

## THE METHOD OF THE ESSAYIST

AN essay, our desk dictionary declares, is "an analytic or interpretive literary composition usually dealing with its subject from a limited or personal point of view." We object. An essay is much more. It is a *trial*, as its verb form attests. The distinction made by A. H. Maslow between intrinsic and extrinsic learning helps us to recognize the peculiar virtue and value of the essay. Intrinsic learning is learning about the meaning of life, and the essay is a modest example of this pursuit. Extrinsic learning is the acquisition of technique. It is concerned with how things work.

The course of the mythic hero makes this plain. When he sets out on his great adventure, he knows what he wants but not how to get it. He has searched his heart and found out what he longs for more than anything else in the world. This is the preformation of the essay, the trial. But he needs help. He does not know where the treasure is hidden, how to avoid or vanquish its fierce guardians, or what time of day will be best to approach its precincts. So he needs the counsel of an old wise woman, or some goddess who resides in a distant land, or an elf who knows secrets withheld from ordinary humans. The fascination of the story, as it unfolds, lies in how this assistance makes the exploit successful. Without the helmet of invisibility he took from the shrewish Graeae, and without the burnished shield given him by Hermes, Perseus could not have beheaded the Gorgon Medusa. Without the silken thread fashioned of a cat's footfalls, the nerves of bears, and the spittle of birds, a cord of magical strength, the dwellers in Asgard could not have bound the Fenris wolf.

Today we would call these indispensable helpers technologists, the artisans of the magic of our time. They are masters of extrinsic learning, the specialists who know secrets of nature. If you

want to hear what people at a distance are saying, they can supply you with a spell (gadget) that will make the voices audible or put them on a tape. If you want to dissolve an island into dust or level a city into smoking shambles, they will make you a bomb.

The technicians do not compose essays. Their task is manipulation, not the search for meaning. They do things instead of understanding them. But now and then one of them walks away from his technical investigations and composes an essay—the hunger for a deeper meaning in his life, and sometimes in the life of the world, has overtaken him—and particular value may attach to what he says. Some inner authority is felt in the words of any human who makes sacrifices in the service of meaning.

There may seem a glow of unearthly truth in what is discovered by such people. Odin gave one of his eyes in order to obtain sight of another kind, and men listened with awed attention to what he said. The wisdom of a man scarred or battered by the ordeal of striving commands respect.

The essayist, then, is one who makes trials for knowledge. He gets an idea and then takes it on a journey to see what it will attract. This is the spontaneous mode of human thought. The skill with which it is used constitutes our intrinsic learning—what wisdom we have as human beings. An essay may make use of a few reference works—to get the figures or the timing or the geography right—but for the essayist facts serve mostly as analogues which help to disclose a meaning. You bring in extrinsic learning to show the practical symmetry of the enterprise, looking for facts which are just right, since bad illustrations are likely to distract from the point.

The thinking we all do from day to day is really an endless series of ad hoc essays. We think

in the pursuit of ends. This is the constitution of normal psychological life. We know we can't find out all there is to know about the world; even if we lived a thousand years, this would be impossible. There would always remain great blocks of factual ignorance, countless unexplained processes, opaque materials, and unexplored regions. So we make of our lives an essay, responding to our deepest longings, and leaping into the welter of the world to see if we can turn hopes into realizations. There is no conceivable termination to this. An essay is only a literary sample of what people do all the time in life looking at experience with what knowledge they have and trying to make something of human significance out of it.

Sometimes we see this clearly. The best photographs are not taken by technicians who buy the most expensive equipment, but by persons who give full charge to their intrinsic know-how and driving purpose. The wisest men are not those who spend their lives doing "research," but those who have lived intensely and reflected deeply.

But we are not the "wisest of men," and we really *need* those technicians, don't we? Indeed yes. But when we make extrinsic learning more important than anything else, and try to use it as a substitute for self-initiated essays, the emptiness of technical knowledge, isolated from meaning, becomes increasingly evident. One could say that we are not really alive until we begin to use well what technical knowledge we already have, what we have absorbed simply by living in the world, surrounded by the know-how of our elders, learning the everyday skills of practical existence from the human community. A letter by John Holt to a girl he had taught in high school puts the actual situation with remarkable clarity. When in college she had written to him enviously, saying, "John, . . . you have everything all taped." He replied:

"You could not possibly be more mistaken. The difference between you and me is not that I have

everything all taped, it's that I know I don't and I never will, I don't expect to and I don't need to. I expect to live my entire life about as ignorant and uncertain and confused as I am now, and I have learned to live with this, not to worry about it. I have learned to swim in uncertainty the way a fish swims in water."

