

KNOWING AND BEING

IS there a way to escape from the confusions which result from the endless arguments and conflicts about "morality"? Some form of the pursuit of Righteousness, it now seems clear, is an unsuppressible tendency or need of human beings. Of it we can say that no objective in human life is more vulnerable to misconception in thought, and to hideous distortion in practice; while, on the other hand, the systematic denial of meaning to moral longing has even worse consequences.

The most intuitively acceptable model of an ideal moral order given in experience is probably the family. The virtues of good parents seem practically archetypal. Parents have a natural authority based on their experience as adults, and deserved through their devotion to the care and nurture of the young. In his relations with his children, a wise father is expected to combine love and patience with a refusal to falsify the nature of the world with which the children will have to cope when they grow up. This means progressive instruction in how to distinguish between appearance and reality, regulated according to the child's slowly growing capacity to understand. Various "lights" are necessary to illuminate the difference between appearance and reality, for the obvious reason that "reality" is of several sorts. One of these lights is the light of a moral ideal—a conception of what might or could be, in contrast to what is. Now the fact is that the light of the moral ideal chosen by the father—parent or instructor—*tints* all the other levels of reality, and defines their ultimate relation to human good. We could say that it is the task of the philosopher in the father to make this clear to himself; and then it becomes the task of the teacher in the father to communicate this understanding to his children. Yet none but the wise can do this well. The best that a good man can do—a good man being one who knows he is not wise, and who refuses to

pretend that he is—is to try. The virtue of the good lies mainly in their rejection of pretense. Yet all men who teach—which includes all fathers—need trust. They can not teach without it. So, in a world of imperfect men, there is no learning without risk. This means that teachers and pupils are practically all exposed to and will make mistakes. This seems inevitable. What is *not* inevitable is the deceptions that result from pretense. An ignorant man can refuse to lie. Since he is a father and a teacher, he cannot function without trust, but the light of the moral ideal—the best, let us say, that he knows—cannot survive pretense about the certainty that light provides. There is no social disintegration as inevitable or certain as that which comes from a system of morality which, little by little, relies more on pretense than light. Even its truths are seen as lies, in the negative light of the exposure of pretense.

Undoubtedly, the most important thing to consider, here, is the fact that the corruption or misuse of the initial relationships of trust in no way makes them unnecessary. There can be no human association without them. Trust, for example, remains the tacit dimension in all government that relies on anything better than fear or terror to maintain order. This is quite clear from books like Guglielmo Ferrero's *The Principles of Power*. In a democratic society, of course, little is said explicitly about the crucial importance of trust. Yet it is still the tacit dimension of *social* reality behind all public functions. Officials are *trusted* to give a true account of their intentions in behalf of the public good, and to supply accurate reports of what they are doing and have done. Trust in the broad authority of elected rulers is periodically validated at the polls, or it is withdrawn. So, quite plainly, trust is the moral capital of the organic or *working*

aspect of a democratic society, and we have an object-lesson in its reality in seeing what happens with its dissipation in what is now referred to as the "credibility gap." The disorders which arise from spreading distrust only emphasize the importance of a rapidly diminishing moral endowment. There is a sense in which we are now watching runs on various institutions which depend for their functioning on deposits of public trust. No wonder that the collapse of some of them seems imminent.

One thing is quite evident: the more that natural and spontaneous trust weakens in any society, the louder will be the outcries against the enforcements of compensating pretenses and the more aggressive the "revolutionary" demand for externalized guarantees of social morality. Trust, the advocates of revolution say, must be replaced by *inescapable* patterns of righteousness. But no revolution can dispense with the need for "morality." If the revolution is successful, all the old virtues receive fresh revolutionary definition, coupled with almost puritan insistence on their practice, on pain of exclusion from the new moral order. Recent experience in both Russia and China proves this to be the case. A revolution *must* attempt to establish new grounds for trust.

But what, in principle, *are* virtues? For general purposes we could say that virtues gain operational definition from the skillful practice of needful functions of human life *in the light of an ideal*. What is an ideal? It is a conception of the way things *ought* to be. Or a conception of the way men—or a man, one's self—ought to be.

Where do the priorities lie, in formulating a moral ideal? In our experience, they seem to have been very largely historically determined. For a long time, that is, the stress was on being the kind of a man who gets to heaven. Then, when the techniques and social arrangements that were claimed to be necessary to help everybody to get to heaven succeeded mainly in making a hell of life on earth, we proclaimed another ideal. Creating heaven on earth by getting all the proper

arrangements—political and scientific—was the next great moral objective. Today, when if not hell, large amounts of sophisticated hellishness seem to be the end-product instead of the side-effect of the techniques, apparatus, and arrangements developed for an earthly paradise, we are taking a long, critical look at our supposed "morality" and its increasingly obvious pretenses. Now we talk about wanting to become "whole men," and wonder about the arrangements that might contribute to this.

