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THE ABILITY TO PERCEIVE WHOLES

THERE is an interesting correspondence between something said recently by Erich Fromm and a passage in Philip Slater's *Earthwalk.* Dr. Fromm is concerned with the contrast between the everyday normal thinking we do and the assumptions of foreign policy. We know, for example, that the person who has an inordinate fear of *germs*—who confines his entire life in a fanatically antiseptic pattern, refusing, say, to touch doorknobs because he might encounter a dangerous bacillus—is a victim of paranoia. Dr. Fromm suggests that when it comes to foreign policy we similarly abandon our common sense, adopting the paranoid assumption that evil and danger lurk everywhere about, waiting to pounce. In an article which appeared in the *New York Times* for last Dec. 11, Fromm wrote:

> In individual life we know the irrationality of people who strive for absolute security—people such as hypochondriacs who spend most of their energy protecting their health, or overcautious people who avoid any risk, because it could interfere with their craving for absolute security.
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> This craving is irrational (1) because there is no absolute security in life, (2) because once it is established as the dominant goal there is no limit to the means sought for to reach this goal, (3) because in the search for this goal the person cripples himself and loses all pleasure in living. . . .
>
> Those who demand that political decisions must be made on the basis of excluding all dangerous possibilities "beyond the shadow of a doubt" make a sane foreign policy virtually impossible. Hence the arms race, on the basis of this paranoid logic, since one can never prove that certain things could not *possibly* occur. . . . *In our obsession to consider all possibilities we end up by not considering the real probabilities.*

Why do we submit to, and sometimes desperately encourage, paranoid thinking with respect to national affairs, while rejecting it easily in our own lives? Dr. Fromm thinks it is because we are remote from contact with people in other nations, and trust, therefore, in the logical abstractions of the various "war colleges"—the Rand sort of think tanks—staffed by men hired as specialists to anticipate the worst possible developments in international affairs. He points to the inevitable consequence—"paranoid thinking is mutually infectious." The policies of other nations become paranoid, too.

Another reason for submitting to the paranoid thinking of political leaders is that the average voter attends to his political responsibilities with only a small portion of his intelligence and attention. Both the power and the responsibility have been delegated to others. We don't really feel that we are participants in such decisions, although giving up responsibility is indeed an act of decision, since it leaves far-reaching choices in the hands of those who have made compulsive paranoid thinking a lifework and career.

In addition, as a matter of course, when people talk about the behavior of other nations, they speak only of the surface aspect of events—what is done by *their* paranoid thinkers and leaders—taking this distorted part, because of its extreme visibility, for the acts of whole populations. Philip Slater examines this concentration on visible externalities more broadly, showing it to be a basic ill of modern civilization. He sees its effects in medicine, technology, and elsewhere throughout our lives. What can be objectified and neatly defined, and then converted into logical formulations, tend to become our only realities. He writes:

> Consider the fanatical zeal with which moribund patients are kept alive with tubes, wires, and chemicals. For whom is this heroic effort made? For the patient, who is unconscious? Had she been asked (and of course she never is—her body belongs to the institution, it would seem), she would probably

have expressed a desire to leave this inhuman environment and die at home among her loved ones. . . .

Boosters of technological progress have always emphasized the joys of mastery. Yet it is interesting that the word "accomplishment" means to fill up, to complete. But what is lacking? No one on earth seems to feel as incomplete as the Western man. . . . Could there be any relationship between his stubborn insistence on perceiving the world as a series of disconnected parts and his inability to feel whole? And could the frantic and ceaseless energy output of Western man, as well as the bewildering proliferation of information, artifacts, and enterprises, all come from trying desperately to create the missing whole by the futile procedure of adding more disconnected parts. . . .

I want merely to point out that the inability to perceive wholes usually goes by the name "rationalism," for some reason. The strategy is a simple one. If you operate with quantitative criteria, as rationalists always do, then it is more important to be right about details than about totalities, since there are far more parts than there are wholes.

Actually, this is an increasingly common diagnosis, these days. What is missing is acceptable prescriptions. Often we are told that what we need and must have is "world government," or that we must put the proper people in charge, but if we have learned anything at all from experience we ought to know that so long as a population can be led about by even good men, it is equally vulnerable to the seductive appeals of power-hungry politicians. Just look at the condition of national politics, these days, and ask how difficult it must be for a really *good* man to be elected to office without ever using the finely honed tools of paranoid thinking which are always available for money. Moreover, the positions of power in our society are tightly enclosed by walls of paranoid thinking, making them virtual prisons for good men. How much can they do against the grain of mass susceptibilities?