Holt gives the child as an example of the natural essay-maker:

The very young child faces a world which is, by and large, totally incomprehensible, just a "blooming, buzzing confusion." But he's not afraid of this confusion. He doesn't feel that he has to have it all taped. He is not only able but eager to reach out into this world that doesn't make any sense to him, and take it in. And furthermore, he doesn't even feel a neurotic compulsion to get it taped, to get it all patterned, structured, conceptualized, so that he can say, this is this, and this fits this, and this happens because of this. He is willing to tolerate misunderstanding, to suspend judgment, to wait for patterns to emerge, for enlightenment to come to him. I think children learn by a process of continuous revelation much more than by analysis.

This is the essential mood of the essayist as he gathers himself together for a bout of reflection. He is not a child, but the complexity of the world has not been much reduced and the questions before the adult come at a number of levels. As Holt puts it:

Where you have a hundred variables, none of which are under your exact control, how do you, by systematic analytic processes, get the thing organized? It can't be done, and the enormous strength of children's thinking lies in the fact that they don't try to do it. . . . The young child is continually building what I like to call a mental model of the world, the universe, and then checking it against reality as it presents itself to him, and then checking again and tearing it down and rebuilding it as necessary, and then checking again and tearing it down and rebuilding it and checking again. He goes through this process I have no idea how many times a year or even a day, and he's not afraid to do it. What happens to him later, to a very considerable extent as a result of his schooling, is that he begins to get such a vested interest in this mental model, whatever it may be, that he becomes increasingly unwilling to consider or look or hear about whatever doesn't fit

into it. It becomes a bed of Procrustes. (*The Under-achieving School*.)

One might add that the rigid model that adults are so reluctant to change is hardly ever really their own, but is made rather of the technical hearsay of the time. It lacks the ingenuous simplicity of the child's model, and is described by such impressive language that it seems sacrilegious to propose a revision. The essayist, on the other hand, is willing to be like a child when he starts out on some trial run. He may respect the imposing edifices of other people's knowledge but he knows that in order to use it in the quest for meaning, he has first to make this knowledge his own. He has to give it life as part of his being. Only then will it add muscle to his essay.

But just to keep himself in trim—or better, from spontaneous inclination—he may also make himself master of some suggestive order of fact. What might that be? Well, there are areas of extrinsic learning which are filled with wonderful analogues of deeper meaning. The world of nature, for example. Thoreau was both a great essayist and a great naturalist, but in Thoreau's mental alembic the facts of botany and all creatures of nature underwent a magical sea change. It is as though he somehow acquired the intrinsic learning known to plants and animals; they seemed to speak to him in a language they both understood.

Joseph Wood Krutch, another distinguished essayist, was drawn to the same area of experience—the world still natural and wild. And as with Thoreau, his essays on nature are equally essays on man.

Here is a passage from Krutch's *The Great Chain of Life* (Houghton Mifflin, 1958), taken from the chapter, "The Meaning of Awareness." Why, he asks, are some animals regarded as "higher" than others?

Suppose you play the childish game. Suppose you ask yourself which you would rather be—a farmer ant or a robin? Only the perverse would

hesitate. "A robin, of course." But why? What it would come to would certainly be something like this: "Because being a robin would be more fun. Because the robin exhibits the joy of life. Because he seems to be glad to be a robin and because it is hard to believe that an ant is glad to be what he is." Of course we can't say positively that he isn't. We cannot understand his language and he may be proclaiming to the world of other ants with what ecstasy he contemplates the fact that he is one of them. But he cannot communicate with us, and justifiably or not, we find it hard to believe that he is glad.

Privately, biologists often share our prejudice. But few, I am afraid, would agree to classify animals as "higher" or "lower" on any such basis. They would reply, and rightly so far as biology is concerned, that to say a robin is higher than an ant because he has more joy in living is to cease to be scientific. Also, some might think that it smacks of immoral hedonism. Nevertheless a hierarchy ordered on that basis is meaningful in human terms as the scientific one is not.

This is a good example of how an essay may fail to reach a firm conclusion, yet remain useful and good. Essays deal with what Schumacher called "divergent problems"—problems which cannot be settled with finality. And here, be it noted, the issue is rather momentous: What is evolution *about*? What makes a high species high? Is there really some far-off goal toward which all creation moves? Why does science—or why do scientists—refuse to consider this question? (Some don't, of course.) Is it because they would have to expose themselves to the folly of writing essays? But if that should turn out to be an aspect of the real business of life—as indeed it is for children—must we not deny that growing up or becoming a scientist means the deliberate avoidance of meaning?

