

THE UNEARNED SECURITIES

THE men of the eighteenth century formulated principles for self-governing societies. The nineteenth century saw their confident if admittedly uneven application. We of the late twentieth century have now to evaluate the result.

This is of course much too simplified a statement of historical sequences. To what extent have we been practicing these principles, in contrast to window-dressing compromises which assure their defeat? If, forty years ago, Walter Lippmann found that "those who would be loyal to the achievements of the past are in general disposed to be fatalistically complacent about the present, and those who have plans for the future are prepared to disown the heroic past," it is bound to be extremely difficult to identify what we are measuring or testing; we may in the end learn only that our methods of evaluation are both partisan and ambiguous, and pursued in a spirit very remote from humanistic wholeness of the eighteenth-century dream.

There is the further fact that the eighteenth-century conceptions of value have been separated and adapted into weapons of partisan political controversy, and that, today, these ideas are used mechanistically in arguments which are not even listened to, except by the people who repeat them. Obviously, there is no dialogue. Obviously, there can be no dialogue without the restoration of a factor basic to any sort of cultural evaluation: we must have commonly accepted *norms*. Instead of coherent and compatible norms we have only a list of disparate and often contradictory objectives. These objectives are none of them normative of the qualities of an ideal human life—which are always balancing conceptions; we have rather quantitative ideas which seem in practice to generate their antitheses. There is on the one hand the claim that we have a great civilization because our Gross National Product represents a

greater prosperity than ever before achieved, and there is the argument that we are the freest of peoples because we have a greater variety of conveniences and luxuries to choose from than anyone else; but almost by turning a magazine page we read devastating accounts of poverty and squalor in the midst of plenty, searching indictments of modern education, and frightening summaries of the soaring statistics of crime, mental disorder, alcoholism, and narcotic addiction. And then, in the next breath, we are told that a great civilization is one that never loses wars, that trades all over the world, and is able to impose its customs, fashions, and even its "regular guy" slang on the rest of the world.

These flashy successes and ignominious failures don't really add up to much of anything besides aimless moral confusion—normless disorder. In circumstances of this sort, people have difficulty in distinguishing between what they feel they are *supposed* to believe, and what they actually think. And it is right here, in this uneasy conflict among feelings of obligation, that the processes of self-determination break down. When thought becomes the end-product of a propaganda process, an effect of the persuasion-through-the-manipulation-of-imagery method of social control, then the entire culture is in mortal sin from the eighteenth-century point of view. Fixing personal responsibility for this condition is almost a waste of time, since practically everybody is contributing to it—by either participation or submission.

Well, we have made a crude diagnosis of modern society, on the basis of "self-determination" as the normative ideal. The judgment relates to breakdown of function, and is widely admitted. The explanation usually given for this failure is that society has grown too big, too dependent on complicated, technical processes

for any sort of popular control to be any longer possible. Nobody is at fault. This, we say, is the way things are. So we tighten our belts and explain that we are now going to apply the systems approach to all our problems. We may not get a brave, new world, but those scientists are pretty smart—look at how well "deterrence" is working!

This is about the end of the line for familiar critical analysis. Can anything more be said?

Nothing more can be said in the terms in which we habitually formulate our problems, which is to insist on "objective" evidence for what we say. But it can be pointed out that when we wait for clear objectivity on what we call *social* problems, we put off analysis until the ills have reached an acute and probably irreversible stage. *Objective* social failure is a last-ditch situation for a great many human beings. It is as though a physician has refused to recognize the symptoms of gangrene until the entire limb has turned an unequivocal black.

Is there any alternative to waiting for this sort of "certainty"? Well, one alternative would be to try to recognize in subjective tendencies and relationships the causes which lie behind the breakdowns that are now admitted only after the damage has become irreparable.

This is a vast undertaking! It is indeed. But we might recall that not so very long ago the progressive historians announced that the time had come to apply the scientific method to the study of *all* past events—they were quite eager to accept "everything" as the data of their researches. So the vastness of the project is not really an obstacle to work of this kind, but only our sense of depression and inadequacy, of failure and futility—we think it is "too late" to start all over again.

Yet we could easily begin by isolating certain key conceptions of the modern age—positive ideas as well as critical ones—and endeavor to see if any critical considerations have been ignored.

We might in this way develop a few clues concerning the norms that are needed in the present, and seem so entirely lacking. We might, for example, subject the idea of "progress" to critical examination.

