

## DEVOTION TO THE HUMAN BEING

ONCE in a great while the world is noticeably improved by the presence of a man who is able to frame with rational description some profound insight—some basic and necessary truth—which, until then, had either been unknown or only vaguely felt. After this man has had his say, that truth begins to become inescapable—or, as we say, "objective." The man with this ability is "a man of the hour." He does not, of course, give this truth a wholly unmistakable meaning; all he can do, by means of his rational frame, is to make its implications impossible to ignore. Any important truth requires time for its assimilation; men have to wrestle with it. They must find a way to unite some version of its meaning with their understanding and theories about themselves and the world.

Several such insights crucial to human progress were so well framed during the eighteenth century that they became history-making conceptions. These had to do with political freedom and the kind of society which gives it a firm foundation. They are represented by the once revolutionary ideas of Liberty, Equality, and Justice, which have been, for a century or more, no longer the objects but the starting-points of contention. There is hardly any difference of opinion, today, about the desirability of these ideals; the argument comes from opposing views on how to achieve them or from differing explanations as to why they have been so imperfectly realized. The problem is now to make the argument about the means to freedom proceed with clarity and promise. This is what Justice Douglas has in mind when he says:

Ideas make men free; the real un-American is he who suppresses them. Yet whatever the Constitution says, whatever the judges rule, are not important if our communities do not honor free expression. . . . Community attitudes as well as *the law* must be shaped so that they become instruments which encourage, not the suppression, but the release of talents and energies in the Dialogue.

So the question arises: What shapes "community attitudes"? How do you change them? What is missing in our understanding of the dynamics of human behavior, that people who claim they are "free" can be so easily led into actions which attack freedom at its roots?

Why do men kill the thing they love? It is not enough, nor is it accurate, to say they are hypocrites, that they do not really want freedom. They *do* want it, but they seem not to understand it. No more do the puzzled legislators whose best projects often fail from public apathy or indifference. While a moralist can always give you an answer to such questions, what he says usually adds up to no more than a confession of social defeat. An answer that we can use must be an answer which does not explain our failures by denying the possibility of reaching the ideal.

No doubt Justice Douglas puts his finger on the main difficulty when he says that the need is for "a vision broad enough to permit discourse on a universal plane; only then will we be able to communicate with a multi-ideological world."

This means, quite obviously, that the people who say they are devoted to freedom, justice, and equality must go on and declare that they are devoted to these goals for *all* men, not just for themselves. And it means that they, who in some sense are already enjoying the rewards of freedom, must be willing to listen to the wants of people who have not yet had much part in them. This is what Dr. Hutchins of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions means when he says:

The United States was born out of a revolution. Our convention has been to glory in this fact, and more often than not we have also gloried in, or at least morally supported, revolution in other places. But do we still want to live with the idea of revolution, or the prospect of it? We do not want it for ourselves because we feel we do not need it. Do we still believe in it for others when others want it?

Now these are rhetorical questions. They are a way of saying that we *ought* to want revolution for others, if those others want it. This "ought" is right out of the Christian ethic, which says that we should love our neighbors as ourselves—both distant neighbors and those close at hand.

How, then, if we rule out moral defeatism, shall we explain the ineffectiveness of this ethical imperative? Why aren't people more willing at least to listen to the arguments of latter-day revolutionaries? Why do we take the easy way out and say, instead of listening, that they are just no good? Or, if this sounds harsh and undemocratic, why do we say they are unreasonably "impatient" and want the good things before they have really *earned* them? (Whatever truth may be in the second contention is made morally irrelevant by the fact that earning is possible only for people who have opportunity to earn.)

We come now to the gifted man whose insight into human attitudes and behavior set going these reflections: James Baldwin. The simple truth that Mr. Baldwin frames so effectively in practically all his writing is that people always think and act in ways determined by their ideas and feelings about themselves. He makes you see that a revolution in behavior cannot possibly take place without a revolution in the idea of the self. Baldwin is a Negro, so he naturally finds much of his raw material in the experiences which come to Negroes, but his importance as a writer lies in what he does with this background. Writers who use their personal origins as a means of establishing themselves as special authorities are of little value to the reader who wants to increase his understanding of general meanings. It would never occur to Baldwin, who is essentially an artist, to write as a specialist. When he uses his (for the white reader) unique experience as a Negro, he does it in order to illustrate some point with vivid intensity, not to pull racial rank. His truth is always human, never "racial," and so you welcome it. Or you could say that he tells about his experience in a way that abolishes the separations and distinctions of race. No man of the present has done so much as James Baldwin to make race irrelevant. He does this

not by telling his readers that it ought to be irrelevant, but by exposing the *fact* of its irrelevance.