Krutch concludes this chapter with gentle questions:

Is it not possible, then, that Aristotle was right, that contemplation is not only the true end of man but the end that has been pursued ever since vertebrates took the road leading to a keener and keener consciousness? Have we been trying to understand the meaning of evolution by beginning at the wrong end? Is it possible that, for instance, the real, the only

true "purpose" served by conscious concern over the young is the fact that out of it comes parental love itself? Has what evolution worked toward been not "survival" but "awareness"? Is the ultimate answer to the question "Why is a bungling mammal higher than an efficient wasp" simply that it is higher because it can experience parental love? Was it this, rather than mere survival, that nature was after all along?

Krutch is a writer turned naturalist, but one who retained the essayist's prerogatives. He insists on the Socratic sort of *thinking*—"resultless" thinking, as Hannah Arendt called it. It brings no certainty, and the possibilities it suggests are only possibilities—not, as yet, even scientific hypotheses to work with. Here we may also quote from Loren Eiseley, who was a scientist turned essayist, daring to raise the same sort of questions. In one of his essays Eiseley endeavored to show that "explanation" in the human or philosophical sense hardly enters into scientific work. After wondering for a time why a species of large wasps endlessly circled the air in his backyard—why were they there and what were they *for*?—he wrote:

I can only repeat my dictum softly: in the world is nothing to explain the world. Nothing to explain the necessity of life, nothing to explain the hunger of the elements to become life, nothing to explain why the stolid realm of rock and soil and mineral should diversify itself into beauty, terror and uncertainty. To bring organic novelty into existence, to create pain, injustice, joy, demands more than we can discern in the nature that we analyze so completely.

Analysis, as John Holt maintained, is not enough. Later Eiseley returned to this question:

When I made the remark that "in the world there is nothing to explain the world," I was, in a sense, perhaps addressing myself to some of my more materialistic colleagues who are masters on aspects of science. Again, let me make it clear: I am not denigrating them. But finally you reach a point where you can say, "We can show you cause and effect from this and that and that, and we can term this a kind of natural law, if you will" (although what is termed "natural law" tends to vary from one time to another). But what I meant was that when you pass beyond this and say "Why does the universe exist? Why does this world exist? Why does life exist? And

take the multitudinous forms in which it does," then, you are reaching the threshold of metaphysics; you are groping into an area in which science cannot supply an answer. . . . It is the difference between how things operate once you have them, and the question of why there should be a universe.

Is, after all, this question so negligible? Is the reason why things are as they are for the people who live on, in, and among them a good or even a necessary thing to know—or at least to try to know? Children, like essayists, dive into their experience, doing what they can to make sense out of it. The thinking of primitive people, Levi-Strauss shows in *Myth and Meaning*, is toward the same goal. They thought about the meaning of the universe and sought a "total understanding" of it—what it is for and what we are doing here involved in it. Speaking as a scientist, Levi-Strauss remarked that while the thinking of primitive or ancient man did not give him the sort of power over his environment that science makes possible for us, "it gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he *does* understand the universe."

So we may ask, Is this "illusion" desirable, or even indispensable? Are we perhaps here mainly in order to understand the meaning of life to develop, as Krutch said, a keener awareness, and not merely to "survive"? The essayist is one who believes in refining his illusions about the meaning of the world and the things in the world. He is not opposed to the assimilation of facts; indeed, he needs them, but only as they combine in organic relation with his growing understanding. And as for the idea that the over-all understanding of the universe, at any given time, will have elements of illusion in it—who would dare dispute the fact that *all* conceptions of the universe are partly illusory, or dare to reject its corollary that some illusions are closer to the truth than others?

Thoreau, who was surely a model essayist, was also enough of a scientist to be asked to write a "Natural History of Massachusetts" by the state's commission on the Zoological and Botanical Survey. The author being Thoreau, it

becomes a delightful essay as well as richly informing concerning the wildlife of the region. And at the end he says:

Let us not underrate the value of a fact, it will one day flower in a truth. It is astonishing how few facts of importance are added in a century to the natural history of any animal. The natural history of man is still being gradually written. Men are knowing enough after their fashion. Every countryman and dairymaid knows that the coats of the fourth stomach of the calf will curdle milk, and what particular mushroom is a safe and nutritious diet. You cannot go into any field or wood, but it will seem as if every stone had been turned, and the bark of every tree ripped up. But, after all, it is much easier to discover than to see when the cover is off. It has been well said that "the attitude of inspection is prone, Wisdom does not inspect, but behold. We must look a long time before we see. Slow are the beginnings of philosophy. He has something demoniacal in him, who can discern a law or couple two facts. We can imagine a time when,—"Water runs down hill."—may have been taught in the schools. The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience. We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method; the Baconian is as false as any other, and with all the helps of machinery and the arts, the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom. (*Excursions*, 1866.)

