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TOWARD UNBRIBABLE MAN

THE investigation of the nature of man is not a thing that should be neglected, but neither should it be overdone. It is not, that is, a subject that is made easy by doing a lot of work on it. Some kind of "becoming" is involved, and because this process of growth—what else can we call it?—sometimes gives off intellectual insights, somewhat as a flower gives off perfume, we tend to suppose that self-knowledge may have intellectual definition. Then, of course, there is a fury to write books about the self, these days.

Certain intellectual expressions are nonetheless useful. In *Man and Crisis* (Norton, 1958), Ortega y Gasset attempts the specifications of a science of history. Our ideas of science, he points out, come pre-eminently from physics. Yet to copy physics in the design of a science of history would be fatally misleading. For example, while exactitude is a chief virtue of physics—

> The quality of exactness lies not so much in the thinking of the physicist as in the object thought about—the physical phenomenon. So it is a *quid pro quo* to lament the lack of capacity for exactness which will always plague history. The truly lamentable thing would be the exact opposite. If history, which is the science of human lives, were or could be exact it would mean that men were flints, stones, physiochemical bodies, and nothing else. But then one would have neither history nor physics; for stones, more fortunate, if you like, than men, do not have to create science in order to be what they are, namely stones.

Ortega now sets the problem in proper terms, and takes a first step toward solving it. He continues:

> On the other hand man is a most strange entity, who, in order to be what he is, needs first to find out what he is; needs, whether he will or no, to ask himself what are the things around him and what, there in the midst of them, is he. For it is this which really differentiates man from a stone, and not that man has understanding while a stone lacks it. We can imagine a very intelligent stone; but as the inner being of the stone is given it already made, once and for all, and it is required to make no decision on the subject, it has no need, in order to go on being a stone, to pose and pose again the problem of the self, asking itself, "What must I do now?" or, which is the same thing, "What must I be?" Tossed in the air, without need to ask itself anything, and therefore without having to exercise its understanding, the stone will fall toward the center of the earth. Its intelligence, even if existent, forms no part of its being, does not intervene in it, but would be an extrinsic and superfluous addition.
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> The essence of man, on the other hand, lies in the fact that he has no choice but to force himself to know, to build a science, good or bad, in order to resolve the problem of his own being and toward this end the problem of what are the things among which he must inexorably have that being. This—that he needs to know, that whether he likes it or not, he needs to work to the best of his intellectual means—is undoubtedly what constitutes the human condition.

How, then, would history instruct us, if we could indeed have an authentic science of the history of man? It would give us, let us say, as full an account as possible of the efforts of human beings to know themselves. And this, we soon see, would be largely composed of reports on both the brave attempts and the failures of the past, since getting self-knowledge, by even the most optimistic estimates, is not a finished undertaking, but a work in progress.

Can we generalize about these "attempts" and "failures"? This will be difficult, since, in the nature of the case, there can be no common agreement on what constitutes "success." We may be able to obtain a certain ritual consensus concerning human greatness, or self-fulfillment, and we have a large number of adjectives that suitably apply to the abstract ideal of human development, along with symbolic personages who are held to have made the grade, but concrete terms of finality elude us on this question. There

is an enormous difference, as Gilbert Ryle has pointed out, between having a vocabulary of superlatives for describing a skillful act of being, and performing the act.

Perhaps we can say that some men have more self-knowledge than others. But if we can say this, we must add that its communication is obscure. We know that they have this knowledge only by inference from the excellence of their lives, which is baffling and unapproachable. It is there, but we do not know how it is made. Some years ago, at an Asilomar Mental Health Conference, Lewis Hill, a principal founder of the listener-supported radio station, KPFA, put this aspect of the problem very well:

> You will remember Ralph Waldo Emerson, I hope, as a man of exceedingly noble character. The whole laborious and inspired history of the medieval Church, the Protestant movement, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation and, lastly, of New England Calvinism, went into the shaping of Emerson's intellect and moral intuition. There has seldom been a more personally admirable man. Possessed of this heritage in a very immediate sense, with only a recent overlay of Unitarian skepticism, Emerson found that a moral man with any interest in the matter could discern the sources of right-thinking and right-feeling directly in his own inner experience, without any slavish dependence upon some external dogma, whether of church or society. This being so, it followed that the faculty of perceiving a divine intention, and the divine intention itself, were one and the same: in other words, divinity was entirely immanent in each person and thing sufficient to itself. The certitude of an inner voice, the Oversoul, even if it contradicted itself, was the infallible basis of a moral perception and religious rectitude.
>
> In the philosophy erected out of these notions, Emerson omitted any account of how one comes to be an Emerson.