It seems obvious that the very mind of the age must recover its health before the insights and talents of responsible leaders can find a field for constructive action. What then should we work on? What must be done? Another psychologist proposes self-education in holistic thinking. He uses the language of psychiatry, but its application to what Dr. Fromm and Philip Slater are talking about seems plain enough. In *Neurosis and Treatment—a Holistic Theory,* Andras Angyal puts the matter in a few words:

In the healthy orientation it is possible to perceive wholes, to see things in a wide perspective, to receive impressions which point beyond the datum itself continuity and intentionality make the world meaningful. In the neurotic orientation, the things and events of the world appear as isolated items or fragments. The long view is replaced by shortsightedness; the fresh outlook yields to a stereotyped and biased one. Impressions cannot be fully valued and enjoyed, because their pointing quality, their "message character" is lost; the result is a truncated experience. . . .

The healthy pattern must be sought and uncovered, not within the pseudonormal surface personality where its vestiges serve merely to disguise the neurotic assumptions, but within the depth of the neurosis itself. Only when the destructive and self-destructive attitudes . . . can themselves be shown to be distortions of healthy trends is contact with the real self established. . . . Real understanding traces the neurotic manifestation all the way back to its healthy sources. When the neurosis is discovered to be an approximation or a twisted version of health, the patient's outlook becomes hopeful.

One other writer has put this process of distortion—what has happened to our use of the mind—in more general language. Erich Kahler says:

Reason is a human faculty, inherent in the human being as such; rationality is a technical function, a technicalization and functionalization of the ways in which reason proceeds. Functionalization makes rationality capable of being detached from its human source, and generalized as an abstract, logical method.

This method, divorced from its human source, is indeed what Philip Slater speaks of as the incapacity to perceive wholes. Only recently, says Kahler, has the excess of specialization by modern man caused rationality to become

"completely independent of, indeed radically opposed to human reason."

It might be said that we are beginning to feel this opposition acutely. Who, asks Slater, feels "as incomplete as Western man"? The cry of mutilated awareness, of longing to be whole, is heard on every hand. Mr. Kahler completes his brief analysis: "And just as the expansion of collective consciousness entails the shrinking of individual consciousness, rationality grows at the expense of reason."

No doubt many inner, personal healings are required. But as Maslow pointed out some years ago, there are not nearly enough psychoanalysts or therapists to deal with this problem—supposing they know how—and, indeed, a great many people are not temperamentally able to be helped in this way. The problem is not medical or psychological in any specified or professional sense: it is a cultural problem growing out of the way we use our minds from day to day, and out of the habits we fall into without noticing their confining and debilitating effect.

Yet it is within everyone's capacity to begin to use the mind, or reason, in its natural, original mode, as inherent in human beings. Bringing this idea into focus on such matters as foreign policy means seeing not only the "good" in other human beings, but seeing the good or the health hidden behind their distorted conceptions. Sooner or later we must learn to recognize the misused health in our own neurotic tendencies, and to understand how the natural energy and defensive instincts of the organism came to be drafted by the forces of self-defeat. But mainly, and at the beginning, we can practice this sort of discovery by learning to look at other people in their wholeness and deep humanity—something journalism and popular reading have made very difficult to do.

Consider the Chinese and, until recently, our almost total ignorance of this most numerous race and nation in the world, who happen also to represent one of the most ancient of its civilizations. China is more than the late Chou En-lai and the aging Mao Tse-tung. Lately we have been turning the pages of *Forever China* (Dodd, Mead), a book by Robert Payne published in 1945. During the war Payne was caught behind the Chinese lines and he remained in that country for several years, teaching English in the University of Chungking. Somehow, after a little reading in this book, all one's preconceptions about the Chinese fall away as irrelevant. The Chinese are like us, and also, of course, not like us. Most memorable of all Payne's recollections were about the students:

> I know nothing about the technique of teaching. You stand against a blackboard, you address a crowd of students at seven o'clock in the morning, when it is raining and great clouds of smoky mist are drifting over the flower-beds outside. Because you are afraid that the students will fail to understand you, you write out on the blackboard interminable sentences of quotation and analysis until your elbows grow weary and your coat is covered in a soft powder of chalk. You are entranced by the nervous intensity in the expression of a young student from Shantung and by the serenity in the face of a young girl in a flowered gown. You try to speak clearly and slowly, and yet, intoxicated by the beauty of the English language and by the curious sensation that they really understand every word you say, you begin to talk faster and faster. The quotation from Katherine Mansfield or Charles Doughty is smeared from the blackboard. You begin to ask questions, and suddenly you realize that everything that the English language has in common with Chinese they understand; but all that is peculiar to English is foreign to them. They are perfectly polite, they make the most graceful bows and inclinations, but all the time they seem to be wondering: "Is this really a language? Chinese is much simpler, and all this talk of stress and rhythms in prose is quite foreign to us, since the Chinese language still works by almost mathematical rules."
>
> I think I have found a way out. The English lyric and the Chinese Iyric are very close to one another. If I have time, I shall write a book on English poetry for Chinese students, and I shall deliberately select those poems which approach most rapidly to the Chinese idiom. Z. agrees with the plan. He loves English poetry with a passion which can only be derived from the fact that he reads it through a mind steeped in Chinese poetry. He chants English