There is initial significance in the fact that Baldwin is a novelist and an essayist, not a political thinker. He does not have political ends, which leaves him untempted by expedient compromise in behalf of "getting things done." An unblinking honesty animates his art and he is extremely sensitive to the distortions of "social" pleading. His analysis of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (first contributed to the June, 1949, *Partisan Review*), is a masterpiece of criticism, showing what happens when the righteousness of a reformer makes no dent in his own self-image. Mrs. Stowe knew it was wrong for white men to traffic in Negroes, but she had no grasp of the importance of restoring to black men their humanity. "Tom" is not really a man at all, but a denatured abstraction, and George and Eliza qualify as proper protagonists only by having their heredity diluted: Eliza can "pass," and George, while dark, is able to disguise himself as a "Spanish gentleman." Baldwin comments:

The virtuous rage of Mrs. Stowe is motivated by nothing so temporal as a concern for the relationship of men to one another—or, even, as she would have claimed, by a concern for their relationship to God—but merely by a panic of being hurled into the flames, of being caught in traffic with the devil. She embraced this merciless doctrine with all her heart, bargaining shamelessly before the throne of grace: God and salvation had become her personal property, purchased with the coin of her virtue. Here, black equates with evil and white with grace; if, being mindful of the necessity of good works, she could not cast out the blacks—a wretched, huddled mass, apparently, claiming, like an obsession, her inner eye—she could not embrace them either without purifying them of sin. She must cover their nakedness, robe them in white, the garments of salvation; . . .

Bigger Thomas, in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Baldwin sees as Uncle Tom in reverse. "For Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold, black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity

according to those brutal criteria bequeathed to him at his birth."

What is Baldwin's positive doctrine? He puts it clearly near the beginning of this essay:

Let us say, then, that truth, as used here, is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfillment that cannot be charted. This is the prime concern, the frame of reference; it is not to be confused with a devotion to humanity which is too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause, and Causes, as we know, are notoriously bloodthirsty.

These quotations are taken from the Beacon paperback, *Notes of a Native Son* (\$1.45). The final essay in this book, "Stranger in the Village," grows out of Baldwin's encounter with the inhabitants of a small Swiss village. Most of the people there had never seen a Negro before, and he endured their curiosity and mixture of naïve friendliness and fear (the children had been taught that "the devil is a black man") with considerable detachment. From this came reflections on the black man's situation in the United States and the fact that the history of the Negro in America is partly a history of the American white man's necessity "to find a way of living with the Negro in order to be able to live with himself." For the Negroes are inescapably here, and their identity, which is not included in the white man's traditions and thinking about himself, is an increasingly insistent fact. Baldwin puts the problem in historical terms:

The idea of white supremacy rests simply on the fact that white men are the creators of civilization (the present civilization, which is the only one that matters; all previous civilizations are simply "contributions" to our own) and are therefore civilization's guardians and defenders. Thus it was impossible for Americans to accept the black man as one of themselves, for to do so was to jeopardize their status as white men. But not so to accept him was to deny his human reality, his human weight and complexity, and the strain of denying the overwhelmingly undeniable forced Americans into rationalizations so fantastic that they approached the pathological.

I do not think, for example, that it is too much to suggest that the American vision of the world—which allows so little reality, generally speaking, for

any of the darker forces in human life, which tends until today to paint moral issues in glaring black and white—owes a great deal to the battle waged by Americans to maintain between themselves and black men a human separation which could not be bridged. It is only now beginning to be borne in on us—very faintly, it must be admitted, very slowly, and very much against our will—that this vision of the world is dangerously inaccurate, and perfectly useless. For it protects our moral high-mindedness at the terrible expense of weakening our grasp of reality. People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster. . . . This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again.

Baldwin's power comes from the fact that he is not a moralist but an extraordinarily perceptive human being. He writes about the realities from which lesser men derive the "oughts" of moralistic contention, and this enables his readers to do their own moralizing instead of getting it second hand. His work is an invitation to self-discovery, not a reformer's appeal for programmatic change.

There may be some value, here, in drawing a comparison between the revolutionary and the artist. Both are serious human beings. Neither has time for social niceties or frivolities. Both engage in exposing the anatomy of life, and both have high impersonal regard for the truth. The artist, however, differs from the revolutionist in that he stops with his disclosures. He does not make politics out of the symmetries of his art. If the appreciator of the work of the artist feels a tug to do something, he knows that the impulse is his own.