Well, whatever you may think of Emerson's pantheistic philosophy, and however strident the objection offered that transcendental reveries and Emerson's soul-inviting seem far beyond the capabilities of "the masses," it is still to the point to inquire "how one comes to be an Emerson." Who, then, has shared Emerson's view "that a moral man with any interest in the matter could discern the sources of right-thinking and right-feeling directly in his own inner experience, without any slavish dependence upon some external dogma, whether of church or society"?

We have not far to look. These are the specifications of a Socrates. And in Socrates we have the advantage of a man who not only agreed with Emerson on crucial issues concerning the nature of man, but also spent his life in learning how to *teach* in harmony with the promise and potentiality of that nature. If we inspect both the counsel and example of Socrates, we see that he supplies what is left out of the Emersonian prescription (as provided by Lewis Hill). For Socrates shows clearly that it is not enough to hearken to the inner monitor. While the god—*dæmon*, or Oversoul—may indeed be the source of the instruction or wisdom that is to be found out, there must also be some means of distinguishing between the authentic recollections of the soul and those rival deliveries which have another origin—the clotted clichés of the poets, or what Bacon in another day called the Idols of the Tribe. The tool Socrates employed for this purpose was his *questioning.* As Leonard Nelson says in his essay, "The Socratic Method":

> . . . by his [Socrates'] questioning he leads his pupils to confess their ignorance and thus cuts through the roots of their dogmatism. This result, which indeed cannot be *forced* in any other way, discloses the significance of the dialogue as an instrument of instruction. The lecture, too, can stimulate spontaneous thinking, particularly in more mature students; but no matter what allure such stimulus may possess, it is not irresistible. Only persistent pressure to speak one's mind, to meet every counter question, and to state the reasons for every assertion transforms the power of that allure into an irresistible compulsion. This art of *forcing* minds to *freedom* constitutes the first secret of the Socratic method.

What may soon occur to anyone who reflects on the possibilities of this method is the extreme purity of the Socratic enterprise. And "purity," for the likes of ourselves, too soon results in an

intellectual kind of nakedness. Persistent questioning strips us of our tattered illusions long before we have the strength to stand alone. Socrates (and/or Plato) apparently understood this well, since his questioning was cunningly embodied in an art of conversation in which the most searching questions were separated by decent intervals. He used props, scenery, and plenty of homely illustrations. For example, in telling Theætetus what he was trying to do in his discussions with the youth of Athens, he compared himself with a midwife. The passage is not a long one. It begins with a sly intimation that he, Socrates, has in common with midwives their dubious respectability, since they are secretly match-makers, and he likewise encourages an intellectual fertility outside conventional unions of the day. But what Socrates is really interested in, in this comparison, is to show the *difference* between himself and the midwives. As he says:

> *Socrates:* Such are the midwives, whose task is a very important one, but not so important as mine; for women do not bring into the world at one time real children, and at another time counterfeits which are with difficulty distinguished from them; if they did, then the discernment of the true and false birth would be the crowning achievement of the art of midwifery—you would think so?
>
> *Theætetus:* Indeed I should.
>
> *Socrates:* Well, my art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs, but differs in that I attend men and not women, and I look after their souls when they are in labor, and not after their bodies; and the triumph of my art is in thoroughly examining whether the thought which the mind of the young man is bringing to birth, is a false idol or a noble and true spirit.

Continuing the analogy, Socrates shows that he is no indoctrinator:

> And like the midwives, I am barren, and the reproach which is often made against me, that I ask questions of others and have not the wit to answer them myself, is very just, the reason is, that the god compels me to be a midwife, but forbids me to bring forth.

And now Socrates vindicates the Oracle, for in the following account of his role he shows that high respect for the souls of others which prevents him from "directing" their thought:

> And therefore I am not myself at all wise, nor have I anything to show which is the invention or birth of my own soul, but those who converse with me profit. Some of them appear dull enough at first, but afterwards, as our acquaintance ripens if the god is gracious to them, they all make astonishing progress; and this is the opinion of others as well as their own.

Now comes the philosopher's sad complaint, or rather candid estimate of his "results":

> It is quite clear that they had never learned anything from me; the many fine discoveries to which they cling are of their own making. But to me and the god they owe their delivery. And the proof of my records is, that many of them in their ignorance, either in their self-conceit despising me, or falling under the influence of others, have gone away too soon; and have not only lost the children of whom I had previously delivered them by an ill bringing up, but have stifled whatever else they had in them by evil communications, being fonder of lies and shams than of the truth; and they have at last ended by seeing themselves, as others see them, to be great fools. Dire are the pangs which my art is able to arouse and to allay in those who consort with me, just like the pangs of women in childbirth; night and day they are full of perplexity and travail which is even worse than that of the women.