> poetry as he chants Chinese poetry in a deep fluttering voice which pays no attention to syllables or even to rhythm, in the "voice of an intoxicated bird." There is no other way to describe the voices of Chinese scholars when they are singing their native poetry. And ever since we have discussed the plan, he has been discovering new similarities between the two poetries.

Hearn, in his *Talks to Writers,* a book made of lectures he gave to Japanese students in the late 1890's, speaks of the importance of knowing the life and literature of other peoples. He told the students of the awakening of the English people to the character of the Russians after they began reading in translation the works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Pushkin, and Kropotkin:

> The great work of making Russia understood was accomplished chiefly by her novelists and story-tellers. After having read those wonderful books, written with a simple strength of which we have no parallel in western literature, except the works of a few Scandinavian writers, the great nations of the West could no longer think of Russians as a people having no kinship with them. Those books proved that the human heart felt and loved and suffered in Russia, just as in England, or France, or Germany; but they also taught something about the peculiar and very great virtues of the Russian people, the Russian masses—their infinite patience, their courage, their loyalty, and their great faith. For though we could not call these pictures of life beautiful (many of them are very terrible, very cruel), there is much of what is beautiful in human nature to be read between the lines. The gloom of Turgenev and of his brothers in fiction only serves to make the light more beautiful by contrast. And what has been the result? A total change of western feeling towards the Russian people. I do not mean that western opinion has been at all changed as regards the Russian government. Politically Russia remains the nightmare of Europe. But what the people are has been learned, and well learned, through Russian literature; and a general feeling of kindliness and of human sympathy has taken the place of the hatred and dislike that formerly used to tone popular utterances in regard to Russians in general.

We all know that history is more than a succession of wars; that understanding the past has little to do with a list of dates marking political happenings and punctuating changes in government. Yet when it comes to current history, we are content to read little else. The papers provide nothing but reports of ideological rivalries and military activities, either expected or going on. How can a child who grows up in this atmosphere escape infection with paranoid thinking? He may, of course, reject his own culture, but this, alas, is in some ways an adolescent form of paranoia—the young refuse to recognize the good qualities which persist at home, however hidden behind the "twisted version of health."

The reading we have been suggesting is only a sample or two, yet the sources of such reading are endless. This is one way, at least, of recovering the ability to see things whole. Another passage from Payne:

> I spent some time in the hydrology department. On the wall were maps of the Yellow River, the scourge of China; and I was not surprised that most of the students came from the north. There was a young Dutch professor of hydraulics, who spoke about the lives of the students with more hero-worship than I had seen in the eyes of a professor before.
>
> "They live on nothing and they work like madmen," he said. "I gave them an examination a little while ago. One of my best students fainted during the examination. I found that he had been studying for sixty-four hours without stopping, without having any food. He finished the paper—the whole paper—in about half an hour, and then he fainted. This is the kind of thing we are faced with—students who continually sacrifice their health for the sake of knowledge. And yet what use will be their knowledge if they are dead before they practice it?" He was filled with fear for the students. Their food was bad, almost all of them were penniless. . . .
>
> China is rich, too rich in her children, and yet there is hardly a child who is not graceful and even beautiful. I have seen in Europe in the ghettos of Cracow, for example—many deformed children, and there are many deformed children in China; but I have never seen a country where the children are so full of vitality. I have seen children, especially the children of rich parents, who looked as though they were dead to the world, without life, the sap no longer flowing through them. But here, even when they are quite silent, their faces are filled with the most

> intense expressions of amusement, enjoyment or melancholy.

