and weakness beneath the external discipline of God's will. Even St. Francis, whose act of preaching to the birds is a beautifully Taoist gesture, fell back again and again into fits of despair, fearing that he would incur God's displeasure for his personal unworthiness and that his soul would be lost. It is this stubborn sense of personality and the otherness of God and nature that accounts for the fact that there is nothing easy and relaxed about our Western saints and mystics. They are generally—like our great artists and philosophers—pretty grave types: frowning and sweating to work out their salvation. Our highest cultural achievements are by and large somber achievements—the products of struggle and passion: art, religion, philosophy are nothing to be funny about! *Serious* art, with themes of tragedy or pathos, takes precedence over the comic. One looks nearly in vain for humor in our philosophical and religious heritage. There isn't a single good joke in the whole New Testament (though there is a good deal of earthy folk-humor in the Old).

But nothing is more impressive than the irreverent wit and good humor of the Zen-Taoist masters. Take a collection of koan like *The Iron Flute* (now available in a handsome edition published by Charles Tuttle Company, 1961). The koan are glossed with shrewd thrusts, wisecracks and puns exchanged between masters. The Western reader is brought up sharply by such frivolity—rather like the disciple of Confucius in one of Chuang Tzu's tales. The disciple came to chant the obsequies of a dead man, only to find the man's two closest friends amusedly singing:

Hey, Sung Ho!
Where'd you go? . . .
You have gone
Where you really were.
And we are here
Damn it! We are here.

Then, laughing at the solemn disciple, the two remark, "Poor fellow! he doesn't know the new liturgy!"

Whatever "the peace that passeth all understanding" has meant in the Christian tradition, it has not usually given rise to a sense of humor. It has instead been a very solemn business—meant to be taken *seriously*. Seriousness has been the Western measure of personal depth and moral earnestness. Humor has always smacked of antinomianism or impiety. But from Chuang Tzu's point of view, "immorality" is not what deviates from sobriety and moral fervor; rather it is whatever deprives men of their easy and normal relation to Tao: power-hunger, greed, ruthlessness, and, indeed, moral fervor itself. Western morality rejects many of these attributes too—but I daresay Chuang Tzu would be struck by how identical in character and mood both our great villains and our great moral crusaders have tended to be: serious, self-assertive, angry, hard-driving, power-seeking. Thus, while the goals of good guys and bad guys have been diametrically different, their means have ironically often been identical. So Chuang Tzu observes:

By ethical argument
And moral principle

The greatest crimes are eventually shown
To have been necessary, and, in fact,
A signal benefit
To mankind.

Again and again one is impressed by the realization that it is the tone and style of knowledge that is more significant than the content of that knowledge: *how* we know is apt to be far more important than *what* we know. Doubtless one could find in the Western tradition an analogous belief or concept for every Taoist belief or concept: beatitude, inspiration, intuition, humility, psychic integration, . . . perhaps all of these can be roughly equated to aspects of Taoist teaching. But I think the equation would be slipshod. For I remain unable to identify in the West any culturally prominent style of life or character type that resembles the grace, calm and good humor of Chuang Tzu. Abraham Maslow observes (in *Toward a Psychology of Being*) that the peak experience can often lead to perceptions of the world that are "relatively ego-transcending, self-forgetful, egoless. . . . unmotivated, impersonal, desireless, unselfish, not *needing*, detached." But this is emphatically *not* the sort of experience that has in the West achieved high cultural expression. And in any case, momentary perceptions of this kind have certainly not been elaborated into a total vision and way of life that has prominently impressed itself upon our society culturally or psychologically. To describe Taoism as "nonrational" or "non-worldly" in its emphasis and then to identify it with various "non-rational and "non-worldly" traditions in the West is, I suspect, rather like calling a skylark a turtle because both are "non-mammals."

What the Western mystic and artist has brought back from the ineffable peak experience has been a very different vision of life and the world than one finds in Taoism. For this reason I believe the challenge of Taoism strikes deeper than many of its Western admirers realize. For ultimately it calls into question the authenticity of the personality. And the personality—that insistently unique, infinitely valuable, fortified

conviction of "me-ness" Western man hugs to the very core of his being—is the glory Westerners will not be robbed of as well as the disease they will not be cured of. But as long as we cling to it, whether as a glory or a disease, I'm sure Chuang Tzu would feel convinced that we are still the frogs in the well who know nothing of the great sea beyond.

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COMMENTARY

NO "DEATH OF GOD"

AN observation by Aldous Huxley in *Ends and Means* (1937) has application to Mr. Roszak's comparison of Eastern and Western mysticism in Review. After speaking of the "dark night of the soul" suffered by Christian mystics when they discover "by direct intuition that he (God) is not a person," Huxley notes that no such ordeal is mentioned in Buddhist or Hindu literature. The oriental mystic, Huxley says, starting out with views which are "in accord with the testimony of his own experience, . . . has no treasured belief to give up; therefore enlightenment entails for him no spiritual anguish."

Accompanying Virginia Naeve's discussion of her lurid Sunday school past (see "Children") were some further comments on the public schools, which, being crowded out, we print here:

One might also put education in our public schools into the same niche. However, you'd have most of the people down your necks for saying it isn't very important. Again it is a mumbling of words. The poor little student prisoners are confined for six to eight hours a day trying to expectorate the right answer to please the teacher. Again, if the teacher is vital and exciting the student responds. Compulsory education is something we grabbed after the industrial revolution, it was to liberate "us."