Most noticeable, perhaps, in the thinking along this line is a decent reluctance to begin by elaborating simple, picture-book ideals. All "easy answers" threaten to repeat the mistakes and pretenses of the past. And at last good men who won't lie about how much they know are getting sizeable audiences. The common effort of such men is to provide a rationale for the emerging intuition of what a really "whole man" might be like. The account given of a "self-actualizing" man sometimes seems a wonderful mosaic reproduction of an old Greek portrait of a man of true virtue. Stringfellow Barr gives the Hellenic view in *The Three Worlds of Man*:

As the dialogue [in the *Republic*] proceeds, Socrates weaves a magic skein of luminous analogies between the various types of unjust men and the various types of the unjust state. But since, both in the individual soul and in organized society, a just ordering of the organic parts will all hang on the quality of the wisdom that directs them we are back again at the Socratic point that virtue depends in a special way on wisdom, capable of transcending mere opinion and achieving knowledge. We cannot learn to be brave or temperate or just without this higher wisdom, for it is this wisdom that tells us which of our physical desires to follow and which we may not follow; it is this that brings to our soul the internal ordering in which Socrates saw justice. In short, all genuine moral choices are guided by the high wisdom that knows principles as well as by prudence about cases. That is why a brave act is wisdom acting with respect to danger; and a temperate act is wisdom acting again, this time with respect to pleasure; and a just act is wisdom acting with respect to the rights of other men about us. If this be true, then, it is easy to see why Socrates in so many of the dialogues seems to

suspect that all virtues are really species of theoretical wisdom as much as of prudence. Or, more baldly, that virtue is knowledge.

That seems about right. Where, then, does the problem lie? Why isn't there more wisdom in action in the world? It was Socrates' view that there was no lack of commitment to virtues, but that the virtues weren't real virtues, only varieties of conventional technique. They were not rooted in wisdom. They were "reactionary," partisan and: emergency responses to events. They were *ad hoc*. And the *ad hocs* of the Greeks set men against one another, even as our *ad hocs* do for us today. Barr gives this analysis:

. . . he [Socrates] could not fail to observe that the moral corruption he saw underlying the magnificent age of Pericles was due less to men's failures to live up to their principles than to their increasing failure to describe the principles clearly. All men had opinions on virtue. And yet, when he questioned them in his gentle, relentless way, their opinions turned out to be mere opinions, not knowledge. They even turned out to be hopelessly inconsistent opinions, as indeed opinions on moral problems have a way of doing. But Socrates wanted to know, not merely to opine. It seemed obvious to most men that without knowledge of some sort there could be no virtue but only anthropological *mores*, enforced by the tribe.

Hence the Dialogues, which are an inquiry into first principles. You don't study the external world, Socrates maintained, to find out about man. You consult man himself, which means yourself, to find out about the capacities and potentialities of human beings. Out of this inquiry there developed a body of conceptions which depended for their light and inspiration on the Theory of Ideas or Ideal Forms—conceptions of the Good which, Plato maintained, could have exactitude and eventually an almost objective certainty. Plato has been much condemned for this sort of "idealism," but also much defended, since there seems a sense in which he only systematized an unavoidable psychological tendency in human beings. Of all Plato's writings, the doctrine of Ideas is notoriously the most obscure, the least concretely explained, yet the reason for this may

be that, like other existential realizations, the substantial meaning of what might or ought to be is actually *concealed* by the terms of verbal definition. For knowledge of the Ideal, in other words, there can be no distinction between knowing and being. Or, as Plato said, the Good is realized by *participation*. There may be no better way to put it. The dialogues were means of opening up the avenues between what is and what might be. It is of course possible that the dialectic masked a more demanding discipline which Plato understood but could not describe. (See Plato's seventh Epistle and Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*, page 53.)

In *Motivation and Personality*, Abraham Maslow writes in something of a modern parallel to the Platonic venture. Speaking of the field of understanding generated by such pioneers of modern humanistic psychology as Kurt Goldstein, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Carl Rogers, and others, he says:

We know better now what lies hidden in man, what lies suppressed and neglected and unseen. We are now able to judge the essential nature of man in terms of what his possibilities, what his potentialities, what his highest possible development may be, instead of relying on external observations. . . .

Once granted reliable knowledge of what man *can* be under certain conditions that we have learned to call good, and granted that he is happy, serene, self-accepting, unguilty, and at peace with himself only when he is fulfilling himself and becoming what he can be, it is possible and reasonable to speak about good and right and bad and wrong and desirable and undesirable. . . .

This is all true in the same empirical sense that we casually say a dog prefers meat to salad, or that goldfish need fresh water, or that flowers prosper best in the sun. I maintain firmly then that we have been making descriptive, scientific statements rather than normative ones.