There is this casual expression toward the end of the book:

> Lin Tungchi suggested that we should choose a hundred poems from Chinese literature and another hundred from European literature, and inscribe them on the mountains. There are bare cliffs quite near here where the poems could be inscribed; and I know a hill in Westmorland where we might do the same thing.
>
> But where shall be begin? The whole of the *Iliad?* The whole of the *Divina Commedia?* The whole of *Faust?* I had almost forgotten these, and Lin Tungchi had almost forgotten the *Li Sao,* which is only a quarter the length of *Paradise Lost,* but still too long to engrave on a mountain. We discussed the magnificent monuments carved out of hills by which Americans seek to commemorate their dead statesmen. "It might have been better," he said, "if they had carved their great books instead."
>
> We know, now, even more than in 1918, that civilizations are mortal. They have their flowering periods and die, they grow according to known laws, and their deaths are inevitable. European civilization, as we know it today, may continue for five hundred years—scarcely longer,—for we are on the threshold of a final mingling of cultures. Today the ancient culture of China is nearer to that of Europe and America than it has ever been. Indian civilization is still almost unknown; but it will soon be known, for already the gates are breaking down; and New England, which brought us the forest philosophers, may yet see Chinese philosophy in its midst. These three cultures are those on which we shall live; and since the fate of the world lies on our understanding of them, it may be that in the history of the earth the roads which are being cut between India and China are more important than all the terrible battles which are being waged in the West.

This is an example of mind in its health, of the use of reason as a human faculty. This capacity and use of the mind lie beneath the neurotic symptoms of the time—the incapacity to see things whole. Until those who have something of this capacity use it more consistently and insistently, helping and teaching others to do the same, civilization will continue to be "at the mercy of soldiers." And what sort of civilization is that?

REVIEW
REFLECTIONS ON MEANING

SOONER or later the books you read declare something about meaning. Meaning may not be discussed but simply affirmed, as in a poem which rises from the tumult of life to exclaim at certain wonders or to celebrate pain and delight. The poet seeks your assent, or he takes it for granted, assuming that your perception and feeling will join with his. For the moment, Keats's classic interchangeables, Truth and Beauty, are sufficient for his purposes and yours. The capture of a flashing delight—"What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"—needs no explanation; the meaning is not explained but evoked. Or the pain of universal human longing may be the substance, as in Shelley's Ode to the West Wind:

> Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
> I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed !
> A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
> One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

There are times when meaning is implicit, locked in the rhythms of a confident march; no one needs explanation during the years of happy achievement when a vast consensus prevails. The feelings of humans come out like the chorus of an old hymn that everyone learned in childhood. It is almost a blasphemy to call reflective attention to this faith. To notice it is to question it. Some daring is required to examine meaning as a conscious enterprise, since there are some ideas or feelings of meaning which collapse like a house of cards when too closely inspected. The complacent Athenians did not want their gods interrogated for deeper meanings and they saw in the Socratic inquiry an attack on the foundation of their lives. Do not ask us to choose, they said; we chose long ago, and we are right!

The locus of meaning seems to move around. For an entire age it may be sought entirely in the splendors of nature. There is no reality but in *things,* the poet insists; and the scientists will listen to no one who does not perform experiments. Metaphysicians and even theorists gain no audience. "Don't think, find out!" is the cry. Start with atoms and the void; locate the atoms, map their motions, and all will become predictable and clear, La Place declared.

But from year to year, almost imperceptibly, moods change in relation to what is happening, what is deemed important in human life. Novelists are often barometers. They don't argue, they disclose. New feelings about meaning emerge, altering the lives of their characters. Herbert Lieberman's *Crawlspace* (McKay, 1971) is a good example. This book tells the story of an aging couple who have retired to a small country town to live out their lives in peace. The man has had a heart attack and must be careful. They are quite ordinary but very decent people with some admirable qualities beneath their conventional selves. The story builds like a familiar horror tale: a young man, a transient whom they have befriended, moves in with the couple. He has intensities that make them stubbornly loyal to him, but he does barbaric things they find frightening. He combines fierce determination with total indifference to community opinion. There is no compromise in him; his will to be only his incomprehensible self spreads its effect like the slow descent of a glacier. A feeling-tone of dark, implacable destiny now pervades the story, making you wish you hadn't begun it. Yet the harsh integrity of the visitor commands respect, even awe, and while he harasses his hosts, he seems quite unaware of his effect on the lives of the aging man and woman he has adopted as his family. Who is this young man? What part, finally, will he have in the story?

Two things happen at the end. After the young visitor is killed in an encounter with some enraged rednecks who live in the area, the husband, who tells the story, is overtaken by a heart attack which leaves him in a deep coma. This is mistaken for death, but he manages to give faint signs of breathing before the mortician goes to work on his body. Then he lies in the coma for five days. During this time he leaves his body and goes on excursions which seem to have inner meaning. He sees people but can't make them feel his presence. He walks right through them. The matter of fact account of this experience is undramatic but intensely interesting. The author seems to attach to it no more unlikelihood than he would to having one of his characters take a week's

vacation at the beach. The narrator tells how he leaves the body, describes the texture of his premature "post-mortem" form, and relates the appearance of the world to his now disembodied consciousness. Then he is made to realize that he must go back and occupy his body again—that the time for his death has not come.