Then, after explaining that some men are by no means ready for the confrontation which is Socrates' sole interest—and that these he sends to other teachers, to learn what they can—he offers to Theætetus a moving invitation:

> I tell you this long story, friend Theætetus, because I suspect, as indeed you seem to think yourself, that you are in labor—great with some conception. Come then to me, who am a midwife's son and myself a midwife, and try to answer the questions which I will ask you. And if I abstract and expose your first-born, because I discover upon inspection that the conception which you have formed is a vain shadow, do not quarrel with me on that account, as the manner of women is when their first children are taken from them. For I have actually known some who were ready to bite me when I deprived them of a darling folly they did not perceive

> that I acted from good will, not knowing that no god is the enemy of man—that was not within the range of their ideas; neither am I their enemy in all this, but it would be wrong in me to admit falsehood, or to stifle the truth.
>
> Once more, then, Theaetetus, I repeat my old question, "What is knowledge?" and do not say that you cannot tell; but quit yourself like a man, and by the help of God you will be able to tell.

We began this inquiry with a quotation from Ortega. The question, for Ortega, was how to describe the necessities of a science of history. As he points out, the subject-matter of history is the lives of men, so that there can be no good history without an initial understanding of the nature of man. And man, he then says, is a being who questions himself, who asks about himself and what he must do because of what he is. With this account of the human being, Ortega shows the inadequacy of Ranke's view of the work of history: "to find out how things actually happened." The point is that what "happens" is inextricably dependent upon the questions men ask about themselves, and the questions alter in form from epoch to epoch; that is, there are times when men imagine that they have very nearly adequate answers to these questions, and other times when, in a kind of climax of cultural disillusionment, they discover that the answers which they have relied upon are drastically wrong. It is these successions and interrelations of faith and doubt which are for Ortega the very substance of history.

But since self-questioning is at the root of it all, Ortega finds it extremely important to insist upon the *questioning* character of the human being, before any other attribute. His argument runs:

> . . . to define man by saying that he is an intelligent, a rational animal, an animal which knows, *homo sapiens*, is dangerous because, however carefully we use those words, we note that if we ask ourselves "Is any man, even the greatest genius that ever existed, truly and in the fullest meaning of the word intelligent? Does he really understand with the required fullness of intelligence, does he really know anything with a complete and unshakable knowing?"—if we ask ourselves this, we note very quickly that the matter is highly dubious and problematical. . . . Man cannot be defined by listing the talents or the skills on which he counts unless at the same time it is said that those talents, those skills, achieve what their names indicate, and that therefore they are adequate to the frightening task into which, whether he likes it or not, man finds himself thrust. . . .

"Intelligence," in other words, despite the term's grandiose sound, signifies an open-ended relativity. It is what we have in order to cope with a destiny which has in it only the finality of an eternal process:

> Man, every man, must at every moment be deciding for the next moment what he is going to do, what he is going to be. This decision only he can make; it is not transferable; no one can substitute for me in the task of deciding for myself, in deciding on my life. When I put myself in another's hands it is I who have decided and who go on deciding that he will direct me; thus I do not transfer the decision itself, but merely its mechanism. In place of deriving the norm of my conduct out of that mechanism which is my own intelligence, I take advantage of the mechanism of another's intelligence. . . . Man cannot take a single step without anticipating more or less clearly his entire future, what he is going to be; that is what he has decided to be throughout his life. But this means that man, who is always obliged to do something in the circumstances that surround him, has in deciding what he is going to do no other course than to pose to himself the problem of his own individual being.

Thus, while intelligence is his crucial tool, man's *nature* lies in making decisions.

So, once again, the clarity of Ortega's analysis brings us up against the discouragements of pure thought and our own nakedness. Analysis, unlike life, leads to abstraction, and abstraction, for all its brilliance, seems to shine on some other world than our own. Yet the dilemma is nothing new. Both philosophers and mystics, when pressed to communicate their secrets, invite us to similar heights of abstraction—whether it be Spencer's absolute, Hegel's *Absoluter Geist*, or Plotinus' "alone with the Alone." And this may be no more

than an effect of insisting that our "intelligence" do more than it is able to do. For words always squeeze the substance out of their meaning when forced to deal with wordless dimensions.

The project remains. Its character does not change because we turn away from Socrates and seek easier, more "definitive" instruction from Prodicus or some other sophist, or argue with Spencer for his tough conservatism, or with Hegel for the all-too-parochial applications of his metaphysics. What did we expect of these men: *Solutions?*

Fortunately, we may apply to other helpers, men more patient with our laggard questioning. If we grow justly suspicious of system-builders who succumbed to the temptation—for men of intellect, a very great temptation—to do our thinking for us, and now give them the reputation of betrayers who connived in the "management" of men; if we decide that there is nothing left for us to do but muddle through, feeling sorry for ourselves, skirting as well as we can those avenues which, even if they lead to wisdom, bring us first to desperation—if this is our decision, there remains at least the casual instruction of the arts. For the arts—if, agreeable to Tolstoy, they have at root a philosophic inspiration—give a questioning focus to the entire panoply of life. Unlike metaphysics, the arts adorn their questions with familiar sensuous imagery. The spaces between the climaxes are filled in, somewhat as life fills them in. You can be momentarily awed, invaded by a secret symmetry, then go away with a small deposit of unspoken meaning or value. Or you can stay and become richer still by brooding over the artist's work. The artist does not put you in a corner, as might Socrates. He has exclamations, not questions, even though the questions are nonetheless there.