Another word for my philosophical colleagues who distinguish sharply between what we are and what we ought to be. What we *can* be = what we ought to be, and is much better language than ought to be. Observe that if we are being descriptive and empirical, then ought is completely out of place, as

can clearly be seen if we ask about flowers or animals, what *they* ought to be. . . . Even a stronger way of saying this is that it is today possible to distinguish in a single moment of time what a man *is* and what he *could* be. We are all familiar with the fact that the human personality is organized into layers or depths. That which is unconscious and that which is conscious coexist, even though they may contradict each other. One *is* (in one sense); the other also *is* (in another deeper sense) and *could* one day come to the surface, become conscious, and then *be* in *that* sense.

It is of interest here to note in passing that in its best days there was no moralizing in Buddhist exegesis—that is, no telling people what they *ought* to do, but an exposition of the Law. And while Buddhist ethics is inseparable from high metaphysical conceptions, its practical teaching is mainly in psychological language. Expounding "the Law" is in terms of man's highest potentialities, including how he may become a Buddha himself.

In connection with the exasperating obscurity of Plato's Theory of Ideas, it seems worthwhile to examine the curiously misleading character of practically all ideals which become familiar mainly through moralistic "ought" language. The real virtues, one strongly suspects, are Taoistic invisibles. There may be built-in self-deception in thinking about a virtue or desirable attainment as though it were some distant goal. The very verbal abstractions used in such thought may create abysses impossible to span. The imaginary postures in which one visualizes himself as "virtuous" may be virtue's negation. This effect quite possibly also results from every kind of self-defeating longing, applying equally to imagining oneself rich, or famous, or otherwise distinguished. "If I were a great writer," a young man may say to himself, "I would do so and so." He wouldn't, of course. A great writer couldn't care less about so-and-so. That sort of longing does not pursue the virtue, but only its shadow—what is assumed to be its cash value. Yet every man who has ever achieved any ideal at all—and we all have—should know that a realized ideal is

in some sense a *forgotten* ideal. Hercules does not sit around thinking about his beautiful biceps. A realized good is never a "possession." Yet no man unsatisfied with himself can eliminate the feeling of "ought" from his emotional life. We know this, too, from experience. What then can he do? Well, he can try to eliminate "possessiveness" from his moral longing. This probably involves little more than being very careful to do no more pretending.

The virtues, after all, don't get shined up as a maturing man acquires them. Instead, they disappear, or get absorbed in a higher reality. As Stringfellow Barr shows, they are abstractions from the reality of wisdom—*modes* in wise behavior. They seem to have separate identity—to be desirable *things*—only when they are pursued as objects, longed for as independent goals. Complimenting a wise man on his virtues would be like telling a fish that it is a great swimmer! It is a meaningless act.

This may vaguely illustrate Plato's difficulty in explaining his Theory of Ideas. The truths of realization cannot be contained in the language of longing. Yet he had to say *something*, because human longings are real, and uninstructed longings are notoriously corruptible.

What, then, in itself, is the feeling of "ought"? Doubtless it is a species of perception in the genus conscience, having an indispensable function in the shaping of a good life. At any rate it is a *given*—one of the raw materials of our existence which come in a great variety of forms. Feelings of "ought" operate at many levels in human life, some of them remote from "moral" issues. One understands, for example, the tears of a small child who can't drive a nail straight into a board, and whose sense of ought makes him despair. Or the despondency of a pimply adolescent girl who has bought all the facial creams in the store and *still* breaks out. What sort of problem have we here? Is there a basic order in the universe according to which a person should try to arrange his "oughts"? Or weed and improve their quality? How does

one find out *what* to ask of *whom* in order to turn what ought-to-be into what-is?

Education is the difficult task of getting the young ready, little by little, to face the fact that there is *no* reliable hearsay instruction for answering this question. The only *good* tradition of explanation is the tradition which closes itself out as a source of guidance when the final, the most important, "oughts" come up for attention. No one can stand this ordeal of loneliness without some endowment of the virtues—of courage, justice, prudence, and moderation. What is human growth? It is the indescribable process through which definitions, which are not knowledge, dissolve into modes of being, which are.

REVIEW

HUMANIST THEMES

THE humanist critic reveals himself through a sensibility as alert in its opposition to confinements of the human spirit as it is to massive external injustice. He must be able to put into persuasive words what he knows in his bones—that the basic issues of being human never change. The outer forms of human needs and the appropriate fulfillments of human responsibilities may change, but not their essential nature. To suppose that altered circumstances have altered the meaning of our lives is equivalent to thinking that we are men who have been somehow made "superior" to or more helpless than our ancestors by forces outside ourselves. No matter how cleverly argued, this claim remains manipulative fraud. It justifies delivery of arbitrary power into the hands of the "experts" in altering circumstances and signifies not progress but abdication.