This difference between the artist and the revolutionary has enormous importance for human decision at the present juncture of history. We have only to think a little about the kind of problems people now have, and the solutions which show the most promise, to realize why this is so. The last thing people need, today, is to be told what to do. About the most unhelpful thing you can do for a man is to explain to him what is "right." Our civilization is made up of many complex components, but the one thing we quite plainly have had too much of is systems of Righteousness. People have been pushed or pulled in the direction of Righteousness and

Morality for hundreds of years. No wonder the more resourceful members of our society have grabbed at counter systems of moral irresponsibility—such as the non-moral objectivity of Scientific Method, or the uninhibited release from personal guilt read into the doctrines of Freud—as though they were lifelines of escape from a Sargasso Sea of puritanical imperatives.

If there is anything to be learned from the present scene, it is that the world is surfeited with self-denying and self-ignoring teachings of Righteousness. These teachings low-grade the human race. In essence, they are contemptuous rejections of the innate ethical perceptions of man; in form, they are expressions of a master-and-slave morality. In effect, they foreclose on the possibilities of individual human development.

The ordinary offenses against society, such as stealing, or even physical violence, are as nothing compared to the antihuman crimes of self-righteousness. What needs examination, now, is the process by which the overwhelming longing in human beings to do right, to be good men, is turned into the blindly destructive weaponry of religious and ideological wars. How does the best in people become the worst? That is what we must understand.

Compared to the psychological strait jackets of the "true" religion or the "true" political system, Procrustes was only a mischievous boy gone wrong, an unpleasant brigand who victimized a few unfortunate travelers. For here are beds of cultural compulsion which demand revisions in the basic constitution of human beings. The infectious necessity of wanting to make over other human beings is by no means limited to religion. After you have catalogued the various inquisitions of Western history, from the days of Torquemada to the witch-hunters of New England, and after you have listed the incredible egotisms of other Calvinists invincibly persuaded of their predestination to Glory, there is need to look closely at social doctrines which are supposed to be free of theological error, from which all bigotry is purged. It is here, in fact, that the unrelenting light of Baldwin's genius shines, by comparison, most brightly. In two brief paragraphs

he shows how the radical power of self-images inevitably creates the relationships between black men and white men:

The making of an American begins at that point where he rejects all other ties, any other history, and himself adopts the vesture of his adopted land. This problem has been faced by all Americans throughout our history—in a way it *is* our history—and it baffles the immigrant and sets on edge the second generation until today. In the case of the Negro the past was taken from him whether he would or no, yet to forswear it was meaningless and availed him nothing, since his shameful history was carried, quite literally, on his brow. Shameful; for he was heathen as well as black and would never have discovered the healing blood of Christ had not we braved the jungles to bring him these glad tidings. Shameful; for, since our role as missionary had not been wholly disinterested, it was necessary to recall the shame from which we had delivered him in order more easily to escape our own. As he accepted the alabaster Christ and the bloody cross—in the bearing of which he would find his redemption, as, indeed, to our outraged astonishment he sometimes did—he must, henceforth, accept that image we then gave him of himself: having no other and standing, moreover, in danger of death should he fail to accept the dazzling light thus brought into such darkness. It is this quite simple dilemma that must be borne in mind if we wish to comprehend his psychology.

However we shift the light which beats so fiercely on his head, or *prove* by victorious analysis, how his lot has changed, how we have both improved, our uneasiness refuses to be exorcized. And now nowhere is this more apparent than in our literature on the subject—"problem" literature when written by whites, "protest" literature when written by Negroes—and nothing is more striking than the tremendous disparity between the two creations. *Kingsblood Royal* bears, for example, almost no kinship to *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, though the same reviewers praised them both for what were, at bottom, very much the same reasons. These reasons may be suggested, far too briefly but not at all unjustly, by observing that the presupposition is in both novels exactly the same: black is a terrible color with which to be born into the world.

But it is in his analysis of the climactic hour of the murder trial of Bigger Thomas, the last appeal to the jury of Bigger's attorney, that Baldwin's penetration grows into luminous understanding. The

defending lawyer's "long and bitter summing up" is—

addressed to those among us of good will and it seems to say that, though there are whites and blacks among us who hate each other, we will not; there are those who are betrayed by greed, by guilt, by blood lust, but not we; we will set our faces against them and join hands and walk together into that dazzling future when there will be no black or white. This is the dream of all liberal men, a dream not at all dishonorable, but, nevertheless a dream. For, let us join hands on this mountain as we may, the battle is elsewhere. It proceeds far from us in the heat and horror and pain of life itself where all men are betrayed by greed and guilt and blood lust and where no man's hands are clean. Our good will, from which we yet expect such power to transform us, is thin, passionless, strident: its roots, examined, lead us back to our forebears, whose assumption it was that the black man, to become truly human and acceptable, must first become like us. This assumption, once accepted, the Negro in America can only acquiesce in the obliteration of his own personality, the distortion and debasement of his own experience, surrendering to those forces which reduce the person to anonymity and which make themselves manifest daily all over the darkening world.