Last week's Review quoted briefly from Lionel Trilling's book, *The Opposing Self.* There is something of the Socratic mission in Mr. Trilling's writing, yet gentled, made less threatening, by his art. We quote from him again, starting with the same passage, but giving it in more expanded form, since only the full passage bears the full impact of what is conveyed:

> Along with other of the English romantic poets, Keats is often said to have lacked an adequate awareness of evil and to have failed to see it as a condition of life and a problem of thought. I have indicated my belief that the contrary of this is true, that the problem of evil lies at the very heart of Keats's thought. But for Keats the awareness of evil exists side by side with a very strong sense of personal identity and is for that reason the less immediately apparent. To some contemporary readers it will seem for the same reason the less intense. In the same way it may seem to a contemporary reader that, if we compare Shakespeare and Kafka, leaving aside the degree of genius each has, and considering both only as expositors of man's suffering and cosmic alienation, it is Kafka who makes the more intense and complete exposition. And indeed the judgment may be correct, exactly because for Kafka the sense of evil is not contradicted by the sense of personal identity. Shakespeare's world, quite as much as Kafka's, is that prison cell which Pascal says the world is, from which daily the inmates are led forth to die; Shakespeare no less than Kafka forces upon us the cruel irrationality of the conditions of human life, the tale told by an idiot, the puerile gods who torture us not for punishment but for sport; and no less than Kafka, Shakespeare is revolted by the fetor of the prison of this world, nothing is more characteristic of him than his imagery of disgust. But in Shakespeare's cell the company is so much better than in Kafka's, the captains and kings and lovers and clowns of Shakespeare are alive and complete before they die. In Kafka, long before the sentence is executed, even long before the malign legal process is ever instituted, something terrible has been done to the accused. We all know what that is—he has been stripped of all that is becoming to a man except his abstract humanity, which, like his skeleton, is never quite becoming to a man. He is without parents home, wife, child, commitment, or appetite; he has no connection with power, beauty, love, wit, courage, loyalty, or fame, and the pride that may be taken in these. So that we say that Kafka's knowledge of evil exists without the contradictory knowledge of the self in its health and validity, that Shakespeare's knowledge of evil exists with that contradiction in its fullest possible force. (It would, of course, be less than accurate and fair not to remark of Kafka that he had a very intense knowledge

> of the self through its negation, that his great and terrible point is exactly the horror of the loss of the Shakespearean knowledge of the self.) It is therefore not hard to understand the virtually religious reverence in which Shakespeare began to be held in the nineteenth century, for when religion seemed no longer able to represent the actualities of life, it was likely to be Shakespeare who, to a thoughtful man, most fully confronted the truth of life's complex horror, while yet conveying the stubborn sense that life was partly blessed, not wholly cursed.

Let us end with a question and a possible answer. How does the world of Shakespeare—his theatre of life—differ from ours? Well, it cannot be argued that the famous orders of the Elizabethan world-view have entirely disappeared. The gods of the cosmic order still exist, but we have given them other names. The State has grown at the expense of both cosmos and man, and assumed control of many of their potencies. Yet the individual, if the truth be known, is still as mysterious as ever, both to himself and to all the other selves.

Yet the artist, for all his intensity, feels no obligation to *drive* at us in the fashion of Socrates. He is willing to show us his findings, and we must be willing to look.

It is different with the educator. Those who come to him are presumed to be ready to submit themselves to the ordeal of search. And he, unlike instructors in science and the mechanical arts, has no engaging bribes to offer those who come. He has only an oblique appeal—that there is really nothing else important or becoming for a becoming man to do.

REVIEW
MAPS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY?

A CERTAIN wariness will probably be aroused in the reader whose first acquaintance with the work of Roberto Assagioli comes in the form of his recent book, *Psychosynthesis: A Manual of Principles and Techniques* (New York: Hobbs, Dorman, 1965, $7.50). In this day of weakening systems and dissolving identities, who can be so bold as to say he knows how peoples' *psyches* are put back together again—how they get "synthesized"? Have we here something that is more cult than either science or therapeutic art? (It is of course the patient's job, with help, to reconstruct himself—yet the title is something of a hurdle.) Then, after reading a bit in the volume, and being persuaded, in sequence, of the author's seriousness, his scientific background, his warm and compassionate nature, and his thorough knowledge of his field, one may continue with greater acceptance, but still wonder about the "completeness" of the theoretical approach. There is a neat comprehensiveness about this presentation that seems far in advance of the age. How can one be sure about all this knowledge of psycho-dynamics, supplied with symmetrical diagrams and explanatory notes? The book is not, however, lacking in a tough-minded sagacity that seems clearly based on experience.