From Thoreau and Krutch and Eiseley we have ideal examples of the method of the essayist. He dives into his subject, actually his life, and picks up relevances as he goes along—matters relating to his own feeling of meaning and discovered in the direction of a particular inquiry. He investigates not a "subject" but a meaning, and he is intent upon making some kind of whole, not a collection of big or little facts. The facts may come in as supports or illustrations, but the meaning is the thing. And then, having completed one excursion or essay, he starts out on another.

This is what we all do, consciously or unconsciously from day to day. The essayist is an artist who draws from life.

After quoting from Thoreau we have a smooth transition to the heroic essay, or quest, which from ages past has been known as myth. Joseph Campbell's remarkable book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, shows that the great antique past of the entire human race is saturated with the spirit of the essay: You go out looking, you find a meaning, and then return to share with others its fruit.

## *REVIEW*

### CRAFTS OF JAPAN

FOR many years we have felt that the best way to appreciate Japanese culture would be to begin by reading Lafcadio Hearn. Now we would add the work of Soetsu Yanagi, a Tokyo-born writer (1889-1961) who devoted his life to the revival of craftsmanship in Japan. His book, *The Unknown Craftsman*, itself crafted (edited) by Bernard Leach, the English potter who was his lifelong friend, is a labor of love and will be treasured by anyone who owns it. The book was made in Japan, published by Kodansha International Ltd., and is distributed in the United States by Harper & Row.

Hearn went to Japan, taught in Japanese schools and universities, absorbed Japanese literature, and gave his understanding of its delicacy, nuance, and depth to the Western world in the form of exquisite essays and translations. Yanagi became proficient in English as a young man. He wrote a long book on William Blake and published a Japanese magazine called *Blake and Whitman*. Sketching the meaning of his career, Shoji Hamada writes in a brief foreword:

Later, together with his literary and painter friends, he entered the world of Post-Impressionism, Impressionism and so back over the centuries of European art to the Renaissance and to the Primitives. That took him gradually back to his own East, especially to Korean art and to Japanese folk art, which he may be truly said to have discovered. This was not an intellectual and systematic process with him, but one of intuition dictated by an extraordinary and visual perception of truth. In like manner, as a religious philosopher and as a disciple and friend of Dr. Daisetsu Suzuki, he searched his way through the developments of Buddhist thought. . . .

Yanagi is best known as the founder of the modern Japanese craft movement and of its museums in Tokyo and elsewhere, which he directed. Bernard Leach, who was helped to find himself by Yanagi, says in his introduction:

It would not be entirely amiss to describe Yanagi's position in Japan as relatively comparable to that of Ruskin and Morris in England. In both cases a deep and comprehensive statement was made regarding work and the qualification of work by beauty, against a background of rapid industrialization. In each case the creative thought behind the resulting movements, separated as they are by approximately one hundred years, may be regarded as counter Industrial Revolutions. Morris and his followers felt there was no genuine heartbeat left in work and so they set out to print and weave and decorate with their own hands. Seen from the present day they appear almost as romantic and nostalgic as the Pre-Raphaelite painters, but some of their work does not stand up to the reality of the time test. Whether the Japanese will fare better remains to be seen but this Far Eastern reaction against the overwhelming effects of scientific industrialization at breakneck speed has already lasted forty-two years and has spread all over these islands with more vigour and considerably greater response from the general public than our own movement under Morris generated.

We said at the beginning that Yanagi would be good reading for those who want to understand Japanese culture. This is true enough, but the real point is that through such writers as Hearn and Yanagi one encounters the universalizing quality of another culture, with the thrill of finding one's own feelings and intuitions confirmed in unexpected ways. We taste the richness of differences through perception of underlying similarities. It is in this sense that Yanagi's book becomes a treasure. But it is also precious in that almost eighty pages are devoted to illustrations, many in full color, of exquisite Japanese craft objects, ancient and modern.