In such passages, the work of the artist is made complete. For now we see what we have done, how the deep angers and fears of history are generated, how we diminish ourselves and others, not simply by righteousness, but, essentially, through the limiting conceptions of the self from which all partisan righteousness-proceeds.

Our religions have given us no catholicity of being, our theories of salvation no generosity of soul. They have not enriched, but only confined, our convictions about human identity. For ages we have remained ignorant of the fact that no man can "save" another, that the one task in being human that can never be delegated is the discovery of meaning, the realization of the self. What outrageous vanity to assume we have a duty to make others in our image! And what extraordinary ignorance not to see that every attempt in this direction produces monsters instead of men. There is a double truth here, for our deep need of the "freedom which cannot be legislated," and of the "fulfillment which cannot be

charted," is matched by our extreme vulnerability to the laws and charts of the Procrustean enemy within.

There is also a paradox here, for while this statement of the problem is timeless and metaphysical, we are always confronted by it in some limiting historical case, and in specific situations shaped by human hopes and fears. We can never, it seems, take the pure metaphysical verity and make a new beginning. We have to make our beginnings in some existing matrix which comes to us out of the imperfect past. The framing horizon of each new psychological discovery we make about ourselves is always created by "the heat and horror and pain of life itself," toward which the discovery has given us some small measure of objectivity.

So the Viet Nams and the Berlin Walls, the Birminghams and the Harlems of today, are rigid symbols of hard self-righteousness brought forward from the past of the modern world, and of its agonizing fruit. What we may learn from artists like Baldwin is that the attempt to batter down these bastions of mutual exclusion with the tools of physical destruction is the ultimate quixotic folly. We can never destroy by force an enemy we carry around within ourselves.

## *REVIEW*

### UNIVERSAL DRAMA OF REBIRTH

THE many deeply appreciative readers of Herbert Fingarette's *The Self in Transformation* will, we are sure, be glad to learn of his short study in the fall issue of the *Psychoanalytic Review*. The title is "Orestes: Paradigm Hero and Central Motif of Contemporary Ego Psychology," and in the idea of "paradigm" we encounter a theme which is central to both Fingarette and Joseph Campbell. There is, in other words, but one "true myth," and that is the story of the human soul in its progressive cyclings from death through initiation to rebirth. That this cyclical process is the inspiration for the most significant art and literature became arrestingly clear in *The Self in Transformation*. In the present study, pursuing the meaning of the Orestean destiny, Fingarette crosses the artificial barriers between ancient and modern, between literature and religion, and between psychology and philosophy.

The paradigmatic nature of the Oedipus myth is plain from acquaintance with Freud's psychoanalytic theories; Dr. Fingarette continues this interpretation, showing that Orestes is the hero who begins where Oedipus was left to wander, plagued with guilt, lost in the labyrinth of the psyche. Both mythic figures are needed, for every man is both Oedipus and Orestes; a man's nemesis is a fateful condition, but may be transformed into destiny. Dr. Fingarette writes:

In the art and drama of ancient Greece, the story of Orestes ranked at least equal in significance to that of Oedipus. In our own times, however, it is the story of Orestes which has served as a main plot for such writers as O'Neill, Eliot, and Sartre. On the other hand the emphasis in the psychoanalytic literature has been the other way round: It is Oedipus' story, as we know, which has occupied the center of the 1st stage. The result, though little noted, is worth attention: though *extant* texts have often been interpreted in terms of the Oedipus paradigm, the *new* works have been written with explicit use of the Orestes paradigm.

This is a symptom not in itself so important, but it is of the greatest importance for what it signals. One wonders whether, in failing to read the Orestes story aright or to appreciate its significance, psychoanalysts may have failed to read some main intellectual movements of our times aright. And likewise, if there is a possible psychoanalytic reading of Orestes which shows it to be of central importance, this may exhibit in a fresh way the bearing of psychoanalysis in our mid-century movements of thought. It is my thesis that the correct reading is just such a reading.