Now the trouble with completeness is its tendency to achieve a closed system. It is the fault of the tract which, instead of limiting its application to the times, seems ready to encompass or disclose the possibilities of all times. Hence we question its validity for any time. However, what this criticism overlooks is the fact that any epoch of history—simply because it can be called an "epoch"—has in it certain characterizing forms, typical problems, and corresponding fulfillments, and that these, taken together, exhibit a kind of "completeness." A system of understanding, or of "therapy," therefore, which matches up with these qualities, yet is not in any important respect a *closed* system, may have its own legitimate appearance of completeness, and this may be a virtue rather than a presumption or a defect. In all, then, we find in Dr. Assagioli's work a sort of Old World kindliness suffused throughout his use of the resources of modern psychotherapy, and suspect that his own wholeness contributes factors of completion which no theory can sufficiently delineate. The incommensurables are there, and doubtless operate as they do in all good theories which dare not refer to them, despite the fact that in this book they are named with a benign candor that seems quite undisturbed by the darkness of which others remain discouragingly aware.

The lay reader has little trouble understanding Dr. Assagioli's prose, which shares in the virtue belonging to many contemporary humanistic psychologists: they write for human beings, not for specialists. The only thing that some readers may find a little dismaying is the intrepid and frequent use of terms like "Will" and "Self" and "Spiritual"—representing a content with which the rest of us are by no means so familiar. This leads to a particular complaint. In his Introduction, after having identified his leading ideas by distinguishing them in certain respects from the assumptions of Existential psychology, the author writes:

> May I emphasize the fact that the elements and functions, coming from the superconscious, such as æsthetic, ethical religious experiences, intuition, inspiration, states of mystical consciousness, are *factual*, are real in the pragmatic sense (*wirklich*, to use the significant German word), because they are *effective* (*wirkend*), producing changes both in the inner and the outer world. Therefore they are amenable to observation and experiment, through the use of the scientific method in ways suited to their nature, also they can be influenced and utilized through psycho-spiritual techniques.
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> At this point the question may arise as to the relationship between this conception of the human being on the one hand and religion and metaphysics on the other. The answer is that psychosynthesis does not attempt in any way to appropriate to itself the fields of religion and philosophy. It is a scientific conception, and as such it is neutral toward the various religious forms and the various philosophical doctrines, excepting only those which are materialistic and therefore deny the existence of spiritual realities. Psychosynthesis does not aim nor attempt to give a metaphysical nor a theological explanation of the great Mystery—it leads to the door, but stops there.

This may be as Dr. Assagioli sees it, but to our way of thinking he crossed that threshold long before he sat down to write this first book, and now apparently speaks to us from one of the upper storeys. No one who discourses on psycho-spiritual *techniques* can claim to be without a metaphysic. The term itself is not a metaphysical postulate, but an application, almost a routine conclusion, from a metaphysical postulate long since adopted. Indeed, to speak of spiritual techniques may be to make the reader feel that he has been led blindfold into some exotic place of worship where he will be exposed to pious procedures he cannot possibly accept. The word "spiritual" palpitates with metaphysical assumption and should be set free from all "techniques." A technique is a manipulative skill, while spiritual—if we may be arbitrary in this case—has to do with direct acts of consciousness, unmediated by tendencies in its coarser coverings which can be indoctrinated with habits and taught various "skills."

In fairness, however, we should let the author define his own terms. Concerning this expression, Dr. Assagioli says:

> We are using the word "spiritual" in its broader connotation which includes, therefore, not only the specific religious experience, but all the states of awareness, all the functions and activities which have as common denominator the possessing of *values* higher than the average, values such as the ethical, the esthetic, the heroic, the humanitarian, and the altruistic. We include under the general heading of "spiritual development" then, all experiences connected with awareness of the contents of the super-conscious, which may or may not include the experience of the Self. It should be pointed out that the reaching up into the realm of the superconscious and its exploration, while approaching the consciousness of the Self, may sometimes even constitute an obstacle to full Self-realization, to the reaching of the summit where the personal-I awareness blends into awareness of the spiritual Self. One can become so fascinated by the wonders of the superconscious realm, so absorbed in it, so identified with some of its special aspects or manifestations as to lose or paralyze the urge to reach the summit of Self-realization.

Dr. Assagioli continues:

> In the following analysis of the vicissitudes and incidents which occur during the process of spiritual development, we shall consider both the successive stages of self-actualization and the achievement of full Self-realization.