Let us look at the subjective side of the way progress is regarded as coming about. It is difficult to improve on the generalizing statement of Henry T. Buckle (in his *History of Civilization in England*):

Owing to circumstances still unknown, there appear from time to time great thinkers, who, devoting their lives to a single purpose, are able to anticipate the progress of mankind, and to produce a religion or philosophy by which important effects are eventually brought about. But if we look into history we shall clearly see that, although the origin of a new opinion may be thus due to a single man, the result which the new opinion produces will depend upon the condition of the people among whom it is propagated. If either a religion or a philosophy is too much in advance of a nation it can do no present service but must bide its time until the minds of men are ripe for its reception. . . . Every science, every creed, has its martyrs. According to the ordinary course of affairs, a few generations pass away, and then there comes a period when these very truths are looked upon as commonplace facts, and a little later there comes a period in which they are declared to be necessary, and even the dullest intellect wonders how they could ever have been denied.

We need not here debate the "great man" aspect of Buckle's view, but simply agree that progress comes from the strenuous efforts of minorities, and that this general account of the spread of new ideas seems quite accurate. The point which needs examination—which Buckle discusses elsewhere, but not in this passage—is whether the eventual recognition of new ideas as "commonplace facts" is really the final confirmation of progress.

We are asking, in short, about the actual value to human beings, and to their society, of progressive ideas which may finally be "accepted," but accepted more from social pressure than from comprehension of what they mean.

This is the question asked by every Socratic thinker. The very meaning of "progress" hangs on the answer that is returned.

Suppose we argue that facts are facts, and that it is bound to be better to accept them, whether or not one understands them, than to remain in ignorance. It can be claimed, further, that much of modern knowledge requires at least a *pro tem* acceptance of facts by no means clearly grasped by students, since this is one meaning of what we call "working hypothesis." If you are going to learn from a practitioner or teacher of science, you have to make some stipulations simply in order to perform the experiment that will demonstrate that he knows what he is talking about.

This is common sense, with which no one can disagree. The general experience, however, is that, with the growing complexity of scientific knowledge, the stipulations have waxed while the educational experiments have waned, until, for the great majority of students, a superficial "literary" contact with the experimental side of scientific inquiry is all that they ever get. We have broad confirmation of this from the frequent complaint of scientists that the average person simply has *no idea* of the exacting disciplines of experimental inquiry. And from this average person's point of view, those disciplines, as now developed, confront him "not with difficulties which stimulate, but with impossibilities that crush." As Herbert Dingle wrote years ago:

The new ideas are not merely hard to understand; they are intrinsically beyond the reach of understanding—or, at the best, beyond the reach of understanding without a long and arduous course of special training which only a few can undertake.

Even *this* might be regarded as a livable situation, except for the delusive belief, fostered by enthusiastic but basically ignorant men, that scientific knowledge is the fundamental means to human good, it following that if this knowledge is too much for the faculties of the ordinary man, he has no choice but to believe what he is told by

those who know. It is this apparent necessity of believing in what we cannot know for ourselves that digs away the foundations of the eighteenth-century vision of human progress. The collaboration of democratic self-determination with universal education and scientific knowledge has become impossible.

This is not a blanket condemnation of all acts of believing. A great deal of believing is inescapable for human beings. What is critical is the clear distinction between belief and knowledge. A man who can't tell the difference between what he believes and what he knows is a man without the capacity for self-determination.

Hence the importance of Socratic questioning, which is largely devoted to making this distinction. Socratic dialogue is the recovery of first principles. It is the endeavor to dig down beneath the layers of belief to the substratum of personal conviction on which the beliefs are—or are supposed to be—based. This is properly called the pursuit of self-knowledge. It is an individual thing, with little or nothing to do with the confident assumptions of an age. These are only the raw materials of the quest.

It is readily apparent that what a man actually *knows* is a part of his essential being. When a man reaches out and lifts a book from a table, he wills his hand to grasp the book and his arm to lift it. Reaching for the book is so natural an activity for him, so much a part of his being, that he hardly thinks of it as involving "knowledge" at all. In all such acts, we might say that he knows what to do, but does not know that he knows. Philosophy involves finding out what we know, and distinguishing it from what we don't know. It does not oppose beliefs as natural and inevitable relationships between what is known, partly known, and hardly known at all. It opposes beliefs only when they are taken as substitutes for knowledge, since when a man relies on substitutes he stops looking for the real thing.