There is a parallel between the psychological situation of the battlefield of Kurukshetra, in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and the situation in which Orestes finds himself before his awakening—before he becomes a "hero." Like Arjuna, Orestes wanders in indecision, fearing to return to a kingdom rightfully his—because gaining the throne would mean dealing with his mother, the conspirator-lover who had murdered Orestes' father. Orestes finally comes to his decision, and it is at this moment that the difference between fate and destiny becomes clear. Arjuna, in the *Gita*, reaches a similar moment when, standing between his own invading army and the usurping forces led by relatives and friends, he is psychologically immobilized by the enormity of his task. Commentary on the Wilkins translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* by the Theosophist, William Q. Judge, depicts the confrontation in simple but impressive terms:

We discover that the poem of the *Gita* is not disfigured by this account of a conflict that begins in the first chapter; to be then dropped while the two great actors retire to their chariot for a discussion. This description of forces, and the first effect on Arjuna of his survey, show us that we are now to learn from Krishna, what is the duty of man in his warfare with all the forces and tendencies of his nature. Instead of the conflict being a blemish to the poem, it is necessary and valuable. We see that the fight is to be fought by every human being, whether he lives in India, or not, for it is raging on the sacred plain of our body. Each one of us, then, is Arjuna.

All of us are brought to this by our own request made to our Higher Self, who is Krishna. Arjuna requested Krishna to be his charioteer, and to drive

him forth between the two armies. It does not matter whether he now is consciously aware of having made the request, nor whether it was made as a specific act, in this life or in many another precedent one; *it was made and it is to be answered at the right time.*

Every student of true religion will go through Arjuna's experiences.

Compare with this Fingarette's account of the Oresteian situation, in which he emphasizes that Orestes is a "paradigm" of man making ultimate decision:

Oedipus committed his criminal acts out of natural impulse and temptation. He was fated to do as he did. Orestes is a man who does not have a fate, but a *destiny*. The difference is vital. Orestes is in plain fact the son and heir of the house of Atreus; but it is still necessary that he *take up* the responsibilities of this role. He could, if he chose, remain an exile, a man who was no one and belonged nowhere. Apollo's oracle told him that if he did not take up his responsibility, he would suffer from decay of spirit, sickness of body and the rejection of men. Death—on every level of existence—is the wages of evasion of his responsibility. But in the *Oresteia* it is quite clear that this is a responsibility which Orestes can refuse to accept. It is neither a necessity, nor, obviously, is it an arbitrary whim of the god's, a command having no real basis in Orestes' life. Orestes has, however, made a *vow* to Apollo, the purifier, to accept his responsibility as son and heir. It is his own vow which binds him. And of course it is in coming to bind ourselves in *this* way that we begin to exercise our freedom.

Dr. Fingarette concludes with a further examination of the subtlety and complexity of responsibility:

In speaking directly of the way we react to our own residual Oedipus complex in seeing the Sophocles *Oedipus Rex*, Freud assures us that we cannot ascribe it all to the unconscious and absolve ourselves of responsibility: "In vain do you deny that you are accountable. . . .(We) are compelled to feel (our) responsibility in the form of a sense of guilt for which (we) can discern no foundation."

How can the deed be one in which the individual accepts responsibility, *is* responsible, and yet is moved by forces which transcend his control? The question is fundamental, and the answer is at best complex when not entirely shrouded in mystery. But

the task of clarification is not one we need to take up here. The point which we must note is that the paradox holds *equally* in the psychoanalytic account of the matter *and* explicitly in the *Oresteia*. The form of the paradox in the one mirrors the form in the other. Furthermore it is a distinctive paradox. It is central to every doctrine in which personal responsibility dwells side by side with the operation of forces transcending the conscious will. The Orestes story brings out the paradox sharply, and thus it frames for us a central paradox in the psychology of the individual's "coming of age" as well as in the notion of responsibility itself.

Orestes at last emerges from obsessive horror, is done with arid exile, and blood sacrifices. He comes into the bright clear air of Athens. There, in taking his place decisively among the community of men and linking his fate with theirs he *sees* at last the realities from which before he merely suffered unseeing. In this vision his courage bears its fruit. And in this same vision we see how not only Orestes' fate, but the order of gods and the communal destiny also are transformed.

## COMMENTARY CONVERGING LINES

BY what is more editorial tendency than coincidence, this week's issue becomes practically a symposium on the idea of the self. The lead article on James Baldwin develops his analysis of the problem of "race relations" as growing out of the white American's idea of himself. Ultimate resolution of the problem lies, not "out there," on the picket lines and with the sit-ins, however provocative or effective these measures may be. Nor is the generation of "good will" the heart of the matter. The place of change is in the deeps of the individual, where he forms the idea of who and what he is, out of "the heat and horror and pain of life itself."

Review is concerned with how Greek myth illuminates the confrontation of the individual with his idea of himself: Is he the impotent pawn of fate, or can he rise through decision to create for himself a "destiny"? The myth adds a universalizing form to the problem of identity. It is still "personified," still an objective dramatic situation, but the players in the myth can be seen as symbols of Everyman. This, you might say, is the first level of abstraction, which helps to generalize the human situation. The myth is both abstract and not abstract; it has the vivid color of struggle, anguish, endurance, and the purifying purge of pain, yet it is general enough to encourage identification with one or more of the cast of characters. The individual who experiences the feelings with which the great myths are lined is often able to make declarations of meaning withheld from other men.