It isn't that we're antagonistically *skeptical* of all this—it just sounds a little easy, too matter-of-factly clear, as if the good Doctor has maps he's reading off to us, concerning mysteries which pressed Patanjali into extreme abstraction, obliged Plato to resort to myth, and inspired others to clouds of unknowing and various ingenious metaphors of paradox.

Yet one ought not to complain of a metaphysical stance so deeply rooted in healing operations that it seems to need no questions—at least no practical ones. And the company of those helped and inspired by Dr. Assagioli seems large enough to suggest that his intuitive affirmations and resulting topography of the psyche find many answering chords. The working truths of a man in action—a man busy, with some success, in helping others to be free—have the integrity of their use, and this use is a role somewhat different from the part played by such truths in a critical history of ideas.

This seems a place to exhibit a prejudice which more than one lay student of the work of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts have hoped will one day turn into a prophecy. It is that, on broad lines, psychotherapy ought to convert itself into Socratic dialogue, and then lose itself in the enriched culture of an Educational Society, grown into a general temper which has no need of either rank or specialty—the undertaking of amateurs all. The reformation begun by Luther—"Every man his own priest"—will not be completed until we make its latter-day application—"Every man his own analyst." The highest compliment we can think of to pay the fraternity of Humanistic therapists—Dr. Assagioli not the least—is that they seem to be pushing in this direction.

COMMENTARY
WHEN ABSTRACTIONS THREATEN

NOT all the distrusters of abstractions are as skillful in explaining themselves as George Orwell. Finding it difficult to meet the arguments of righteous ideologists, they become stubborn advocates of moralistic formulas of their own.

Their motives, of course, are mixed. But being pressed to constant self-defense, they have little incentive to self-examination. Self-examination in the midst of struggle is reserved for the pure in heart, and these are few on any "side."

A question seldom asked is whether the intellectuals have any responsibility at all for the production of "anti-intellectuals." It is simply assumed that men who seem to take pride in their ignorance do this for no better reason than a fear that the tools of understanding will weaken their case. Facile analysis will make their self-interest seem mean and contemptible. So they champion an "ethic" which keeps basic problems out of sight.

When such confrontations become acute, good men sometimes decide that they must practice "tolerance"—which amounts to making a *mystique* out of patience with the moral shortcomings of others. More than this is required. Such tolerance is often only self-righteousness raised to a higher power. A spontaneous anger may have more integrity in it.

Devotees of abstractions have as much need of self-examination as their opponents. If abstractions alone could save the world and make all things new, Shakespeare could not be counted a great artist and Kafka would be known as the chronicler of the means to Salvation.

The social question turns on the discovery—not yet made in terms of common acceptability—of how to test abstractions. Only a handful of Gandhians have been willing to acknowledge this fact, and it is difficult for them to gain attention. They have manifest imperfections. Their methods are slow. They lack the wrath men need in order to *act.* Their principles require both too much and too little.

Yet in the end it seems evident that they take account of the same realities which Orwell was obliged to face because of his tough-minded moral empiricism. What lies behind Mr. Trilling's curious sentence: "The very stupidity of things has something human about it, something meliorative, something even liberating"? No Indian metaphysic here, only a problem which righteous ideologists refuse to inspect.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
UNCHANGING KERNELS OF TRUTH

IN *Parents' Magazine* for last January, Margaret Mead discusses the problem of bringing up children in a changing world. Its most serious aspect, it may be, lies in the tendency of parents to swing with the times, to imagine that the latest fashion in child-rearing is somehow the final answer. Dr. Mead illustrates:

> In the recent past, old-fashioned ideas of obedience were discarded by many parents in the attempt to do right by their children, and to provide them with opportunities the parents had lacked. Ours has been, in great part, a society of immigrants, with each generation of newcomers wanting their children to belong truly to the new country. Because the parents lacked confidence in the suitability of their old-world methods of discipline, the youngsters were allowed to flout their parents' values. After a while, the flouting, itself, became a kind of virtue. Children were encouraged to be different from their parents. . . . So a pendulum swing developed in our methods of child-rearing. But simply swinging from strict disciplinarian practices, say, to overpermissiveness and then back again, gets us nowhere, and sometimes leads to quite absurd results. For example, some families rejected the old undemocratic idea that "children should be seen and not heard," and went to the equally undemocratic idea of putting children's comfort above all else, with the result that their youngsters became even more insensitive to their elders' needs than their elders once were to theirs.

What may be hard to see is that these changes which sweep over a society—which are embraced as much from the desire to be "modern" and up-to-date as from any actual understanding—often exhibit on their surface only the froth, the sloganized with-it-ism of a movement which, in its beginnings, grew from profound insight into a balance needed by the times. There is just no way in which human relations, or parent-child relations, can succeed without continued thought. A mechanical correction of past excesses in relation to children ignores the human factor just as much as the great ideological swings of history which insist upon revolutionary changes in the "system." Reduced to essentials, it is as Margaret Mead says:

> We cannot teach what we don't understand. How then can we solve this paradox? By selecting out of our traditions and practices those which are appropriate, those which, enclosing an unchanging kernel of truth, are capable of being expressed in different ways.