This sudden and apparently unrelated climax has an interesting effect on the reader: Instead of saying to yourself, "Well, this seems true!" or "It can't be true!" you may wonder about the comparative *accuracy* of the account. Is this really what happens after death? If it is, then it certainly reduces death itself to something unimportant. For this reason Mr. Lieberman's story reminds one of Basil King's account of dying in *The Spreading Dawn,* which has a similar quality; and its naturalism is in distinct contrast with, say, Anthony West's *The Vintage,* in which the author develops a full mythology of the afterlife. The heart victim's disembodied journeyings are not mythic. Another work, Sutton Vane's play, *Outward Bound,* which unfolds the out-of-the-body experiences of two young people who attempt suicide, but fortunately fail and return to life, is also recalled by Lieberman's book; but the point, here, is that the after-death experience in *Crawlspace* has no deliberately symbolic framework. The experience is presented as simply and directly as other parts of the story. Its acceptability suggests that our background assumptions of meaning and human possibility have changed. The author may mean to indicate that they have changed.

The other thing that happens at the end of *Crawlspace* is the discovery that the dead young man was the son of a Cheyenne Indian. After the couple moved to Florida to begin a new life far from the scene of the disaster, the Indian father comes there to thank them for their kindness to his boy. The reader then begins to realize that these two middle-class Americans, kindly and generous people, have been made to experience the terrible simplicities of a species of human that knows nothing of the familiar adjustments to convention that are commonly believed to make modern life . tolerable. Suddenly the reader understands why this childless couple came to love the youth, and also why they had little hope of dealing with the archaic energies and loyalties on which his life depended.

The narrator tries to explain to the Indian father what happened:

> Suddenly I felt a need to tell everything. To unburden myself. "When things got very bad . . . we got very frightened and I asked him to leave. I ordered him out—"
>
> "He killed someone," said Graycloud. His voice was like stone.
>
> "He killed someone defending us, and I abandoned him, I said.
>
> "I don't blame you," said Graycloud. . . . "What you did, you hadda do."
>
> "I could have had the decency to die with him."
>
> Graycloud's eyes narrowed exactly the way I'd seen Richard's do so many times.
>
> "That's what an Indian would've done," he said. "White man are something else." There was no accusation in it. He had simply stated a matter of fact as he saw it.

That's the way the story ends. The reader is left to brood about the incompatibilities of systems of meaning. The Indian boy was heroic and intolerable, magnificent and doomed. The novelist has the privilege of leaving things this way. Or it is his *obligation* to leave things this way. (Only scientists are permitted to leave out entirely what they can't explain.) What begins as an ordinary horror story turns on you like a treacherous animal, biting you with insoluble cultural contradiction. Yet the pain is oddly leavened with eschatological possibilities that vaguely suggest some transcendental resolution of the unbearable dilemma imposed upon the characters. You have been truly surprised and made to wonder by this book, which gives the story a strangely reverberative effect.

COMMENTARY
A TIME OF DISORDER

IN *The New American Ideology* (Knopf, 1975) George Cabot Lodge, professor of business administration at the Harvard School of Business, illustrates the inability to see wholes in higher education:

> America's universities, organized traditionally to serve the specialized interests of the community's institutions, are finding it difficult to rearrange the old structures of scholarship to provide students with ways of grappling with the changing whole. They seem unable either to reveal or to explore the ties that bind genetics to politics, government to psychology, or ecology to philosophy and economics. The old categories of knowledge frequently resemble straight-line tangents to the circle of reality, while the demands for integration are increasing. The traditional institutions of religion and culture are likewise in difficulty—they are splintered, and the splinters are rotting. Sects, often exotic, are multiplying. The resounding truth seems to be that of the Katha Upanishad: "Who sees the variety and not the unity, wanders from death to death."

Quite obviously, this is a time for calling the cultural turn. In his stance as a teacher of business administration, Mr. Lodge sees the faith and practice of corporate enterprise disintegrating before his eyes. In his stance as a thinking human being, he sees the sources of that faith and practice drying up; the world is withdrawing its confidence from the principles that have defined meaning almost to the middle of the twentieth century. They weren't really principles, he seems to be saying. Principles illuminate unities, but we have been dealing in empirical ad hoc fashion with variety, and have lost our way.