Then, in *Frontiers*, the abstracting process in pursuit of the self is elevated another step—perhaps several. The thought of Plotinus generalizes the idea of the self to an almost contentless purity. In its highest aspect, the self is identical with The One. From this point of view, the man is both The One and that in him which longs to unite—or reunite with The One. Yet when he asks himself what this really "means," the stubborn metaphysic of transcendental philosophy has no answer. The answers come only in the poetry of spiritual longing, which speaks of "the flight of the lone to the Alone."

So mysticism, dealing in philosophic paradox, is stern and austere in its ultimate content, but often

frowzy with emotional compromises and wishful personifications on the periphery. And to the tough-minded maker of definitions and compiler of objective truths, it is a bog of alien chimeras. Yet it is also undying. Its symbolisms repeat themselves spontaneously, from epoch to epoch. Man's thoughts of endlessness rise from some artesian source within himself, forever challenging the testimony to his finiteness brought by limiting experience. No age has been without these polarities of thought concerning what is "real." In classical scholarship, they are represented by the contrast between the Platonists and the Aristotelians—the enthusiasts versus the down-to-earth factualists and classifiers. The best men are always those who see or feel this paradox of dual reality and are unable to resolve it by cleaving to a single pole. The artist is often the most effective reflector of the contradiction, learning through his creative ordeal to exhibit the tensions between the One and the Many, keeping his work alive by rejecting any formula of fixed balance or static harmony.

The present is distinguished by a rapid transition in serious thought from the preoccupation with "behavioral problems" to psychological problems involving the idea of self. Witness John Gardner's *Self-Renewal* (quoted in "Children"), a book about the needs of the young in relation to their education and participation in society. It is most unlikely that, a generation ago, Mr. Gardner's questions could have appeared in a book with the word "self" in its title. But now the feeling of important focus has moved from action and behavior to consideration of the actor. How do his thoughts about himself affect his decisions, his attractions, his allegiances?

Questions about the self can be put in a number of vocabularies, each one representing a somewhat different universe of discourse. So there are various dialogues, today, proceeding on this central question of identity, with all the resulting discussions animated by adventurous uncertainty, filled with the life that is born in attack on something "new." What is new, of course, is only the convergence of all these lines of attention. At last the human situation is being examined in terms of itself.



# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### INNOVATION AND PARTICIPATION

THE central concern of John W. Gardner's *Self-Renewal* (Harper & Row, 1964) is the need for bridging the wide gap which usually exists between the attitude of youth and the attitude of those "guardians" of society who insist that values and ideals have been satisfactorily established and need only to be accepted with proper filial devotion. Mr. Gardner writes:

In some cases, young people find that the moral precepts their parents have to offer are no longer relevant in a rapidly changing world. And they often find that in moral matters the precepts their parents utter are contradicted by the behavior their parents exhibit. This is confusing, but not catastrophic. Those writers who imagine that it destroys all possibility of youthful moral striving are wrong. The first task of renewal in the moral sphere is *always* the difficult confrontation of ideal and reality, precept and practice; and young people are very well fitted to accomplish that confrontation. Their freshness of vision and rebelliousness of mood make them highly effective in stripping the encrustations of hypocrisy from cherished ideals.

One of the most difficult problems we face is to make it possible for young people to participate in the great tasks of their time. They have found a few constructive outlets recently, notably the Peace Corps, but on the whole such opportunities are rare in a complex technological society. Alexander might conquer half the known world in his early twenties, and nineteenth-century New England lads might be sailing captains in their late teens, but our age lays enormous stress on long training and experience. We have designed our society in such a way that most possibilities open to the adolescent today are either bookish or frivolous. And all too often when we do seek to evoke his moral strivings the best we can do is to invite him to stand sentinel over a drying reservoir! What an incredibly dull task for the restless minds and willing hearts of young people!

This analysis introduces two related topics—the function of the ideal university and the inadequate opportunities for youth to participate in the idealistic labors of the world. Perhaps

"participation" is inadequate, for what is lacking is mainly an atmosphere of commitment. As to the function of the university, following is an excellent paragraph from Karl Jaspers' *Philosophy and the World*:

The philosophical university is the realm of endlessly advancing cognition. The various premises of thinking out of a multiplicity of faiths meet there in mutual perception, to query and doubt one another. Their common basis is an encompassing faith which nobody can call his own in definite form—faith in the road of truth, on which all honest seekers for truth can meet. They keep an open mind and do not segregate themselves. Other forms of faith are not excluded indeed, to do so is regarded as the mark of untrue faith. This realm of the university provides every opportunity for specialized scientific research. Its covering, pervading spiritual life is lived in the tug of war between theology and philosophy.