A work of art, however, will avoid proposing such truths in the form of naked moral judgments. Art is not the discovery of truth or reality, but its metaphor. It is a captured resonance a focussed symmetry, and the humanist critic is able to single out authentic works of art and knows how to call attention to them. This brings us to two recent contributions of literary criticism to the *New Yorker* by George Steiner. Mr. Steiner is a conservationist—a defender of the excellences of the Humanities in our time. Two of his books, *Language and Silence* and *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky?* have been reviewed admiringly in these pages, and a reader's kindness in sending us his articles—on the new (Knopf) edition of the memoirs of Alexander Herzen and on the (Harcourt) collection of the essays, journalism, and letters of George Orwell—is much appreciated. (They appeared in the *New Yorker* for Feb. 8 and March 29, 1969.) In the discussion of Herzen (1812-1870) there is this illumination of the paradox of the cultivated revolutionary thinker:

He [Herzen] could not conceal his amusement over the acrimonious snobberies of a milieu in which the burning question of the day was whether Kossuth should call on Ledru-Rollin or Ledru-Rollin on Kossuth. And as the whale nears the minnows scatter: when "the red Marx" stalks out of a committee room, only a handful follow, but those who stay behind drop out of history. Herzen despised the brutal, boorish sage. But we glimpse in Herzen's memoir of their rare, hostile meetings his realization, beautifully honest as always, that the world of radicalism he had helped to create was passing into dust. How many are there like Mazzini—revolutionaries committed to the worth of the individual, "and who will come after them?"

Herzen's memoirs have a twofold relevance. They document, with complete psychological fidelity, the condition of tragic liberalism. I mean by that that Herzen strove all his life for revolution but came to know that such revolution would spell ruin for the civilization he himself embodied. The impulses that made him a rebel, that drove him into exile and unbroken resistance to autocracy, were generous and deep-seated, but they reflected the idiom and intellectual values of a privileged, high-bourgeois culture. . . . What lay ahead was most likely a grey plateau, a mass society devoted to the crafts of survival. Herzen knew this; he sensed the philistinism, the vengeful monotones that waited beyond the storm. Unlike so many New Left pundits and would-be bomb-throwers of today, Herzen never minimized the cost of social revolution in terms of culture. Stuffed into the dustbin of history would be not only injustice, exploitation, class snobberies, religious cant of every kind but a good measure of the fine arts, speculative insights, and inherited learning that were the peculiar glory of Western man. Herzen knew that the task of a radical intellectual elite was in a very precise sense suicidal. In preparing a society for revolution it was inevitably digging its own grave.

The essay on Orwell deserves a place in every library along with the evaluations of Orwell by George Woodcock and Lionel Trilling. Orwell was a man who acted on what he believed, and Mr. Steiner devotes himself to showing how such a man tends to think. Orwell feared the loss of "common decency" and found the modern intelligentsia unappreciative of the fact that human society can be based upon nothing else. His indictment of the corruption of language, quoted

by Steiner from an essay published in 1946, demands common decency in the use of words:

In our time political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible . . . Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging, and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants are driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck, or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements*. . . . When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink. . . . All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia.

Orwell wants thinking about action to come out of the grain of life. "I admit," he wrote, "to having a perfect horror of a dictatorship of theorists." Steiner remarks:

There is an illuminating concession in Orwell's attack on Kipling in 1942: "He identified himself with the ruling power and not with the opposition. In a gifted writer this seems to us strange and even disgusting, but it did have the advantage of giving Kipling a certain grip on reality. The ruling power is always faced with the question, 'In such and such circumstances, what would you *do?*,' whereas the opposition is not obliged to take responsibility or make any real decisions."

We skip, now, to an article in *Anarchy 104* by Kingsley Widmer, but without change of subject. Mr. Widmer, who teaches English at San Diego State College, has measurable success in showing the importance of doing one's thinking on the basis of the grain of life:

A few years ago I practiced the trade of airframe "template maker" in various plants and job-shops in three western states. After several months of making metal patterns in one of the largest and reputedly most "progressive" plants, my boredom reached such excruciation that some gesture toward critical change

was imperative. From the better writings on the subject as well as my co-workers I know that my reaction was unexceptional. Many a factory worker, not just a *poete mandet* with a hand drill, finds his routine painful, his conditions of work arbitrary and his sense of life emptied. Above a certain minimum, issues of pay and other "benefits" only concern the condiments, not the life-diet. To those reduced to being controlled functions in a factory (and the similar, if sometimes more lavish dehumanizations of office and business and professional), the alternatives consist of escape, degeneration and counter-assertion.