A number of these picture pages show the architecture, temples, and ceramics of Okinawa, the central island of the Ryukyus southeast of Japan—a place which most Americans remember only from the headlines toward the end of World War II. The work of the Okinawans, shown in these pre-war photos, underlines Thoreau's dictum: Read not the Times, read the Eternities. Here are works of craft that will make the wonders of Okinawa unforgettable. This is a

book, then, which instructs in how the rest of the world ought to be sought and known.

Yanagi's experience of Okinawa inspired him to write:

The world's music today has become concert music. . . . The dregs are left to the man in the street. Is this good? Has the root of music not been cut? I believe that when music was alive in life there was little need for concerts and concert halls. The life of music was in the streets, the homes, and the fields.

What lit my heart was to find this in Okinawa, and in this sense I call it a land of song and dance. Not only Okinawa itself but in all the small islands, and especially in Yaeyama far to the south. Everybody sings: one starts, and at once others gather and join in, bringing their own contribution of words, turning everything they want to say into song on the spot. There is no stardom; they all sing well in work and play. This is the song of the people, folksong, a world of music before division into good and bad. There is no room for the music critic, because music is alive in all the people. The innate potential in all is uninhibited. In the countryside and in the towns there is no poisoned or vulgar song, nor any sentimentality. The songs of Okinawa are natural, direct, sincere—in a word, *Shibai*.

He mourns the decline of Okinawan art and crafts:

These island people look towards the capital, Tokyo, with respect and desire. That is natural: they look with the provincial eyes of a former age of handwork, so it is almost inevitable that they feel they must throw aside their old ways.

But surely the matter needs more careful consideration: Evaluating a culture involves more than the question of new or old,—the basic consideration is what is true or untrue. There are so many aspects of this new civilization of which we should be ashamed. . . . what this new civilization makes is neither honest nor beautiful. How has this come about?

There are two main causes. The first is that men of the new age think that it is far more advanced than it is. An honest scientist knows this full well; he knows that although mechanics seem wonderful, the instruments are in fact clumsy, limited, and puerile before the subtleties of nature. Who would say that nylon is better than silk? Secondly, the social effect of factory life: the principle of profit in industry;

capitalism; profit as against quality; advertising of the cheap and poor articles to the masses. Why should the makers of the splendid crafts of the Ryukyus bow down in humility before these gods? I feel this the more strongly because the possibility still remains that they may not do so. . . . They do not employ machinery to increase output, but they have a natural power absent in modern factories. Time means little to them, and this timelessness releases this natural power. I want to tell everyone that this naturalness ought to be valued and nursed, for it is life itself.

The potteries themselves, too, form a harmonious whole with the village, which can scarcely be found anywhere. Roads wind between clay walls, like those of Korean villages. The dark green leaves of overhanging flowering trees against the red-and-white tiled roofs are beautiful.

The author defines craft as beauty born of use. Explaining "use," he says:

The word is not to be understood merely in its materialistic sense. . . . If crafts are only judged from a utilitarian point of view, then pattern, for example, is uncalled for. But good pattern adds to the function of that utensil. It becomes an indispensable part of use. On the other hand, however useful an artifact may be, if it causes in the mind a feeling of ugliness, it detracts from total service.

Yanagi in effect explains the title—"The Unknown Craftsman"—by remarking that "the power of the individual is weaker than that of tradition."

Personality, however great, is nothing compared with nature. Surprisingly enough, the history of art is full of the products of humble craftsmen that are far finer than the work of clever individuals. This is because their work contains no signs of egotism. It is like looking for true belief in a world infested with self-centeredness.

The writer goes on to show what he means in saying that the issue is not so much the old versus the new, as what is true. In a discussion of modern production, he writes:

Although there can be a kind of beauty in things made mechanically, yet nothing so made has surpassed the beauties of the age of handwork. The shape of things at present is hopeless. Since a tool is a kind of mechanical aid, one cannot say that hand and machine are utterly apart, and, for that matter the

hand itself is a machine; why then are things made by hand both more beautiful and more lasting? Actually because it is a freer and more complex machine. However intricate the mechanics of the machine, they are nothing to those of the hand.

Like both Gandhi and Schumacher, Yanagi seeks the balance that contributes order to the whole of human life:

Machines are not bad in themselves, but a completely mechanized age would be a disaster. So long as man does not become enslaved to machines he may use them freely. But if machinery is master and man the slave, the effect is disastrous. Broadly seen, however, the more complex the machinery becomes, the more fully men become slaves to it. Man is most free when his tools are proportionate to his needs. At the same time, with the increase in population, work produced by tools, as distinct from machines, ceases to meet demand. We need far more mechanical aid than in earlier times, but man's nature shrinks when this gets too great. We need fresh thought on the problem of how to steer a true course between the two alternatives. The wisest planning would be in the direction of using power in the preparatory stages of work, and the hand in the finishing stages. Handwork would be too wasteful for the one, and machine finish too destructive of quality for the other.