We return to Mr. Gardner for one of his concluding paragraphs:

The moral order is not something static, it is not something enshrined in historic documents, or stowed away like the family silver, or lodged in the minds of pious and somewhat elderly moralists. It is an attribute of a functioning social system. As such it is a living, changing thing, liable to decay and disintegration as well as to revitalizing and reinforcement, and never any better than the generation that holds it in trust.

Men and women who understand this truth and accept its implications will be well fitted to renew the moral order—and to renew their society as well. They will understand that the tasks of renewal are endless. They will understand that their society is not like a machine that is created at some point in time and then maintained with a minimum of effort; a society is being continuously re-created, for good or ill, by its members. This will strike some as a burdensome responsibility, but it will summon others to greatness.

An article in the *American Scholar* (Summer, 1963) suggests the importance of Mr. Gardner's analysis at this time. The writer, Balachandra Rajan, is a professor at the University of Delhi who has had considerable opportunity to develop a "global view" in work for the United Nations. Prof. Rajan observes:

When a society finds its freedom endangered there is always a tendency to put freedoms in cold storage, to argue the best way to protect certain values is to make sure that, for the time being, those values are not exercised. The paradox is not even poetic; it is merely and monstrosly illogical. If we are not committed to the open mind we may as well abandon the open society. If we accept both we must put up with their operational inconveniences for the sake of what we believe to be their compensating assets. We are now emerging from an experience which it is fashionable to call traumatic. Those who use the word presumably mean that what has happened to us has shaken us to the core. But the word has other and more important overtones: a trauma can only be controlled if it is brought into the open, totally confronted, methodically analyzed and thoroughly understood. In this resolute searching of ourselves, we have to look back not in anger perhaps, but certainly not in complacency. Although every nation is a product of its past it must be careful not to be its prisoner.

For a view of the same issue at the level of the higher learning, we once more cite Frederick Mayer's *Creative Universities*. In his concluding chapter, "Challenge and Response," Dr. Mayer writes:

Higher education can be evaluated ultimately by the type of individual which it produces. If it creates merely conformists, if it develops lethargic alumni, if it only glorifies the cult of success, if it develops individuals who have no interest in the arts, if it creates too many Babbitts, then indeed higher education has failed. . . .

The choice is clear: We can continue the status quo in our colleges and universities. This will make the teacher into a glorified custodian. It will mean a stress upon requirements. It will mean an education which emphasizes externals, not inwardness. It will produce other-directed individuals who will have inadequate motivations and who will react to hidden persuaders. It will make for a soulless culture.

The social isolation of universities must be overcome in an age in which we have all become neighbors. Our students are idealistic. They can be motivated to seek constructive goals. Thus, City College in New York was wise when it sent out students to work in delinquency areas with excellent results. Many universities have special projects for the underprivileged, and some have even taken an interest in city planning and slum clearance.

The yardstick of the quality of higher education is the same as the yardstick of a political system, which is to be judged by the quality of the human beings who emerge within its jurisdiction. Thus the mood of the present, in both school and society, will mean either the freedom or the imprisonment of the future. So is society "continuously recreated, for good or ill."

## *FRONTIERS*

### Philosopher of The One

To read Plotinus in the second half of the twentieth century is to hear a far-off, ancient cry. One broods over his meanings with contradictory emotions. There is a bewildering piling of abstraction upon abstraction, such as one occasionally encounters to a lesser degree in Plato, and then you come upon a passage that is overwhelmingly clear, beautiful, even sweet. For Plotinus, life is an expression of, a contemplation of, a return to, The One. Nothing else is important. Nothing else is happening.

What is The One? It is that which Authentically Is. A proper preparation for thinking about what Plotinus means by The One would be to read what Lao-tse says about the Tao, or what ancient Indian sages said about Parabrahm. It would be fruitless to name it "God." Western thinkers have been too careless in the use of this term, which tends therefore to call up images, and The One can have no image. The speculative figure of the Absolute is probably not inaccurate, yet a kind of emptiness inhabits its use. The One signifies fullness beyond measure. Yet it is not Being, nor any of the fullnesses of which we have some experience. As Plotinus says:

The chief difficulty is this: awareness of The One comes to us neither by knowing nor by the pure thought that discovers the other intelligible things, but by a presence transcending knowledge. When the soul knows something, it loses its unity; it cannot remain simply one because knowledge implies discursive reason and discursive reason implies multiplicity.