My counter-assertion no doubt revealed a peculiar naïveté. I combined my responses to the tooling shop with some of the studies on industrial organization and came up with a moderate list of rational changes that would help humanize my work. When I then consulted a noted academic specialist on how I might initiate these, he exhibited acute embarrassment. He did provide two pieces of wisdom on how I might modify my life in the factory. I should go back to school and major in Industrial Relations, thus both getting out of the shop and "getting ahead"—the usual American ideal of "opportunity" substituted for justice and meaning—and I should spend my spare time in politics, in liberal-Democratic chores in a Republican suburb. Such counselling passes for "realism" in therapy as well as in politics.

We are going to quote a lot more of this because the "grain" would be lost in a summary:

Next, the labor union. With difficulty, I finally presented my critical suggestions to someone at a low level in that hierarchy. My points ranged from making the "breaks" concur with the job (i.e. take a smoke or coffee at a natural place in the work instead of being bound by a rigid plant-wide schedule), through cooperative decisions on work assignments to a procedure for electing foremen. All such proposals were angrily rejected. The union, like most "pressure-groups" in a pseudo-pluralistic society, usually bends and bulges only in the accepted ways. I quickly learned that individual and various conditions, such as flexible rest periods, lacked drama and therefore had no chance as bargaining issues; everybody knew that assignments and promotions were purely corporate prerogatives; and that I'd better "get with it." Though too dumb to say it, the union official's tone insisted that arbitrary production requires arbitrary authority, including his own, rather than autonomy for those doing the work.

Now a professor, Mr. Widmer finds the situation basically unchanged: "The dilemma remains: as president of a college professor's union local, I find that a majority of my colleagues want to aggrandize salaries and the institutional surrogate for themselves rather than radically change education. One can only serve by subverting." Well, in his fight against boredom as a template-maker, he finally got to see the Plant Superintendent, who turned out to be mainly interested in getting rid of "a loquacious, unshaven, T-shirted third-rate tool-maker inexplicably spending his off-time arguing about perfectly standard shop procedures":

The Super came on with phony geniality, then irritated belligerence, and finally collapsed into a self-made boss intimacy, lamenting that he'd never understood those "industrial psych" courses he had to take in night school, and concluding, hand on my shoulder, "What can I do for you? Put you in for a promotion?" No, I wanted to smoke my pipe at reasonable intervals, to work out with other template men the divying up of the jobs—it might even be more "efficient"!—rather than be trapped by engineering numbers and foremen's caprice, and, in sum, we wanted to be a bit more our own bosses and make some changes. Wasn't that reasonable? He agreed but wearily assured me that what I asked would require getting rid of all those goddam personnel people, changing the company and union contractual procedures, and not only reorganizing the whole plant but the prime contractor, the US Government. . . .

Mr. Widmer's general conclusion comes several pages later, after various other illustrations of what might be called the powerlessness of power, some of them drawn from experience in prison:

The revolutionism which seeks organized external mass methods of power usually insists on subordinating social and cultural revolution to political activity. Instead of refusing power, that heightens it, and ends conserving the repressive character and authority of institutions. Revolution and reaction agree in condemning styles of refusal as romantic and utopian and deviationist. Mere politics thus becomes the new displacement of full humanness, generating a new terrorism and totalism of *le peuple* or the proletariat or a political

organization or a historical process. Revolutionism is not nearly radical enough.

COMMENTARY

TWENTY-TWO YEARS OLD

WITH this issue, MANAS begins its twenty-third year of publication. Its circulation, while still small, continues to increase, although slowly. Its economic condition, although somewhat improved, is still precarious. Recognition in June, 1966, by the U. S. Treasury Department of the Manas Publishing Company as a non-profit corporation, permitting tax-deductible contributions to its support, may have made possible the paper's survival during recent years of rapidly advancing printing costs. Gifts to make up the annual deficit are still necessary, and will continue to be, unless there is an extraordinary gain in the number of subscriptions. Counter sales still remain slight, being limited to the few newsstands and stores which are sought out by unusual readers. Now and then a friendly wholesaler does what he can to "place" MANAS on more stands, but simple exposure in such settings does not accomplish much. Sample copies sent to persons suggested by readers are still the most fruitful means of obtaining new subscriptions.

Once again, we repeat the established policy of the publishers of MANAS, adopted in the beginning, which is to make known the general financial needs of the paper to its friends and readers, but never to conduct "campaigns" for raising money nor to engage in solicitations. If someone asks if we need financial help, we simply say, "Yes." It's always true. We might here add that the modest contribution has the incalculable importance of increasing the feeling of community for those who work to get the paper out, and joined with other gifts it enables us to pay our bills and keep going.