There are many reasons why we need to look critically at the Enlightenment conception of

progress—involving, as we said, political self-determination guided and armed by scientific certainty. In the literature of social science, for one thing, there are findings concerning human behavior which are so prejudicial in respect to the hope of self-determination that they are virtually kept secret. What would the man in the street do if the full implications of, say, Pareto's conclusions were made plain to him? Since he prides himself on being a practical man, he might accept the contentions and methods of the fascists. And the reductive doctrines of the Behaviorists, said still to dominate academic psychology, are hardly calculated to inspire the common man with confidence in himself and in his capacity for social decision. Knowledge, in the Behaviorist version of utopia, lies exclusively with the benevolent despotism of the expert conditioners.

It follows, then, that a science on which the fundamental moral postulate of self-determination might rest cannot be the kind of science which now has our belief and respect. Under social application this sort of science renders self-determination impossible in both theory and practice. Saying this removes the discussion from the limiting context of accepted scientific knowledge and places it in a classical humanist frame, which means that we are no longer considering "science," *per se*, but a basic problem of human nature. This science was undoubtedly corrective of the human tendency to substitute religious belief for knowledge, but it is useless as a critic of the forms of belief inspired by science itself.

This is easy to demonstrate. Reliance on scientific knowledge of the external world has led to neglect of the examined life insisted upon by Socrates. Even socially, it has brought no light to basic problems, exposed no basic delusions of mankind. Its iconoclastic activity put an end to one historic epoch of self-delusion, but left the tendency to be deluded untouched. We need go no further than Buckle for evidence of this. Take

for example what he says about the delusive reliance on political authority:

No great political movement, no great reform, either legislative or executive, has ever been originated in any country by its rulers. The first suggestors of such steps have invariably been bold and able thinkers, who discern the abuse, denounce it, and point out how it is to be remedied. But long after this is done, even the most enlightened governments continue to uphold the abuse, and reject the remedy. At length, if circumstances are favourable, the pressure from without becomes so strong, that the government is obliged to give way: and, the reform being accomplished, the people are expected to admire the wisdom of their rulers, by whom all this has been done. That this is the course of political improvement, must be well known to whoever has studied the law books of different countries in connection with the previous progress of their knowledge. Full and decisive evidence of this will be brought forward in the present work. . . .

We have, then, two conclusions based on Buckle. The first, more or less deduced from his statement about "progress," points to the fatal weakness in the unearned securities of belief. The habit of belief, even if what is believed is in some sense "true," is destructive of self-determination. The second conclusion, almost a corollary, is that belief leads to a faith in an authority which cannot accomplish what that faith expects.

Out of this comes one absolutely indisputable fact. The social community is indivisible. The knowledge claimed by a social community, unless it is possessed in a realizing sense by the members of the community, *is not knowledge*. Knowledge is a reflection of the operational use of the laws of life. If what men call knowledge distorts the common social life—if it betrays the people into situations of powerlessness, delusive belief, self-contempt, and gives them expectations which cannot be fulfilled—it should not be termed knowledge, but something else.

This is a way of saying that a supposedly knowledgeable man who does not know how, or is unwilling, to share his knowledge with the social community does not have any knowledge so

far as that social community is concerned. His activities will not improve its quality; he will not serve the ends of human association; he cannot have an organic relation to the human community's growth. He knows nothing of *human* progress. He may think of himself as a member of a proud elite which stands far above the multitude, deploring its incapacity to know what he knows, but he is only a very ignorant man.

The minute you let go of the Baconian doctrine that knowledge is power over nature, you see the profoundly ethical character of any knowledge that is presumed to have *social* meaning. What cannot be taught, and so made common property, is not essential truth, is not useful, *per se*, to the social community, and ought never to be held up before the people as the key to progress. No more betraying claim could be made.

While various relativities are involved in this judgment, we have stated it as an absolute, and it could, we think, be defended as such. After all, we would have an altogether different conception of progress, and a very different experience of it, had this principle been joined with the eighteenth-century dream of a society in which liberty, equality, and fraternity coexist. It is the fraternity, you could say, which insists on equality, and it is the equality which makes possible the liberty. These eighteenth-century principles are inseparable. Men cannot outrun one another in knowledge without it changing into some demoralizing form of belief.

But, it will be said, some men are brighter than other men! If this is so, then we have been too long a time in admitting it. And we have been equally too long in trying to see how liberty and equality and fraternity can be made to retain their essential meaning despite the manifest differences among men.