Therefore we must go beyond knowledge and hold to unity. We must renounce knowing and knowable, every object of thought, even Beauty, because Beauty, too, is posterior to The One and is derived from it as, from the sun, the daylight. That is why Plato says of The One, "It can neither be spoken nor written about." If nevertheless we speak of it and write about it, we do so only to give direction, to urge towards that vision beyond discourse, to point out the road to one desirous of seeing. . . .

As The One does not contain any difference, it is always present and we are present to it when we no longer contain difference. . . . We are not separated from The One, not distant from it, even though bodily nature has closed about us and drawn us to itself. It is because of The One that we breathe and have our being: it does not bestow its gifts at one moment only to leave us again; its giving is without cessation so long as it remains what it is. As we turn towards The One, we exist to a higher degree, while to withdraw from it is to fall. Our soul is delivered from evil by rising to that place which is free of all evils. There it knows. There it is immune. There it truly lives.

Like all transcendental philosophers and mystics, Plotinus has to fight the battle of words. He speaks of "seeing visions," then turns against the ordinary meaning suggested. The misleading imagery of sight, he remarks, is doubtless "what is back of the injunction of the mystery religions which prohibit revelation to the uninitiated." He continues:

The vision, in any case, did not imply duality; the man who saw was identical with what he saw. Hence he did not "see" it but rather was "oned" with it. . . . He was like one who penetrating the innermost sanctuary of a temple, leaves temple images behind. They will be the first objects to strike his view upon coming out of the sanctuary, after his contemplation and communion there, not with an image or statue, but with what they represent. They are but lesser objects of contemplation.

These passages are taken from a new Mentor volume, *The Essential Plotinus*, translated by Elmer O'Brien of Loyola College, Montreal. The appearance of this book may be taken to signify the undiminished vigor of the thought of a man who is justly called "the father of Western mysticism"—a "third-century pagan" whose inspiration has survived all manner of theological confinements during the centuries since he lived, and who is best encountered without any intermediaries or interpreters.

This edition seems entirely free of any special pleading or claims. Prof. O'Brien's translation is avowedly a labor of love. He concludes his preface by saying: "Walt Whitman (after a

fashion) comes to mind, 'This is no book, camarade. Who touches this touches a man . . .'

In the final section, headed "Contemplation," the reader comes very close to touching Plotinus, for here the basically psychological character of his cosmology becomes quite plain. For Plotinus, the goal of being is contemplation, and through contemplation, return to The One; but all action, all coming into being, is also, in his thought, a form of contemplation. Plotinus justifies this view poetically, but his contention is a serious one:

Were one to ask Nature why it produces, it might—if willing—thus reply: "You should never have put the question. Silently, as I am silent and little given to talk, you should have tried to understand. Understand what? That what comes to be is the object of my silent contemplation, mine is a contemplative nature. The contemplative in me produces the object contemplated much as geometricians draw their figures while contemplating. I do not draw. But, contemplating, I drop from within me the lines constitutive of bodily forms. Within me I preserve traces of my source and of the principles that brought me into being. They, too, were born of contemplation and without action on their own part gave me birth. But they are greater than I: they contemplated themselves and thus was I born."

Defense of the primacy of contemplation continues:

The point of action is contemplation and the having an object of contemplation. Contemplation is therefore the end of action.

Action seeks to achieve indirectly what it cannot achieve directly.

When one has achieved the object of one's desires, it is evident that one's real desire was not the ignorant possession of the desired object, but to know it as possessed—as actually contemplated, as within one.

Action always has some good or other in view—~ good for oneself, to be possessed. Possessed where? In the soul. The circuit is complete: through action the soul comes back to contemplation.

Plotinus was a Platonist, and he is said to have had other sources of inspiration. But most of all, he learned from himself. His speech gives

evidence of this. He was not a compiler of the thoughts of other men. And his speech has also the appeal of a rare common sense applied to the things of the mind. Following is his account of the validity of abstract ideas:

To grasp the oneness of a tree, that is, its stable principle or of an animal or of a soul or of the cosmos, is to grasp in each of these cases what is most powerful and of worth.

If at last we try to grasp the oneness that is found in the true realities and is their principle, source, and productive power, how can we all of a sudden become doubtful and believe this principle is nothingness?

This principle is certainly none of the things of which it is the source. It is such that nothing can be predicated of it, not being, not substance, not life, because it is superior to all these things.

But if you manage to grasp it by abstracting even being from it, you will be struck with wonder. By directing your glance towards it, by reaching it, by resting in it, you will achieve a deep and immediate awareness of it and will at the same time seize its greatness in all things that come from it and exist through it.

Those who are moved by Plotinus to pursue such thinking would probably be helped to orient their investigations by reading Thomas Whittaker's *The Neoplatonists* (Cambridge University Press, 1928), a book which, like this translation, is a labor of love.