You could say that Western thought has been a long series of oscillations between ordering unities and the unresolved diversities encountered in life. And to this day we don't know how to resolve the contradiction put so well by the Greek poet, Archilochus:

> "The Fox knows many things, but the Hedgehog knows one big thing."

The many things which press upon us declare their importance through defiant contrast with the one big thing—the underlying but mysterious unity we feel but cannot explain. Having lost ourselves in diversity, as the Upanishad had warned would happen, we are now looking for explanatory and guiding unities, with all the chastened fervor of the Prodigal Son.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
FOUNDATION OF MORAL EDUCATION

SHORTLY after the March 17 MANAS appeared, with comment (in the lead article) on the recently published volume, *Moral Development,* we received from a reader a copy of Herbert Read's *The Redemption of the Robot* (Simon & Schuster paperback, 1969). The contrast between the quoted criticism of *Moral Development* and Read's confident exposition of Plato's views on this subject was too striking to ignore. The reviewer said:

> So the reader will not learn from this book how to prevent a Watergate, or how to raise a virtuous child, or even how to improve his own character; but he may learn quite a bit about the intellectual and empirical habits of social and development psychologists when they grapple with great issues.

In his introduction to *Redemption* Read states his aim, stressing its urgency:

> War, as Rousseau pointed out long before Tolstoy took up the theme, only makes manifest events already determined by moral causes (*Emile,* Bk. IV). For this reason our main energies must be directed against the moral causes of war. Those moral causes lie within ourselves—and pacifists should not suppose for a moment that they are pure in heart in this respect. The moral regeneration of mankind can be accomplished only by moral education, and until moral education is given priority over all other forms of education, I see no hope for the world. I have already indicated what I mean by moral education—*not* education by moral precept, but education by moral practice, which in effect means education by aesthetic discipline.

Read means education on Platonic lines:

> The claims made by Plato for an aesthetic mode of education are quite simply stated. Indeed, one cannot do better than translate Plato's own words. "We attach such supreme importance to musical education"—he makes Socrates say in the *Republic* (III, 401-2)—"because rhythm and harmony sink most deeply into the recesses of the soul, and take most powerful hold of it, bringing gracefulness in their train, and making a man graceful if he be rightly nurtured, but if not, the reverse." Plato then describes, in what we call considerable psychological detail, the exact effects of rhythm and harmony on the growing mind. But he does not, as is too often assumed in the discussions of his educational theories, ascribe these qualities to music only. He says that the same qualities "enter largely into painting and all similar workmanship, into weaving and embroidery, into architecture, as well as the whole manufacture of utensils in general, nay, into the constitution of living bodies, and of all plants; for in all these things gracefulness or ungracefulness finds place." And he adds, for he has always the negative picture in mind, "The absence of grace, rhythm, and harmony is closely related to an evil style and an evil character."

Read makes this comment:

> There is something at once so simple and so comprehensive about this theory of Plato's that really we do not need to go beyond it. Music, painting, the making of useful objects, the proportions of the living body and of plants, these will, if made the basis of our educational methods, instill into the child a grace and harmony which will give it, not merely a noble bearing, but also a noble character; not only a graceful body, but also a sober mind. It will do this, says Plato, long before the child is able to reason, because it will inculcate what he calls, "the. instinct of relationship," and it is upon this instinct that reason itself depends. Possessing this instinct, the child will never do wrong in deed or thought.

Read is not actually guaranteeing this result, but saying simply that children who grow up by learning to be on the side of life, moving and expressing themselves in the rhythms of life, are far less likely to violate the spirit of life than those who never learn these ways and are unable to respond spontaneously to life's multitudinous modes. Read also points out that if we dislike the expression "aesthetic education," we have an obligation to learn what Plato meant by it, in contrast to its present implication or meaning. He quotes A. E. Taylor on this point:

> To Plato, as a true Greek, the ugliness of conduct which is morally out of place is the most immediately salient fact about it, and the beauty of holiness, if scriptural phrase may be permitted, is something more than a metaphor. To judge by the tone of much of our literature, we are less sensitive on

> the point; we seem slow to perceive ugliness in wrongdoing as such, or even ready to concede the "artistry" of great wickedness. It may be a wholesome discipline to consider carefully whether this difference of feeling may not be less due to a confusion on Plato's part between the beautiful and morally good than to a certain aesthetic imperceptiveness of ours.