One thing is clear from history, if we look for guiding experience according to the norms of a morally unified social community. It is that the

wiser a man is, the more patient he is with men less wise. Or, using the family for illustration, a sensible father does not feel "superior" to his infant son. He knows that the human potentialities of his son have yet to be disclosed. Human beings in general are similarly unknown quantities, so far as their future development is concerned. We learn this continually, in a fragmentary way, through our attempts to apply measuring devices to education. Hardly a month goes by when some educator does not point to the misleading character of "tests" of human intelligence. The ability to remember what one has been taught is not an index of intelligence. The capacity to manipulate abstractions is not a measure of insight. Moral understanding often has only a random correlation with intellectual skills.

Yet the fact of the differences among men is obvious, even if we don't know how to account for them, nor how to produce them. Actually, we need no consensus on this subject. We are not ready for any objectively tested theories about how to make men good. Theories of this sort, when they reach the consensus stage, are invariably forms of prejudice, and soon become rationalizations of privilege for the dominant group.

Candid admission of ignorance is still our greatest security as free men.

REVIEW

THE SATURDAY REVIEW

THE weekly *Saturday Review* may be one of the best evidences we have that a genuine cultural community exists in the United States. This magazine's pages give frequent expression to an undoctrinal Humanism, widely diverse in interests and coverage, and the paper embodies an editorial commitment hardly to be found in magazines of similar mass circulation. This distinction is doubtless mainly due to the character of the editor, Norman Cousins, although the existence of such a matrix of responsible journalism requires a community of like-minded individuals.

The March 2 issue ought to settle the argument about the "two cultures" in favor of the Humanists—if there was ever anything to this argument between single-track minds and straw men. This issue contains comprehensive discussion of both the potentialities and dangers of technology. In general, humanist inquiry does not produce final answers; it is not supposed to. It arrays alternatives and weighs values to illuminate the field of decision. It considers the good of man and what technology may do to serve that good, and what it ought to be restrained from doing. Humanist critics are able to distinguish the obligations imposed by ends from the necessities required by means. Except for scientists who are also humanists, science and technology take their ends from mandates which are often unexamined and proceed by means which are often blind to the anti-human by-products with which their activities litter the world.

Buckminster Fuller is a good example of what can happen when a man develops extraordinary technological intelligence, yet refuses to let this practical ability dwarf his myth-making vision. For Fuller is animated by myths—concepts of human value and destiny—which direct his energies toward unmistakably altruistic ends. His article in this *Saturday Review*—perhaps not so clearly as some of his other writings—illustrates

the mutating possibilities of technical knowledge in the hands of a man of moral imagination. Were more men working in technology similarly endowed, science would never be called "reductive" and technology would not need to be feared as a Frankenstein monster.

Also in this issue, W. H. Ferry endeavors to answer the question: "Must we rewrite the Constitution to control technology?" It is not altogether clear what the Constitution has to do with this problem, since the disorders brought by technology are at root an expression of the values of our society, while the Constitution is concerned with the use of power. Humanists are not usually interested in being instructed in values by constitution-makers or legislators, and the men of greatest moral sensibility in the United States, today, are mainly horrified by what the law-makers are doing—or permitting to be done. Mr. Ferry means, of course, that vast and dangerous powers have grown up in the hands of industrial and political institutions—powers which were not anticipated by the makers of our Constitution and which are now plainly out of control. There is thus not even a *rationale* of control. But how will we be able to design the proper controls, if we are still confused about the values that are to be served? Social health is not a simple opposite to a long catalogue of breakdowns and abuses.

Yet Mr. Ferry is well aware of the fundamental problem:

Here is where all the trouble begins—in the American confidence that technology is ultimately the medicine for all ills. This infatuation may, indeed, be so profound as to undercut everything of an optimistic tone that follows. Technology is the American theology, promising salvation by material works.

I shall argue that technology is merely a collection of means, some of them praiseworthy, others contemptible and inhumane. There is a growing list of things we can do and we *must not* do. My view is that toxic and tonic potentialities are mingled in technology and that our most challenging task is to sort them out.