We have barely begun to describe the excellences of this book, which cover every aspect of Japanese craftsmanship. The author reveals its foundation in Buddhist philosophy and shows how universal ideas give strength and beauty to the ways and materials of everyday life. *The Unknown Craftsman* is a splendid tract, not only for our times, but chiefly for the makers of the future. Finally, this well-made and finely bound book is itself a worthy representative of contents that delight, inform, and inspire.



*COMMENTARY*  
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THIS week's "Children" ends on a high note, declaring for the philosophical religion we make for ourselves. In principle the project seems admirable, and may ultimately prove necessary, but at the outset it is formidable. We nearly all feel the need of help. Few of us are Emersons or Thoreaus. Well, both Emerson and Thoreau, while of independent mind, looked for help and found it. They read wisely and well. They were observant, in the full meaning of the term. They knew or learned how to think. In consequence their writing sometimes has a scriptural ring.

How much can we take from others without getting trapped in the enclosures of someone else's unverified belief? The only safe procedure is to take only what we are able to make our own, independent of its source. This way of looking at possible truth by no means implies lack of respect for sources of ideas we are not able to assimilate; we just don't pretend we know what the ideas imply.

The best discipline in such matters would probably be to distinguish, as carefully as we can, between convergent and divergent problems—between questions which are answered by logic or calculation and questions solved only by growth. The confusion of meaning with technique is the central error of our time.

With this issue MANAS begins its thirty-third volume. Judging from our correspondence, the paper is in healthy condition. Judging from the continuing support which comes from readers who realize that MANAS cannot survive without extra help (money), the paper is valued by its readers. (Contributions to MANAS are deductible.)

Readers help in other ways. From the year of our beginning, 1948, some of those who live in this area have been giving practical assistance in getting the paper out. One man learned typographic composition and since the early days

has been making up the pages during six or seven months of the year. Others contribute bookkeeping skills. Still others come every week to wrap the issues that go out in the mail. We have some volunteer typists and others who have learned to make Addressograph plates for the mailing list. Then there are readers around the country who send in very good material, sometimes from odd and curious sources, constituting themselves editors-in-the-field. For all this help the editors and publishers are grateful. By reason of it the paper has acquired an organic life.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### WHY AREN'T THEY HAPPY?

IN his column in the Autumn *American Scholar*, Rene Dubos was moved by the mood of today's college students to recall something said by Shaw:

Watching the healthy and prosperous, yet disenchanted, young adults he saw in England during the 1930s, Bernard Shaw remarked, "They've got enough food, sexual freedom, and indoor toilets. Why the deuce aren't they happy?" Today one might add; "They have cars, hi-fi, and the pill."

While the prospect of unemployment is certainly a cause of gloom for the college generation—worse, Dr. Dubos thinks, than the threat of "nuclear warfare, shortages of resources, and environmental degradation"—he believes that an underlying pessimism has grown out of today's generally low estimate of humankind:

Because of the Freudian revolution, it is said, the very concepts of rationality and consciousness have been progressively eroded and are being replaced by the blind determinism symbolized by expressions such as "Chance and Necessity" and "Beyond Freedom and Dignity." We have indeed little reason to be proud of being human if it is true that our behavior is governed, not by rationality, but by "programs" and unconscious forces.

The Darwinian revolution seemingly deprived the human species of its uniqueness among living things.; *Homo sapiens* is said to be not significantly different from the great apes and to be just a tiny glow flickering for a short time in an indifferent corner of the cosmos. Ever since the Copernican revolution, each advance in astronomy has made our planet appear as a more and more trivial object among celestial bodies, and this knowledge has led many people to conclude that human life is as inconsequential as the bit of matter on which it is located. . . .

For many people, the sense of pride in being human is incompatible with an awareness of the power of the deterministic forces that influence our behavior and of the immensities of geological time and of astronomical space to which we must relate our lives. No longer supported by the belief that the world around us had been designed for human life,

many people, including students and faculty of prestigious schools, try to find intellectual substitutes for the lost certainties in astrology or in mystical doctrines emanating from ancient times and distant places.