Not long ago I asked one of the members of the board of education of our town (at an informal meeting), "Have you ever used physics, chemistry, or trigonometry in your daily life since leaving school?" He looked at me in a blank way as if I had just pulled a large white grub out of my pocketbook and asked if he had ever tried fried grubs? He didn't answer me, just shrugged his shoulders. Why ask such a question since everybody does what the board of education lays out for them to do. You don't think about it one way or the other. School and church are like the

customs of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*—they are interesting games you play because you don't know any others and you've been *told* that they are the right ones.

It would be a pretty wild situation, but maybe a very good one, if all the schools were disbanded and the prospective students were flung out into actual experience on their own. A lot of them are dropping out, anyway. I think A. S. Neill has put the point as directly as possible: "Juvenile delinquency is primarily due to an education that does not have any contact with life outside of school."

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

AN [UN]RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

THERE have been numerous discussions, references, etc., in MANAS on the question of religion. I don't remember having read an inquiry into the personal reasons one might have for believing or not believing in any kind of religious training. When I say religious training I mean the influence of going to Sunday school on an individual child. What does he really think about going to church?

Church or Sunday school appearances seem for the most part a punishment vested by the parent onto the child, because the parent once endured church at the insistence of *his* parents. Many parents don't give a second thought to school or church in regard to their own children and whether it will work any more for them than it did for the parents. How many children go to school, let alone Sunday school, because the parent says in his own mind, "I did it, now it's his turn, it didn't hurt me." Or did it?

My mother had a passion for tennis when I was growing up. She frequently played on Sunday after my brother and I were dumped at Sunday school. I have very few recollections of her coming along and going to church. I was given a nickel to put into the collection, was scrubbed and neatly dressed, and sent off to my moral lessons. Near our church was a drug store and I finally worked out a scheme whereby I could buy a five-cent candy bar if I got rid of my small brother quickly and dashed to the drug store and made it back before Sunday school began. One Sunday for some reason my Mother drove back around the block and saw me coming out of the drug store with the candy. I then dashed back into the store, threw the candy on the counter, grabbed the nickel and nonchalantly walked out of the store.

When I was about four I remember spending a good deal of my nap time trying to figure out *how* God could be everywhere. No matter how much I tried, I couldn't conceive a human form (the only one I knew) having 1,000 or so arms to embrace all little children. Since I couldn't solve this problem satisfactorily I had to let it drift into the unanswerables. But the doubt it cast grew throughout my childhood and made me question a lot of other things as time went on.

In the last month there has been a lot of discussion in the Canadian Parliament about abolishing the death penalty. (It was not abolished.) That brought to my mind the time my Sunday school class made a three-day trip to the state penitentiary. Arrangements were made for the teen-agers—thirteen years and up—to make the trip if their parents allowed. At the other end housing was made possible by the people of the same denomination in the town where the penitentiary was located. It was about a 120-mile trip and we were all bundled into cars and driven down one Friday after school.

Upon arrival it was found there was not enough housing available, so some of us (girls and boys separated) were put into two cabins in a sort of motor court behind the house of one of the parishioners. I was put in with three other girls. Not too far from us was the cabin of spare boys. It was going to be a lark. One of the boys whom I liked and who was an usher at a local movie theater back home was in the other cabin. He religiously taught me how to kiss that weekend.

That Saturday we were shepherded out to the penitentiary. It was out of town in an area with no trees or grass near the correctional buildings. The town proper was not far from the Mexican border and on the desert. The buildings holding the prisoners were covered with galvanized metal roofing, this being pointed out to us for some reason or other. I think, now, of the ghastly heat that must have radiated down upon the prisoners under those roofs during the hot months. The only other thing I remember about the prison trip

was a tour through the hanging room. This room was circular in shape and adorned with cut-off nooses hung at intervals on the walls over the pictures of the prisoners who had been hanged. Various comments were made by the touring guard about how long it took to hang some men. He pointed out a hole or trap-door arrangement in the flooring which caught the prisoner after the noose was put around his neck and he dropped, breaking his neck. One wonders what the condemned man thought as he looked around for the last time at all those nooses, knowing that his would soon be added to the decor. After the hanging room we were shown the modern method of extermination, the gas chamber. In detail the operation was described: how little pellets dropped into something and formed gas and the prisoner died.

The sum total of the tour was one of seeing the PLANT. The prisoners were incidental to the workings of the establishment. We saw the cooking apparatus (none of the food or the prisoners eating). We saw the hanging room, the gas chamber, the mechanisms that closed the prison doors—and that was that.

Due to my childhood conditioning I felt obliged to continue church as was expected. However at about fourteen years I decided I would try out all sorts of churches and see what they had to offer. There was a rapid turnover of different denominations. I did stay a little longer if there was a good youth club. One church had a roller rink and for ten cents on Friday evenings one could go skating and meet other kids.

In the ninth grade I met a boy whose parents were some sort of freethinkers. Anyway, whatever they were, the boy was different. He definitely didn't go to Sunday school, church, or anything of the sort. For the first time in my life I talked with someone who asked questions. I was fascinated, but petrified. I got a peek at the world outside of church and school that seemed endless and free. I annoyed the boy to distraction with my

fascination. Our family moved to another state and that relieved both of us of the relationship.

As a child I couldn't put my finger on why I was constantly embarrassed when prayers were said or in school when we saluted the flag. Not long ago I joined a home and school group here in Quebec which opens its meetings with a prayer. I was as usual embarrassed. What the prayer said made sense—it talked about tolerance, kindness, etc. I looked around and saw everyone else mumbling words. Yes, mumbling, and I'm sure the words meant absolutely nothing to any of them. A prayer was a prayer, and you opened the meeting with it.

Except in token instances, most people can take or leave church these days. It has no real importance in our lives. It is a mumbling of words. If you are lucky enough to get an interesting minister who reaches you in human terms then the response is greater (but you can do that outside of church). All in all, it is a mumbling cause.

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