The chief source of encouragement and nourishment for the editors continues to be the steady flow of correspondence from readers, who often send along clippings, copies of magazine articles, and suggestions of books for review.

This collaboration is invaluable, helping to provide a coverage that would be impossible for a small staff to achieve by other means.

We wonder occasionally about the possibility of revising or improving the general statement of what MANAS attempts or intends, as given in the box at the bottom of the next column. But each time the conclusion is that this paragraph, which appeared in the first issue—for January 7, 1948—says briefly and accurately all that needs to be said.

A point of interest in the present issue: The correspondence between Robert Jay Wolff's observation in *Frontiers* about the "artwork" of biology and chemistry majors, and the discussion in the lead article of the obstacles placed in the way of goals or ideals by sentimental or possessive formulation of what the goals mean.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves EDUCATION FOR TOMORROW

THE "flight from the city" described in last week's *Frontiers* fulfills a longing now felt by a great many of the young. This seems completely understandable. The complex artificialities of modern urban life demand both inventive intelligence and extraordinary tenacity of purpose from those who decide to stay in the city to do what they can to improve the quality of that life. Even people who serve heroically may grow discouraged after a while. Years ago, two *MANAS* editors devoted a week to visiting intentional communities in California. In one small settlement located in the San Joaquin Valley they talked to a middle-aged farmer who had previously been a social worker in Chicago. "Why did you leave Chicago?" they asked him. "Because," he said, "I could no longer continue doing work in which even my small successes, achieved after many years, could be liquidated overnight by a politician's idea of his necessities."

Well, there are doubtless *some* levels of constructive activity remaining everywhere, including the cities. Meanwhile, what of education for the young, and for the children of the young, who choose a hard life on the land? One might say that the modern world is going to have to learn new ways of doing practically everything, and that the best place for this is under circumstances where new beginnings are at least possible. These may, and probably should, have great simplicity. A justifying text for this outlook is provided by Thoreau:

As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad. A man has not everything to do, but something, and because he cannot do everything, it is not necessary that he should do *something* wrong.

Yet it is, after all, no negligible contribution to live a constructive, useful life, one even a little like Thoreau's. If more people were doing only this, the world *would* be "a good place to live in," regardless of politics. The social philosophy which declares that nothing good can happen until the *whole system* is changed leads inevitably to automatic cynicism—contempt for all attitudes and efforts which fail to demand an instant millennium. This is the paralysis of the individual, as any serious reading of history will show.

This general criticism of the doctrine of "total revolution" is in complete harmony with the conclusions of the reflective members of a generation of radical thinkers—the generation of Dwight Macdonald. Macdonald concluded his book, *The Root Is Man* (1953), by printing an essay by Andrea Caffe, Italian historian and philosopher, who offered the following distillation:

We must wake again in the individual the courage to frankly assert his need for *happiness*, and no longer resign himself to substitutes, conformism, and "ideological" imbecility. In Europe, we haven't got empty space to escape from the suffocation of mass regimes. The only escape open to us is a bold and uncompromising recourse to reason (which, among other things, would mercilessly ridicule any form of authoritarianism, theocracy, "ideocracy," or of what Sartre calls *l'esprit de sérieux*) and to a sociability so refined, so vigilant, and so tolerant, as to give the individual, together with a sense of common purpose—and solidarity, a feeling of full personal independence.

Only through the reawakening and cultivation of such qualities can we slowly build a "civilization of the people" in opposition to the "civilization" of the masses, where everything tends to be measured in terms of sheer utilitarianism, stability is again and again sought on the lowest possible level, and a coarse pragmatism is supposed to be the measure of all truth and all justice.

This is a sort of thinking that probably hasn't been done by the young who are seeking and finding community in out-of-the-way places in America. It doesn't matter much. They reached the same conclusions on less intellectual but very

real grounds. Now they have other things to learn.

MANAS receives a little mimeographed paper published by the Society for the Preservation of Early American Standards, gotten out by a man who lives in a cabin in a rural area in one of the eastern states. The paper is filled with revivals of "Yankee ingenuity"—something like Gandhi's both practical and symbolic celebration of the spinning wheel. It deals with how to live on the land—how to split a log, how to make your own tools, and other practical counsels. Romantic? Not for the people who are doing it.

Actually, a sound basis in reason for all such efforts can be found. Henry Beston, whose *Outermost House* is a classic concerned with life close to nature—belonging on the shelf with Thoreau's *Walden* and Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*—says this in *Northern Farm* (Rinehart, 1948):

I have lately been working with machines, and I venture to set down here something of my growing quarrel with one aspect of modern machinery. Again and again as I study these contrivances, I am struck by their increasingly dehumanized and even anti-human perversity of design. That a machine is both a machine and something meant to be used by a human being is apparently the last thing considered in the blueprints. Not only is one now confronted with some absurdity of design which makes repairs difficult, but also with absurdities of structure which make difficult and even dangerous the care of the machine necessary to its daily use. Among such deviltries—and they are numberless—are parts so placed that only a contortionist could reach them, spaces through which the hand must pass which are too small and cramped for the hand, and oil drains which require a gutter if the oil is not to mess up everything.