Nothing is more fundamental, nor, at the same time, more difficult, than the application of this counsel. The child—and we all begin as children—is by nature a being of trust. The trust of the child in his parents, in his community, and in the wide and wonderful world has a natural logic which we violate only at extreme peril. And yet, at some point, as we grow up, we must learn from experience that trust can be betrayed. The familiar forms of trust, we see as we grow older, are often used for slick deceptions. The labels often lie. Our friends are sometimes enemies. Inevitably, criticism and questioning must begin. Yet this critical inquiry must start without disturbing, too much or too soon, the delicate organism of the child's environment, suffused with trust.

How easily men forget this in their wrath against exploiters, in their mindless rebellion against deep indignity, and in their cynical contempt! Such men have nothing to say to their children. A society which permits its social cataclysms to destroy the trust of children before they are ready to ask and answer questions for themselves invites the chaos wrought by psyches deeply flawed with precocious knowledge of evil, a generation mutilated from careless indifference to the defenselessness of the young.

How do these terrible things come about? The children are not to blame. The angers which blind men to the needs of their children are generated in a matrix of delay and compromise. The comfortable people of the world did not ask questions when they should have. And so, from irresponsibility, from token solutions which only humiliate, grow angry passions which have no rational resolution save from the measureless compassion of a Gandhi. We know that the high heroisms of non-violence are an extreme from which even good men shrink, since

they, for all their goodness, have not been able to see the lateness of the hour. Yet the "extreme" measure, as demagogues with another meaning sometimes claim, may be the only remedy for what has become an extreme situation.

"We cannot teach what we don't understand." At root it is a question of religion. It is in childhood that the habits of trust beyond or before the need of questioning are shaped. So, also, it is in childhood that seeds of complacency are planted, and lovingly nourished with the egotisms of the group. Here is the original sectarianism, bed of the righteousness which blinds, the salvation which excludes, the judgment which condemns, and, eventually, of the fear which kills.

We know that children must trust. What is more difficult to recognize is that, in order to preserve the conditions of trust, grown men must question. A trust which is not helped to mature into questioning is a trust turned into folly. There is a religion of trust for children, but a questioning religion for growing up. People who take their educational know-how from the prevailing fashion, who quiet their insecurities with the "latest thing," know no religion for growing up. What they do provide, by all these barely hidden vulnerabilities, is a vast market for the merchants of shallow reassurance and commercial serenity. Taken as a whole, it amounts to an elaborately performed funeral service for the still-birth of social and moral man.

But this is too dark a picture. In the midst of all this modernity and confidence-gaming, the "unchanging kernels of truth" spoken of by Dr. Mead keep on finding patches of fertile soil. They provide the enduring decencies, the sometimes seemingly irrational resistances to what people feel to be wrong. Sometimes the kernels root in poor soil and grow up into useful half-truths—when whole truths remain too much for us. Sometimes, in individual cases, they turn clichés and platitudes back into their original meanings, quietly maintaining the depth-dimensions of life.

When the times are topsy-turvy, truths find it difficult to survive, and often appear in mixed-up situations, fighting their way against hard doctrines and tough gospels. It is then that systematic analysis becomes deceptive and men feel compromised when they agree with *anybody* who voices a conventional claim. Sometimes a warm heart makes a man the enemy of abstraction. For illustration of this kind of courage of mind, there was George Orwell, surely a dedicated man, who came to recognize middle-class stolidity as a useful brake against fanaticism. In *The Opposing Self* (Viking, Compass), Lionel Trilling remarks:

> Orwell, it may be said, came to respect the old bourgeois virtues because they were stupid—that is, because they resisted the power of abstract ideas. And he came to love things, material possessions, for the same reason. He did not in the least become what is called "anti-intellectual"—this was simply not in the range of possibility for him—but he began to fear that the commitment to abstract ideas could be far more maleficent than the commitment to the gross materiality of property had ever been. The very stupidity of things has something human about it, something meliorative, something even liberating. Together with the stupidity of the old unthinking virtues it stands against the ultimate and absolute power which the unconditioned idea can develop. The essential point of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is just this, the danger of the ultimate and absolute power which mind can develop when it frees itself from conditions, from the bondage of things and history.

No doubt Orwell returned to "the old bourgeois virtues" with diffidence or difficulty, and not because they were bourgeois—that was the difficulty—but because they remained virtues, qualities which human beings cannot do without. And this "stupidity" of things—well, it has the admirable function of decentralizing error and slowing down the wild righteousness of men who have become drunk on a principle which admits no accountability.

All this may seem somewhat distant from the needs of children, but it is very close to ourselves.