In matters of this sort, we can do no better than quote from Herbert Read and repeat the passages from Plato which he selects. He finds the *Laws* clearer on this subject than the *Republic:*

> The theory, I would maintain, is as simple as it is true. It is this: that the aim of education should be to associate feelings of pleasure with what is good and feelings of pain with what is evil. Now such *feelings* are aesthetic—a fact which would have been obvious to the Greeks. This word aesthetic as we use it is cold and abstract, but it indicates a relationship which to the Greeks was very real and organic, a property of the physiological reactions which take place in the process of perception.
>
> Now, says Plato, there exist in the physical universe, which we experience through our senses, certain rhythms, melodies, and abstract proportions which when perceived convey to the open mind a sensation of pleasure. For the moment we need not consider *why* these rhythms and proportions exist: they are simply part of the given universe. But if, says Plato, we can associate the concrete sensation of pleasure given by these rhythms and proportions with good, and the concrete sensation of pain given by the opposite qualities of disharmony and ugliness with evil; if we can do this systematically in the early years, while the infant mind is still open to such influences, then we shall have set up an association between natural and spontaneous feelings and graceful or noble behavior.

The supporting passage in Plato's *Laws* (in Taylor's translation) is this:

> And therefore what I would say is this: a child's first infant consciousness is that of pleasure and pain, this is the domain wherein the soul first acquires virtue or vice. . . . By education I mean goodness in the form in which it is first acquired by a child. In fact, if pleasure and liking, pain and dislike, are formed in the soul on right lines before the age of understanding is reached, and when that age is attained, these feelings are in concord with the understanding, thanks to early discipline in appropriate habits-—this concord, regarded as a whole, is virtue. But if you consider the one factor in it, the rightly disciplined state of pleasures and pains whereby a man, from his first beginnings on, will abhor what he should abhor and relish what he should relish—if you isolate this factor and call it education, you will be giving it its true name.

Read says two important things at the end of his book: First, that Plato had no intention of creating more poets and artists as a solution—his interest was in integrated human beings, people made whole by their own practice; second, Read had no expectation of abolishing existing educational institutions. "It would be easier," he said, "to disband the armies and navies of the world than the forces which administer our educational systems." He suggested leaving them to die a natural death. "The new institutions, the new methods of education, the inspired pedagogues who must precede a new civilization, will spring up piecemeal, in isolated and unexpected places."

Read sides with Adam Smith, Godwin, and Gandhi in declaring against education by the state. Education must never be allowed to become the tool of politics. He quotes Godwin: "It is not true that our youth ought to be instructed to venerate the constitution, however excellent; they should be instructed to venerate truth, and the Constitution only so far as it corresponded with their independent deductions of truth."

The anxious question of how children can be isolated from present environmental influences which oppose the spirit of what Plato proposes has a simple answer. They can't be isolated. The young must learn to cope, not be preserved in vulnerable innocence. When the young grow up in a community of adults who are deliberately selecting constructive, harmonious activities, and rejecting others, they learn more than a "perfect" environment could ever teach them. The perfect environment, like the perfect school, does not exist. Moreover, cloistering the young is more likely to produce rebels than model children. The good human life is never a sure thing.

FRONTIERS

A More Than Technical Problem

YEARS ago Walker Winslow—who wrote *If a Man Be Mad,* one of the best of the books on alcoholism and mental illness—used to say that he knew too much about alcoholism to get published on the subject. The editors, he said, want material that is only half-informed, articles dealing excitedly with undigested facts and urging political solutions. They want exposés and shockers that sell magazines or books.

The public, it appears, is convinced that if we can learn the true facts, we shall be able to *change* things for the better. So writers investigate and muckrake—there's an endless supply of muck to rake—and editors publish their revelations. Usually, nothing of any lasting importance results.

In the April *Harper's* a reviewer discussing a book on crime by Ernest van den Haag had this to say:

> Our treatment of crime over the past fifteen or twenty years is a tribute to America's piety toward intellectuals and "experts." Such respect for the great minds of the Republic is admirable and should go far toward gainsaying those who insist that anti-intellectualism runs along the spinal column of America. Unfortunately, our policy makers have been esteeming the wrong intellectuals. They have been listening to those who blame crime on poverty, oppression, ignorance illness, and assorted social evils, and in the meantime the crime rate has lofted out toward the ionosphere. The crime rate increased from 1960 to 1970 by 144 per cent. . . .

Meanwhile, policy-makers were following their theories undeterred:

> They attempted to lower crime rates through education. Recidivism was dealt with through counseling and other forms of rehabilitation. The results were not promising, but one strategy stirred the hopes of pols and advanced thinkers alike. The grand strategy was to eliminate crime by eliminating its cause. Public policy would go beyond the symptom, crime, and scotch the disease, poverty, and enormous effort and expense were devoted to a veritable war on poverty. Now the smoke is clearing, poverty is on the retreat (down from 50 per cent of America's families in 1920 to about 11 per cent today), yet in van den Haag's words, "If crime has been reduced as much as poverty, it is a well-kept secret."