The country tradition of the handcrafts would be ashamed of any such neglect and scorn of our humanity. I am sure however, that this same scorn and perversity has a role in the making of our fatigues and discontents. It may be a mere detail, but it's not a small one when you are tying yourself in exasperated knots with a greasy monkey wrench.

It is not remarkable that people who think seriously about a humanized future commonly have ideas that fit together. Ralph Borsodi, for example, long ago pointed out that engineers in the United States have given little or no attention to the development of small production units—the sort of machinery that might make something equivalent to "cottage industry" possible for a people many of whom are natural technologists, and in time decentralize both production and employment to a much greater extent. Actually, such a future will require not only a new generation of engineers, but also a lot of new textbooks concerned with the practical needs of a society which makes collaboration with both nature and man its first rule and intention. It isn't really "impractical" to go back to simple tools, in preference to the efficiencies of industrial farming. There is doubtless a happy medium to be figured out, but the obvious "efficiencies" of a chemical pellet containing all necessary nutrition—no tiresome "chewing," no time wasted just *eating*—are quite ridiculous as justification for giving up enjoyable meals. Those scientists are out of their minds, we say. But what about efficiencies which cost us other natural joys—serenities now in such short supply that even their existence is in doubt? The young are carrying on experiments in this region of the unknown.

FRONTIERS What Is an Artist?

[This article by Robert Jay Wolff is based on a paper read at an Annual Faculty Day at Brooklyn College in New York, and subsequently published in the *College Art Journal* for the Summer of 1957.]

THERE is one thing that most artists have in common, at least those in the visual fields. It is a final indifference to the interpretive concept, to truth without consequences, to the word without music, to thought without action. Because of their resistance to word thoughts, artists usually do not write, or if they do, they tend to write exasperated nonsense.

An artist is first of all a person with a highly sharpened sensory intelligence. In unison with his mental processes he thinks with his eyes, his ears, his sense of touch; with his insights, his sensibilities and his heart. With him thought is not a game of verbal abstractions. His mind gives order rather than orders to experience. Because his intelligence strives for wholeness he does not place the usual desperate and exclusive reliance on prescribed patterns of rationality for his life's equilibrium. To a brain-bound world he seems always to be flirting with chaos, but more often than not surprises it by his indestructibility.

Of course the problem of creativity is not centered exclusively in the struggle of the practicing artist. But if we are looking for valid insights into the general human problem certainly here is a primary source. For creativity is not a concept. It is a force, an active condition. We can perhaps set it in motion, guide it and discipline it, but can we really say what it is? And why should we want to? As far as I know no concept of creativity has ever induced creativity.

Still, on the other hand, this force does not necessarily flourish in an intellectual and cultural vacuum. Among students, we know from experience that where there is a persistent indifference to the great expressive efforts of the past and present, the result is not free and original

and self-expressive as some would have it, but on the contrary it is dismally frustrated and self-repressed. There is nothing more distressing to me than the sight of a culturally marooned victim of "progressive" art education playing creative patty cake with a dull look in his eye and a scowl on his face.

Creative achievement is intimately bound up in the whole scope of the life from which it has been projected and, indeed, the heart of creativity lies somewhere in depths of memory and insight that have never been reached by rationality, by logic or learned analysis. The expressive projection of these insights into a crafted creation is only the last half of the whole story. Without the first half the creative effort drugs itself with technical know-how in the production of well-tested stereotypes.

This is certainly one of the strongest arguments against early specialization in education, against the art school for instance, in favor of a truly broad and liberal pattern of learning. Even more, we may find the reason here for the failure of formal education on any basis, at least in the pre-professional stages of a young person's development, and for an eventual re-evaluation and replacement of our traditional concepts of educational structure.

The greatest need today, even in the work-a-day world, is for the ability, the fortitude and the intelligence to explore and grasp the unadorned and unexplained reality at hand. The specialist's mind (the art school mind, for example) is oriented only to know-how and is completely stalled when confronted with the real challenge which is to live anonymously within and to finally sense the nature of the raw condition requiring the creative effort. This challenge must be met before the tools and trappings of the act of achievement can be used to meaningful purpose.

To face this pre-existence of creation, to confront its formless chaotic ferment, is perhaps the darkest and most distressing part of the creative development. For here is a violently alive

existence, without direction or order, vastly diverse and wholly anonymous. This is the awesome wilderness, the fear of which results in the shoddy contrivances of those without the courage to explore it, and whose hasty and meaningless productions give the comforting illusion of having conquered what, in fact, they have contrived to evade. This is the well-known escape from nowhere to anywhere, into æsthetic monasticism or artistic opportunism, or into that mawkish blend of art and life where you get a little of both and not enough of either.