This task seems overwhelmingly difficult, Mr. Ferry says, because technology has become an awesome "mystery." From spending \$74 million on research and development in 1940, the federal government now allots \$16 billion to assure further technological progress, and this, Mr. Ferry says, "is not history in the old sense, but instant history." The point is, moving at this rate and developing its own imperatives, technology becomes a mysterious force over which we have no power at all. Hence the need for immediate attention to its activities:

A mystery is something not understood. Intellectuals are in charge of demystification. Public veneration is the lot of most mysteries, and technology is no exception. We can scarcely blame statesmen for bumbling and fumbling with this phenomenon, for no one has properly explained it to them. We can scarcely rebuke the public for its uncritical adoration, for it knows only what it is told, and most of the information comes from the high priests and acolytes of technology's temples. They are enraptured by the pursuit of what they most often call truth, but what in fact is often obscene curiosity, as when much of a nation's technological quest is for larger and more vicious ways of killing—the situation today.

It seems to us that Mr. Ferry is saying that we need to change, not our Constitution, but our Religion. His natural eloquence homes on theological analogy to explain what has happened, and you don't go to legislators for religious reforms. You wouldn't ask Congress for help in plain living and high thinking.

In his editorial in the March 2 issue, Mr. Cousins gives dissent to the war in Vietnam the character it deserves. He makes a statement, then asks some questions:

It is in the name of freedom that the United States has gone into Vietnam. And it is in the name of freedom, if freedom is to have any meaning, that the American people must denounce the massive and destructive blundering being carried out in their name. The notion that the best way to save people from the terrors of the Vietcong is to burn down their homes, uproot them, and send them off to refugee camps is the kind of logic that makes moral cripples

of us all. Why not carry this incredible process to its weird conclusion and shoot down the Vietnamese themselves in order to keep them from becoming the victims of the Vietcong?

Does anyone know—can anyone guess—how many new Vietcong are created as the result of such policies? Is there any quicker way to make heroes out of the Vietcong than to drop fire bombs on villages? President Dwight D. Eisenhower once estimated that 80 per cent of the Vietnamese people would turn to Ho Chi Minh if a nationwide free election were held. Are we likely to win the Vietnamese by burning down their houses, defoliating their crops, and dislocating their families?

Then, on the question of dissent:

Members of the American military who complain that dissension in the United States over the war is aiding the enemy should know that such dissension is a direct expression of what Americans have been taught best to do by their own history. They have been taught to insist on straight answers and to refuse to be manipulated by men of powerful station who apparently have little understanding of the democratic process. The Tonkin Gulf episode and the *Pueblo* incident indicate that there may be contempt rather than respect for the intelligence of the American people and for the Constitutional process of decision-making. So long as this is so, what is most to be feared is not severe criticism of the war but its erosion under mindless and powerful pressure.

At the end of his article, Mr. Ferry quotes two scientists, Jerome Weisner and Herbert York, in a way that shows the close alliance of technology with the escalating dangers of war:

Both sides in the arms race are . . . confronted by the dilemma of steadily increasing military power and steadily decreasing national security. It is our considered professional judgment that *this dilemma has no technical solution*. . . . If the great powers continue to look for solutions in the area of science and technology only, the result will be to worsen the situation.

There may be no institutional solution, either, but only a human solution—which means simply that in ultimate questions, no power of decision can be delegated to "fix-it" type authorities. The delegation of power in such matters tends to drain it of moral resolution. What is required is the

correction of basic attitudes, something that will have to have the attention of everybody. For example, Allan Nevins' review of Robert Leckie's *The Wars of America* in this issue of the *Saturday Review* illustrates one deep-lying source of confusion. Mr. Nevins says:

Americans like to pretend they are a peace-loving people although the record when honestly examined shows them as martial in temper and prone to spasms of aggression as any other people: the Assyrians, the ancient Israelites, the Romans and the inhabitants of the Italian city states. . . . One result of this attitude is a great deal of cant and hypocrisy.

Whatever other services it performs, the *Saturday Review* is trying to help the American people to lead an examined life.

COMMENTARY LEADING AND TEACHING

THE theme of this week's lead article is hardly a new idea. Gandhi made its main point when some Africans came to him and asked why so many of their leaders in the fight against colonialism failed to achieve much of anything. "Take off your clothes," said Gandhi. Africans don't wear clothes. You can't lead people without identifying with them. A Europeanized African cannot lead Africans, Gandhi pointed out.

In the book quoted in the lead, Buckle spoke of the uselessness of trying to "teach" Christianity to other peoples without living their lives, understanding their problems, learning their language. Buckle was not a conventional Christian, but, like many nineteenth-century thinkers, he accepted the moral idealism taught by Jesus.