The press—even the intellectual press—thrives on sensational disclosures of innocence betrayed by calculating rascals, offering reports of heroic fix-it remedies that the Better Minds are continually devising. In the same issue of *Harper's,* the editor, Lewis Lapham, reflects on the difference between the acceptable and the unacceptable in the public prints:

> It is the backdrop of assumed innocence that makes the market in scandal. The discovery of crime or incompetence becomes news only if it can be presented as an exception to the rule. It is one thing to be told, in the words of a headline in the *New York Times,* that "thousands die because of faulty prescriptions," but it is quite another thing to be told that thousands will continue to die for exactly the same reason, that all forms of energy are dangerous, that doctors are as incompetent as journalists, and that even a Senate sub-committee cannot restore the electorate to the Garden of Eden. . . . the man who denies the promise of next week's redemption does so at his peril.

So editors, wanting their papers to survive, are careful to restrict the amount of unacceptable truth that appears in their pages. They may tell about this policy in a laconic and amusing aside, as Mr. Lapham does, and they may encourage writers to include a little of the unacceptable, along with the marketable illusions, in the form of intriguing paradox, puzzling questions, or admitted "mystery." But believable illusions, after all, are what keep the presses turning. It is also true that illusions seem to attract about nine tenths of the sum total of human good will, and for this reason they need careful and considerate handling.

We must also face the fact that business-as-usual progress depends almost entirely on cherished illusions. If people didn't believe that more or better products would make them happy, they'd stop buying, and then—if this happened all at once, which is far from likely—unemployment would paralyze the entire country. And if the

people didn't believe in the "hire-an-expert" solution for nearly all troubles and ills, the universities would close, and many more Ph.D.'s would be pumping gas—supposing, somewhat optimistically, that there would be some gas.

Authentic illusion-smashing, in short, is and needs to be a semi-private enterprise, and should be undertaken only by those with enough moral capital to afford it.

At hand is the example of Hassan Fathy, the Egyptian architect who, thirty years ago, was retained by the Department of Antiquities of the Egyptian government to build a town for seven thousand peasants about to be dispossessed of their homes. He worked out a magnificent low-cost solution—using mud brick and ancient masonry techniques—and in three years built a great deal of the new town, only to be totally stopped by political obstacles. This engrossing story is told in *Architecture for the Poor* (University of Chicago paperback, $5.95). Fifteen years ago Fathy went back to look at the town—his vacant, unfinished town—of Gourna, to which not a single brick had been added since 1948

> Only two things flourish. One is the trees I planted, now grown thick and strong, perhaps because they were not subject to the administration, and the other is the forty-six masons we trained, every one of whom is working in the district, using the skills he learned at Gourna—a proof of the value of training local craftsmen.
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> Looking over the village with its deserted theater, empty khan and crafts school, and few houses inhabited by squatters, with only its boys' primary school in use, I thought what Gourna might have been—and what it still must become, for the problem of the Gournis is still as acute as it was in 1945, and there is still no other solution proposed.
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> Certainly I learned more from the struggle than I would have done had my path been perfectly smooth. The Koran says that things you dislike are often good for you, and certainly a direct consequence of my disappointment at Gourna has been a great deepening of my understanding of the problems of rural housing. For the problem is concerned with more than the just technical or economic; it is primarily human, embracing systems and people, professionals as well as peasants. It is much greater than Gourna and the Department of Antiquities. . . .
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> Several experiments were started in Egypt and elsewhere, but as soon as they reached the stage of yielding any concrete results they were stopped as by some mysterious agent or by the force of destiny itself, and like Sisyphus, I had to carry the stone uphill, slide down, and carry it up again and again.
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> This is not to say that the authorities were not interested in the welfare of the people, but that an intrinsic incompatibility exists between the principles, aims, and procedures of the cooperative system of building and those of the contract system which is well established in the official economy and administration. . . . I realized at last that I had to be my own patron if I wanted to continue with the struggle. Therefore I hope my own work in future will be to apply the principles of cooperative building and to develop to the limit all the ideas outlined in this book in a modest project in the small provincial town of Nabaroh, which gave my mother all her memories of the countryside and to which she always longed to return.

A companion volume, which might be read before or after *Architecture for the Poor,* is Charles Abrams' *The City Is the Frontier* (Harper paperback, 1965). The problem, as Fathy says, is "much greater than Gourna."