We see what Dr. Dubos is getting at. He is suggesting that the gross effect of scientific doctrines, through their emphasis on quantitative measures of reality, has been to wear away the sense of the dignity of man. Should this, however, be called a "lost certainty"? Some "certainties" were clearly abolished through scientific discovery—the idea that the earth is the center of the universe, and a large collection of superstitious beliefs which had the support of theological authorities. One can be grateful to the scientific revolution for this emancipation from false ideas about the world around us, but Dr. Dubos is also speaking of our ideas about ourselves. To the question, *What are we doing here?*, the scientists have no answer except *Surviving*, which does little or nothing for the hungers of the human heart:

In the absence of a philosophical basis—a central guiding principle—human activities tend to become ends in themselves. They proceed on their own course and become increasingly unrelated to general human concerns. Yet most people everywhere long for permanent values that enhance the quality of life. Even while enjoying ephemeral and trivial satisfactions, they want their lives to be organized around certainties that are lasting and important. It is in this sense that a central guiding principle is needed in all human activities.

Perhaps we should say that the tendency of scientific thinking has been to abolish the good certainties along with the bad ones. But what are the good certainties we need? Are they what people call religious truths?

The answer seems to be both yes and no. The idea that human life has significance and meaning—that surely is a certainty (or conviction) both good and necessary. But to have this dogmatically spelled out for us—that would probably be a very bad certainty, since it would leave us nothing to think out for ourselves. Some

subtlety or paradox involved here, of a sort science as such can hardly take cognizance, although scientists, as human beings, can certainly do so. We might remember, also, that the anti-religious temper born in the eighteenth century was itself a spirited human response to too much "explanation" of a sort that actually denied the inherent dignity of man. (Miserable "sinners" earn little respect.) Implicit in the freethinking of the anti-clerical philosophers was a questioning of the authority of religious dogma and the assertive claims made for Christian Revelation. As a Genevan youth once asked his archbishop: "Is it simple, is it natural that God should go in search of Moses to speak to Jean Jacques Rousseau?"

Apparently, we go from one extreme to the other. There is not much difference between predestination decided by Jehovah and a life controlled by blind material forces that abolish the moral independence of human beings. To Dr. Dubos our civilization seems more and more a social elaboration of this sort of mechanistic dictatorship:

All over the Western world, furthermore, there is a tendency for political, economic, and social organizations to become so large and so complex that they can no longer be apprehended by the human mind. People feel like interchangeable cogs in the social megamachine, very much as they feel themselves to be dispensable people in the disposable cubicles of huge housing developments. The most prevalent symptoms of our misery are the sense of helplessness in the face of events that appear beyond our understanding and the feeling of loneliness that comes from the impersonal nature of social relationships. People who cannot be comfortable without certainties—and they are the great majority—are prone to join fringe groups in which they hope to recapture peace of mind and the warmth of close human relationships, even if it requires blind obedience to a leader.

If we put together the various comments and suggestions made by Dr. Dubos, it seems clear that some certainty or conviction is needed—but a kind that enables us to live with a range of inevitable or necessary uncertainties. We might call this capacity philosophical religion.

It is plain enough that philosophical religion is not something you pick up on a hurried metaphysical shopping tour. It grows from the convictions forged by people who, in the first place, are quite unable to give "blind obedience to a leader," and who realize that this religion requires disciplined thinking and consistent action.

The sources for working out philosophic religion are many, from the Buddha to Ralph Waldo Emerson. In another article in the *Autumn American Scholar*, the writer, Douglas Rush, speaks appreciatively of Irving Babbit, a distinguished Humanist of the early years of this century, who found a first principle for his thinking in a passage from Emerson:

There are two laws discrete  
Not reconciled,—  
Law for man, and law for thing;  
The last builds town and fleet  
But it runs wild,  
And doth the man unking.

This seems a fine starting-point for philosophical religion and starting-points are all we can have from others, since philosophical religion is religion we make for ourselves.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Some Basic Ideas

IT is desirable to review from time to time the over-all objectives of the deliberate personal, social, and economic changes now so widely attempted. Something written by Arthur Morgan in 1950, reprinted in the September-October *Community Service Newsletter* (P.O. Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387), distills the vision of a man who devoted most of his life to the study and shaping of communities. He began:

The pursuit of community should not be an effort to force society back into an old pattern. The new world to be will not capitulate to the old. It will have its own life, its own form, its own genius. At best it may be better than anything which has passed.