FRONTIERS

The Evil Far and Near

THE international spy novel comes very close to being the only literary embodiment we have of the modern theory of evil. This kind of reading—which takes the place, one supposes, of the more romantic Dr. Fu Manchu episodes of a generation ago—is designed to make it absolutely impossible for the reader to feel any sympathy for the mechanistically resourceful, utterly brutal, and always defeated "enemy." It is not of course a "theory" of evil, but a substitute for a theory, since any theory worth considering requires thought which moves toward explanation, and a novel involving this obligation for the reader would not be "light" at all.

This is not a heavy-handed complaint against light literature, which surely has a place. But light literature should deal with light matters. Here we have a literature which "plays" with the unsolved issues of good and evil, as though they no longer mattered. It is the lethal "toy" of the grownup generation.

What, actually, are the qualifications for absolute evil? One wonders, having raised this question, about the inhuman horror of capital punishment. Here is a man condemned to die. If there is to be any dignity connected with his death, it must be contributed entirely by the victim. From the moment sentence is passed he stands apart from the rest of mankind, marked by the public consensus as having in him nothing worth preserving. He is treated as a clot of muscle and bone in whom no spark of the human essence now exists. The courts have decided this, and the courts are informed by law with the power to judge. So the wheels of justice turn, and this quivering thing which has been wholly denied by us all is presently made to relax forever its spasmodic motions by a clever device designed for the purpose. Toward the end it may cry, plead, or jeer and curse, but no one is empowered to hear; indeed, it is foolish to give attention to such sounds, which by high authority have been rendered meaningless and without effect.

Could there be an evil worse than this? . . . But what makes the evil of capital punishment so great? Surely it is not death—since all men die—but the deliberate judgment as completely evil of any human being. What sort of human being? A poor sort, perhaps, as men go in our society; yet poorer ones, we are told by all who study the subject, walk the streets and pursue their ends without interference. It is only a kind of judicial accident, a coincidence made possible by the times, which lets the coarse net of criminal law conjoin with the victim's lack of skill in the performance of unpunishable offenses, and so produce an instance of the " justice" we know how to make.

Yet there are greater evils. There are systems of life and government, we are told, that hate the smallest ethical impulse, that are contemptuous of any notion of the good which has not already had crude political definition, which seek out even latent expression of individuality with the same single-minded purpose with which a housewife pursues ants and other insect pests, armed with Black Flag.

Where did this monstrous intrusion upon our happy lives come from? We do not know; it is bad enough that we must endure its presence, without being obliged to *account* for it! How much can you ask of right-thinking people? Here is an enemy which raises evil to its highest power, beyond all rational limit: For this, in the nature of things, it is not possible to give an explanation.

Since it is a condition of life that we never encounter either good or evil in absolute forms, but only in the dilutions of finite human nature, we have to be extremely careful in our dealings with other men. The weak ones, the potential sinners who easily become betrayers, are those who try to "understand" what cannot possibly be understood. In his recent book, *Gandhi on Non-Violence* (New Directions), Thomas Merton has worked

out the procedures for dealing with absolute evil through its misguided representatives:

> . . . one simplifies the situation by assuming that the evil to be overcome is clear-cut, definite, and irreversible. Hence there remains but one thing: to eliminate it. Any dialogue with the sinner, any question of the irreversibility of his act, only means faltering and failure. Failure to eliminate evil is itself a defeat. Anything that even remotely risks such defeat is in itself capitulation to evil. The irreversibility of evil then reaches out to contaminate *even the tolerant thought* of the hesitant crusader who, momentarily, doubts the total evil of the enemy he is about to eliminate.
>
> Such tolerance is already complicity and guilt, and must be eliminated in its turn. As soon as it is detected it becomes irreversible.
>
> Fortitude, then, equals fanaticism. It grows with unreason. Reasoning itself is by its very nature tinged with betrayal.
>
> Conscience does indeed make cowards. It makes Judases. Conscience must be eliminated.

The logic of this position is obvious enough. The only weapon strong enough to deal with absolute evil is the purity of heart of men penetrated by absolute good. For such men, who naturally ally themselves with one another, there can be only one postulate—

> that *there should never be any sin.* That therefore what happened either was not a sin ("Dallas has no sins," as we all were quasi-officially informed at the end of 1963) or else it has been immediately wiped out (by a lynch mob, or a Jack Ruby). Since sin is what never should be, then it must never be, therefore it *will never be.*

One sees at once why the international spy is permitted to be so tough. No chivalry is needed here, not even faint respect for one's opponent. No compassion for the sinner, who is a minion of darkness. At last the culture of the masses has found its gospel. Soul-searching is no longer required. Even light reading embodies the final secret of moral excellence. Armageddon has arrived, and diplomacy is at last relieved of torturing decisions, as any fool can see.