The duality of art and life cannot be overcome by attempts to combine them into a single entity (that is, a slightly more artful life or a slightly more life-like art), nor by evading one for the other, but paradoxically, only by allowing each a complete and self-nourishing independence, and by somehow living fully within both. Finally one finds that the tension created by the mutual antagonisms inherent in such co-existence is actually the principal artery from which both the conscious creative effort and the artless act of life draw their greatest vitality.

To me, art like nature is an inner force rather than a spectacle to be viewed and appraised. The final, panoramic view is not really nature but a kind of symbol or reflection of it. Nature is not the sight of the forest, it is the sap in the tree, just as art and education too, for that matter, are animate conditions and not polished and petrified achievements.

When asked about the source of such beliefs the only authority I can turn to is experience. Most of my life has been lived in cities where only the spectacular and final fruits of the processes of nature are met. I was always puzzled about my completely negative reaction to the sight of cut flowers in a bowl or a hot-house plant in full bloom. I wondered about this and in self-defense concocted a notion vaguely based on the separation of art and nature. I did not fully understand these feelings until I moved to the country and began to grow my own plants. I did

not realize at first what was happening to me, but before long I found myself as involved in the growth of a transplanted gardenia slip as I am in the growth of one of my paintings. And for some strange reason I found that everything I touched flourished to the point where today, after six years, the house is beginning to look like a jungle. I did not understand it myself until one Easter when I brought home a magnificent hydrangea plant and subsequently let it dry out while I fretted over a dozen pots of tiny geranium slips that I had just cut and planted.

One could draw certain hasty conclusions at this point; for instance that creativity has no meaning beyond its own process and that there is no valid satisfaction in the contemplation and enjoyment of its fruits. In answer to this I can only refer to a day when a houseful of guests were subjected to my irrepressible admiration of a geranium plant which I had been nursing for five years, and which finally gave forth with over two dozen of the most exquisite blossoms I have ever seen. In the light of the fact that my interest in the same plant in a New York florist's window would no doubt be slight, it could be said that my enthusiasm was sheer vanity. And so it was, partly. But there was also the presence of that sense of shock and surprise when a long and sustained involvement in the growing aspects of a living thing or a work of art is suddenly crystallized into a single, all-embracing manifestation, where the whole creative process is finally and tangibly confirmed. And yet, great as this moment is, it cannot stand alone and will disintegrate under the effort to make it an end in itself. It should be taken as a heart-lifting indication along the way that all is well.

Years ago, when Biology or Chemistry majors would surprise me by electing our Basic Design workshop, I was always as puzzled by their outstanding performances as I was exasperated with the stereotyped virtuosity with which many art-minded students went about their tasks. But I soon discovered that the young

scientist had a distinct advantage. Having no idea where he was going or where he would like to go in art, his only security was in the firmness of each step he took. The Art major, smug in the notion of what he thought he was after, expected the instructor to provide the vehicle that would get him there. It was always a great satisfaction to see the pleased surprise of the science major when he found that the sustained firmness of his steps actually led him somewhere. And it was even a greater satisfaction to observe the dismay of the art student when he compared results.

Creativity, if it can be defined, would mean to me a self-propelled exertion of all the faculties to preserve and nourish the diverse forces of nature in oneself through an inventive, disciplined and, if possible, æsthetic structuring of the outer facets of one's existence. Creativity is the establishing of an equilibrium between the inner life with all its mysterious power, its turmoil and its penetrating intuitions, and the particular outer structure which is created to contain and express it. Creativity to me is in the effort whether it fails or succeeds. Works of art are exciting and inspiring to me only insofar as they confirm the presence and force of my own creative exertions. In this sense I believe one can only establish a living affinity with great works. One cannot ever fully understand them.

It is said that knowing something about a work of art will bring one closer to it. I believe it is the other way around and that knowledge in this sense remains merely decorative without the propelling power of a deeper creative bond.

Since this approach to a work of art seems possible only where there has been some experience with the creative problem, it can reasonably be asked, "If this is true then do only practicing artists have the key to art? What about the rest of us? If art is not made for the people of the world, then what is the reason for it? Do we all have to become artists?"

My answer to this last question is that yes, in a way, people have to become artists before works of art live for them. Putting it in another

way, they will have to drop the notion that, given some æsthetic sensibility, an agile brain and a willing eye, art can be educated into them. The only door to this realm is creative effort and self-generated revelation.

As far as I am concerned, the main task of education is not to improve the view from the doorway but to entice more people to pass through it.

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