The old, isolated, provincial primary-group community is going, never to return as it once was. Yet there are elements of its life and structure that are fundamental to wholesome and continuing social life as air, water, clothing and shelter are necessary to physical living. It is the business of the community movement to discover what are these elemental necessities for good social living, and to try to see that they are not omitted in any patterns of social life which may emerge in our rapidly evolving society.

These universal elements of good social life include community responsibility for the land and natural resources. They will include open spaces for children to live and grow freely, without frustrating restraint. Natural resources should not only include fertile soil, productive forest, mineral resources and clear streams, but also garden spaces, play spaces, sheer wilderness and primeval forest. They should include bodies of water, available to all people.

We should pause here to note that while the concentration of population in overgrown cities may have made these goals seem impossible for many, this is not a reason for setting them aside. They remain the conditions necessary for normal adult life and for children growing up. Life is certain to be distorted without them, and all serious planning should start with these ideas. Morgan continues:

The social units in which children grow up and in which their elders live should be large enough to

provide varied fellowship, and small enough to make general acquaintances possible. Children should feel at home and secure in such communities. They should find life varied enough and intimate enough so that they will get its feel and texture, and learn the arts of living by seeing them in operation and by participation in them. The communities in which children grow up are the chief media for transmitting from past to future generations the quality and spirit of life; the considerateness which makes social life good, the friendships and neighboring which make it secure and full of flavor the responsibilities which give it fiber.

Morgan goes on to speak of community as an organism rather than an organization, calling it "one of the long-continuing and most precious creations of humanity."

Then he says:

We shall not find a union of those universally essential elements of good social living by waiting for them to appear out of the drift of current life. We must explore and discover what they are. We must have deep spiritual and emotional commitment for those values. We must make those values a normal part of our whole philosophy and program of life. We must undertake by discipline, experiment, and patient practice to direct our own lives so that these characteristics and values of social life shall come into being. . . . It is necessary that we search for the universal values of our social inheritance and with them create the structure and the quality of the social life that is to be.

This is the sort of check-list we need to return to again and again, while attempting to build community.

In the October *Newsletter* of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, Theodore Roszak writes in a parallel fashion, laying stress on the now available sources for thinking about community, naming individuals who are hard at work in one or another way in its behalf. He says:

For over two centuries of industrial history, we have looked for economic and moral progress in the direction of expanded technocratic power, toward regimes of impersonal expertise and social massification.

If there is ever to be a politics that breaks with these bad habits, it will have to stem from a recognition that the needs of the person cannot be served by mass movements or mass institutions. It has taken our experience with industrial bigness to teach us this lesson: that human beings can build systems that do not understand human beings and which will not serve their highest needs. The various humanistic therapies can contribute uniquely to the psychic and moral leverage we need to pry ourselves out of those lethal systems but only if they join in creating some independent critical ground where we can stand outside the urban-industrial dominance: alternatives that are scaled down, slowed down, democratized, decentralized; institutions that are dedicated to the growth of the personality rather than the growth of the economy.

If we had to invent such a world from scratch and on our own, the job would be formidable. But the social vision toward which humanistic psychology naturally tends is already taking shape. It is there in the thought of the decentralist economists: the work of E. F. Schumacher, Paul Goodman, Murray Bookchin, Lewis Mumford, Leopold Kohr, Hazel Henderson. It is there in the work of the ecologists: Aldo Leopold, Barry Commoner, Amory Lovins, John and Nancy Todd's *New Alchemists*. While humanistic psychology has been exploring the crisis of the person, these social and scientific minds have been studying the breakdown of mass institutions and the growing environmental emergency. Now we begin to see that the two bodies of thought converge upon a common set of values, a shared social ideal: intimacy of scale, self-management, participative institutions, neighborly and companionable sharing, restrained consumption, rewarding work.

Most important of all are the links between inner and outer change:

At the core of all viable institutions, there are the simple and unspoken convictions that people carry through their daily lives, their intuitive sense of need, purpose, value. That is what makes a practical moral order out of mere social machinery. Nothing in society works for very long simply because it had been ingeniously designed—not even because it had been imposed by grim necessity. Things work because people find their highest ideals expressed in them. Now, as our industrial institutions sag beneath their own weight, crushing the natural and human systems on which they stand, the old sustaining ideals of material progress, competitive careerism, high-

status consumption, the ruthless subjugation of nature begin to fade from our lives.

Some of the changes that have begun grew out of spontaneous awakenings, while others are the result of deliberate analysis and planning. Together they are becoming the shaping forces of the future. Needless to say, the remaining tasks are enormous, the obstacles great.