There is a sense in which Thoreau, when he refused to write a memoir for the Massachusetts Natural History Society, was making a similar point. He would not reduce his knowledge of New England plant and wild life to the conventional "natural history" abstractions. Those abstractions took on vital meanings—meanings worth communicating—only in the context of values which gave them truth-content for Thoreau.

Polanyi echoes Thoreau when he says that the heart of science is the personal knowledge of the scientist, which is the inner fruit of his commitment. "You cannot," he says, "formalize the act of commitment, for you cannot express your commitment non-committally."

Leonard Nelson, discussing the Socratic method of teaching philosophy, objects to any instruction which goes beyond the actual understanding of students. Even though, he said, the teacher may invite the students to verify for themselves what they are being taught, this method "offers no assurance that the students will accept the invitation or, if made to stand on their

own feet, that they will master such difficulties as they may encounter on the way." Indeed, in respect to indoctrinated pupils, Nelson said: "I stand ready to demonstrate in a Socratic discussion that those students will still lack everything that would enable them to defend what they have learned."

Ortega (in *Man and Crisis*) makes the point as a social scientist might make it:

Primitive man, lost in his harsh elemental environment, reacts by creating a repertory of attitudes which represent to him the solutions of the problems posed by those surroundings: this repertory of solutions is culture. But this culture, on being received by later generations, becomes more and more complicated and loses more and more of its genuineness. It turns into affectation and a concern with the topical, into cultural narcissism and the dead letter. Man then loses himself again, becomes demoralized, not now in the primitive forest but in the excessive vegetation of his own culture. As that culture advances and develops, it arrives inexorably at a certain stage in which three things happen. (1) The ideas about things and the norms of behavior of which culture consists become too complicated and overreach man's intellectual and moral ability. (2) Those ideas and those norms lose their vigor, their liveliness, and their obviousness for the man who must make use of them. (3) Culture is no longer distributed with organic spontaneity and precision among the social groups which are creating it and is therefore no longer in proportion to their understanding of and feeling for it; on the contrary, this higher culture is now injected mechanically, as it were, into the masses. These, on becoming cultured (by which one means pseudo-cultured), lose their own genuineness and are rendered false by the higher culture. This is the phenomenon of socialization—the reign of the commonplace—which penetrates into the poor man and dislodges his real and authentic self.

There are doubtless endless ways to say these things. Ortega's seems particularly lucid.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

ON TEACHING RELIGION

NO one can talk to the young people of today without recognizing the strong under-current of religious longing in what they say. Along with their rejection of conventional meanings and values, they are groping toward some source of inspiration that will relate to the hungers they feel. The young are truly a starved generation, so far as religion is concerned. The heart of religion is commitment, and the familiar forms of institutional religion all seem infected by moral contradiction, which means the loss of commitment. Even the religious reform known as atheism has submitted to compromises, except for a lonely handful of anarchists.

So there is this hunger in the young, and no way to satisfy it. A danger, in this situation, is that the search for new sources of inspiration will not be persistent enough. A "ready-made" religion does not escape the shallowness of all ready-made things by having exotic qualities. Simply from their background of never coming into contact with serious, committed religion, the young seem wide open to the persuasive devices of a pseudo-religious, psychological technology, which are by no means limited to drugs. Shallow religion is always easy-come and easy-go, and there is ample evidence that Americans easily turn away from orthodox religion to become wandering religious "shoppers." They may be prevented from finding what they want by a profound misconception as to how it is to be obtained. They may have given up their barren, inherited faith, but not the habits of mind that shallow religion encourages.

Something of the access to meaning which religion ought to provide is suggested by a recent defense of religious education in the schools, by W. R. Niblett, professor of education at the University of London. In an article in the *Manchester Guardian* for Sept. 21, 1967, he said:

I should certainly class religious knowledge in the school program as one of the humanities—concerned with the perception of meaning in things, as distinct from learning how to use them. Whether it will be like this depends in part, of course, upon whether those who teach it recognize that their reward is neither examination successes nor converts to particular religious doctrines, but moments of new perception and perhaps self-discovery in their pupils. The teachers' own integrity, their ability to be honest not only at the relatively superficial level of not pretending to believe in dogma they don't believe in, but at the much deeper level of conveying, nothing said, something of what they do believe in.

Against this view there is the claim that we cannot depend upon the vague feelings and intentions of teachers for the great moral reform the world is in need of. Teachers need something "specific" to teach about religion. Well, the feelings of a wise and honest man can be quite specific, although perhaps not in terms recognizable by those who make this objection. And if it be argued that many teachers are not wise, and some of them not honest, we shall have to admit that teachers tend to be like everybody else, and especially when they try to teach in a society where people want them to be like everybody else. The fact is, however, that good teachers have always done what Prof. Niblett recommends; they can't help but do it if they are concerned with helping children to grow. Yet it might be possible to encourage more teachers to try. This is what Prof. Niblett proposes:

If we leave religion out of education altogether, we may find ourselves teaching the more efficiently, though without meaning to, that the world is chiefly a place for colonisation by technology. It is simply not necessary on this theory to *understand* the world, except in so far as one has to know such things about it as will enable us to manipulate it more effectively for our purposes.

It might help, here, to recall a curious decision by Henry David Thoreau. After Thoreau had published enough to make it clear that, along with his philosophical attainments, he was a careful observer as well as lover of nature, the Massachusetts Natural History Society asked him

to write a memoir on his observations. Thoreau refused. "Why should I?" he asked. "To detach the description from its connections in my mind would make it no longer true or valuable to me; and they do not wish what belongs with it."

Thoreau was not dead set against a recitation of scientific facts. "Let us not," he said elsewhere, "underrate the value of a fact; it will one day flower into a truth." But it was the truth that he cared about, and in the case of the Natural History Society he was unwilling to part facts from what he considered to be the truth.

There might be here an argument against setting aside a special time for "religious studies." You could say that for Thoreau, nothing lacked religious meaning, and having classes in religion suggests that religion is some kind of "specialty." Prof. Niblett, however, thinks that a special time should be given to religion, on the ground that if this isn't done "it will be no one's business to foster this mode of apprehension and that a still larger proportion of the school week will be spent in adjusting people to a society whose aims are at best a 'virtuous materialism,' with technical accomplishment, including of course examination success, achieved *en route*."

This amounts to saying that when you start an important reform, you have to call attention to what you are doing, and this is bound to have the look of a specialty until people realize what it really means. Well, Prof. Niblett may be right.

But what about the question of specific content for religious instruction? Prof. Niblett suggests using the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Koran, and the Bhagavad-Gita, for their ideas of "man's scope and nature." Perhaps great myths and epics should be added, since the object is to convey, not "religious truth," but the idea that all these teachings have helped men to find truth for themselves. "All true and living knowledge," said Coleridge, "proceeds from within." Prof. Niblett approves: "Such a basic position can have many consequences." In other words, the most important quality in religion is

contributed by the student himself. As Prof. Niblett says:

If religion is to matter it must be as a deepener of experience, not as a substitute for experience or as a protection from it. Poor quality religious knowledge teaching can be just that: escapist, dull, not even in touch with real life or real events at all.

FRONTIERS A Heroic Task

SCIENCE is not the only cognitive activity which reaches its goals by means of abstractions. Both philosophy and religion are filled with generalizing statements. And these, too, like the precise laws declared in scientific generalization, have a simplicity which bears little resemblance to the unresolved contradictions encountered in daily life. The problem of the would-be philosopher is to generate a sense of sustaining reality for the simplicities of philosophic ideas.

Take the question of identity, which is inseparably connected with meaning. There is an impressive uniformity in what the high religions have had to say on this subject. "That thou art," declares a *Upanishad*, meaning by *That* the ineffable reality and unity underlying all. "I and my Father are one," Jesus affirms in the Gospel according to St. John. "Look inward, thou art Buddha," counsels an ancient Buddhist text. It is a recurring theme of Hindu religion that Atma, the self in man, and Brahma, the self of the universe, are identical.

A thrill of sublime truth pervades all these utterances, but the reader may also feel that their meaning escapes through the openings in his intellectual net: It is lost because of its extreme universality. If science is reductive by seeking truth through analysis, religion sometimes seems reductive by its absolute inclusiveness. It is no wonder that, wanting the sort of truth a person can bite into, men compile popular treatises about religion which satisfy by offering undeliverable certainties, and then, after these are rejected, what remains seems like collections of tantalizing paradoxes, ingenious analogies, and invitations that end in blank walls. It is this final blankness, no doubt, experienced with a portion of our minds, which leads, periodically, to the mindless solution of authoritative Revelation, and then, by reaction, to uncompromising materialism. Jehovah's thundering "I am that I am" and the

materialist's "Don't think, find out" are psychological twins.

The "realists," whether concerned with this world or the next, want *defining* ideas of reality and identity, not truth which shimmers in paradox. It is only when the suspicion arises that the defining ideas don't really define that philosophers get another chance to explore publicly the idea of human identity and the path of self-knowledge.

A cycle of philosophical activity always seems to begin with a complex corrective operation. Socrates' energies were devoted to persuading his listeners that they didn't *have* to think the way the popular authorities of the time expected them to think. He argued that there is a self or soul in man that can become independent of the patterns of conventional thought and action. *Preface to Plato*, by Eric Havelock (Harvard University Press), is a book entirely devoted to study and analysis of the cultural matrix in which Socrates struggled to make this demonstration. Helping men to become philosophically independent has its tough surgical aspects, always painful to the men honestly looking for truth and usually costly to the teacher.

There is an interesting parallel between the method of the *Upanishads* and that of Socrates. The Athenian teacher spent most of his time showing the inadequacy of the idea of the self held by most of the men of his time. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, the teacher leads his disciple through what has been called the "shaving process," from which he learns that the visible forms of life do not contain their essence, but rather hide it from view. If great scriptures are to be taken as a guide, it seems clear that much of truth-seeking is involved in overcoming the illusion that one has already found it.

We now seem to be entering another philosophical period of history, since the problem of identity is being renewed with more fervor and independence of mind than in any past that we can recollect. It is even conceivable that awareness of his intellectual history may, for modern man,

replace the framework of the Dialectic—that we may see, in our own development, the hard lessons of philosophy. In his contribution to *Human Values and Advancing Technology* (edited by Cameron Hall, New York: Friendship Press, 1967), Huston Smith reads the history of the rise of scientific and technological civilization as the account of another kind of "shaving process"—the gradual elimination of old conceptions of human identity. The point, here, is not that what was shaved away was necessarily true or good, but that the process, when it was complete, left practically nothing in the way of an idea of self. Dr. Smith writes:

Copernicus undermined man's belief that he stood at the center of the universe, Darwin that he was specially created. As the scientific world view gained in clarity and came to command increasing attention, man's soul, an afterlife, God and human freedom were called into question, for none turned up on the photographic plates or in the cloud chambers. Most drastically, values seemed to have no status in the objective universe at all. If the Copernican revolution dislodged man from the *center* of the universe, the revolution of Galileo and Newton seemed to remove the parts of man that mean most to him—values, meanings, purpose, spirit—from the objective world *altogether*. It seemed to reduce knowable reality to the dimensions of an objective mechanism. In the words of E. A. Burtt, what the scientific revolution of the eighteenth century seemed to show was that "the really important world outside was a world hard, cold, colorless, silent and dead." Descartes was the first to see the implications clearly: nature was a machine and nothing but a machine, purposes and spiritual significance had alike been banished. The vision turned the universe into a necessity emptied of purpose, a chain of effects without final causes, wherein all that mattered was matter. . . .

I do not say that the human spirit cannot survive such an antiseptic vision. The point I want to make is that man need not continue it unless he wishes. For there is really nothing privileged about this mechanomorphic view of reality. We are coming to see in epistemology that theories derive from purposes. The mechanomorphic theory of reality derives from a specific purpose—science's attempt to understand things objectively, casually and quantitatively to the primary end that man may

control his corporate, corporeal future. The mechanomorphic fits this purpose perfectly. But we should see it as hyphenated to that purpose, not as objectively true. To see it as thus partial is not easy, for the achievements of science and technology are so magnificent that they reflect back to give the mechanomorphic vision they sponsor greater standing and finality than it deserves. But if we let our minds be guided by logical rather than psychological considerations, we can see that this view is so incomplete that to live in it would be like living in only the scaffolding of a house, and to love it like loving one's wife's skeleton.

Interestingly enough, what Dr. Smith says here about the mechanomorphic vision's splendor virtually duplicates Plato's objection to the poets, whose role, in Plato's time, was to make conventionality look like the good, the true, and the beautiful.

Another comment by Dr. Smith is pertinent:

The difference between life in traditional and technological societies is that the traditional society gave its members some individuality without allowing them to win much more, whereas technological society gives its members almost no individuality and permits them to win a great deal.

It should be added that while the individuality which is self-made and won is doubtless the best kind to have, it also seems to be the most difficult to achieve. This might help to explain the feeling of deep crisis that is all about: the iconoclasm of the scientific revolution has made the revival of individuality into a heroic task.