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IS PHILOSOPHY IMPORTANT?

CLAIMS made for the importance of philosophy have a way of losing their force in the impressions people have of academic philosophy. This does not prevent anyone from philosophizing, which is, practically speaking, reaching decisions about meaning and the good, but it has the effect of making people think that there is no discipline which applies to the making of such decisions. Unfortunately, whenever an activity becomes identified as a specialty pursued by learned men, the activity tends to be separated from ordinary affairs and regarded as irrelevant by the great majority of people.

What is wanted, then, is a fresh understanding of the idea of philosophy. Let us say that philosophical thinking has impact whenever the thrust of a seriously deliberated human attitude is felt.

Philosophy, from this point of view, is concerned with the values which exercise a controlling influence on the primary decisions of human life. Its influence is everywhere, as for example in literary criticism. In an article in the *American Scholar* for the Winter of 1965-66, Storm Jameson develops the suggestion that literary rebels who think themselves opponents of the mechanizing effects of technology sometimes choose nihilism for their weapon. To illustrate, she speaks of the urbane and highly intellectual form of the "new novel":

> Its most self-explanatory practitioner, Alain Robbe-Grillet, sees human beings as a kaleidoscope of moods, and communication between them little more coherent than a conversation on crossed telephone wires, to pass judgment on their acts, thoughts, feelings, is senseless or impossible. This irrational philosophy lays an ax to the roots of any intelligible vision of reality, so that by an ironic paradox the New Novelists devalue man, rob him of his identity, as fatally as does the most menacing product of technology.

A similar piece of criticism, which appeared in *Twice a Year* in 1948, gives further illustration of the impact of a philosophic attitude. Speaking of books by John Dos Passos and John O'Hara, Claude Edmonde Magny says:

> These communicate a very special malaise; the same malaise that we find in some of the magazine stories that are so useful a study for anyone interested in the sociology and psychopathology of the United States; with their characters stuffed full of clichés, real social mannekins, dressed in platitudes and satisfied to be nothing else; all the more terrifying in that they lack even the relative existence which suffering gives to any consciousness however empty it may otherwise be. The profound truth to which this whole world of American fiction bears witness is that nothing in man belongs to him; considered in himself, he does not exist; he is reduced to a bundle of physiological and social determinisms. Whether Dos Passos' heroes succeed or fail, and are happy or unhappy, satisfied or dissatisfied, the cause is never in themselves: It is due neither to their force of character, their ability, nor their wisdom. Even determinants which are usually considered intrinsic, located in the depths of being, are represented by Dos Passos as fortuitous, adventitious, exterior. His characters are always moved by some determinism, usually economic. . . .

The reader of a novel may not be interested in putting such criticism into words, but he nonetheless turns the pages with some kind of expectation. He seeks touch with the "reality" of which Miss Jameson speaks, and he watches the behavior of the characters, waiting for them to do something really "their own." During this waiting, which is more mood than conscious intent, he preserves a certain wariness toward artificial versions of reality and contrived evidences of character. These responses in reading are the activities of the philosopher in the reader, who is seeking for authenticity, the presence of the real within the tissue of appearances. The reader of a great novel puts it down with feelings of awe and

humble fulfillment. His knowledge of self and of man has somehow deepened; he has more awareness of the diversities through which the quality of being human may struggle; he is better equipped for understanding life. Yet it is virtually impossible to measure these increments of growth or to systematize their acquisition. This learning is simply something that happens, and while we all know that it happens, we don't know how. If someone were to attempt to plan a sequence of such happenings, expecting to codify the results, we should regard him with the utmost suspicion. Part of the excitement of this learning is in the unique way it is gained.

The spontaneous attitudes of the reader help to show the meaning of philosophy; other attitudes are present in the varying relationships of participation in a group.

A member of a group may enter into its activities with any one of a wide variety of expectations. He may join the group with eager anticipation of enrichment. Here, he may think, are people who are doing things that I want to learn how to do, or finding out things I want to know about. This is an uncomplicated response, quite different, for instance, from the expectations of someone with experience of similar groups, who comes mainly for the pleasures of human contact, for whom the work of the group is a kind of play involving existential rather than "progressive" values. There may also be those who see the group as a vehicle for growth in terms quite other than the stated purposes of its work. A youth leader who mixes with some boys at loose ends may get a project going—the kind of project hardly mattering to him at all.

In any group, there is bound to be talk. But what is said will be differently heard by individuals representing these various attitudes. Lines of conversation will be picked up for different reasons, themes developed to different ends. A philosopher would take part in the group with some awareness of the full spectrum of possible ends. He will participate by choice at one or more than one level, and be able to do it without awkward "self-consciousness." He will not spoil what anyone else is doing, although he may see a distance beyond. In any activity, in other words, he is never all the way in.

But this, one may object, is consideration of philosophy according to random illustration. There must be a better way to get at the subject. Doubtless there is. And if one is willing to study the history of philosophical inquiry, either in a university or by reading books, he may be able to work out a systematic approach of his own. But this will prove useless exercise—or worse, an illusion of having knowledge unless he recognizes, at the same time, that every statement made in affirmation of "truth" always creates a field for unlimited argument. No matter what is said on a philosophical question, there is a counter-statement containing another sort of truth or meaning.

If you try to formulate a statement which takes every possible alternative into account, you will hedge what you say with qualifiers until its meaning expires from carrying so many ifs, ands, and buts. This probably contributes to the tendency in the university to make philosophy a narrow specialty. By convention professional philosophers agree on what they think it is pertinent to discuss, and then they don't feel obliged to stick in qualifiers which are already implicit by common consent. Doubtless both convenience and ideas of relevance affect the rules made up to define the domain of academic philosophy.

Curiously, in a very different theatre of life, technology and science are having to face this need for "regulation," but without the possibility of control through a chosen convention. In *Science and Survival* (Viking, 1966), Barry Commoner speaks of what happens when a specialist in technology moves forward in a particular field to solve a problem without becoming aware of the effects of the solution on the total environment. Mr. Commoner says in

effect that the precise need of the man who applies science practically is to know *all* about *everything,* and *right now.* That is, the results of all research need to be disclosed to all other scientists everywhere. Only thus, he thinks, can "science check itself." But this is impossible. There is not only the vast problem of summarizing and recording and communicating; there are the exquisite questions of relevance, interest, and direction, which differ with each scientist and each human being.

And to make a sentence which has both specific and universal meaning in philosophy is the abstract impossibility of which the simultaneous "all-knowledge" of technological side-effects is a material symbol.

A philosopher, then, must be a man who understands the limitations of his medium—thought—and because he knows this is able to make his thought work according to some intuitive scheme of communication, in which breakdown and contradiction are the conditions of life; and these become part of the scheme through the use of paradox. Thus philosophy becomes a kind of "art."

Academics have an expression, "technical philosophy." There is a sense in which technical philosophers take on the task of working their way through a certain class of self-deceptions and false assurances of which human beings may be guilty during an epoch of history. By doing technical philosophy, philosophers hope to avoid the apparent unaccountability of philosophy as an art. Linguistic philosophy seems to be such a disciplined undertaking. Its achievements have both a confining and a releasing effect. Not knowing enough about it, we can't say much more, except to add that the master of its skills makes large, clarifying contributions to modern thought, while, at the same time, there are large areas of human inquiry to which the linguistic philosopher is not attracted. It would almost certainly be possible to find a parallel between technical philosophers and the Freudians who studied the dreams of six American Indians for the content that was interesting to Freudians, neglecting to point out in their papers on the subject that the dreams of the Indians were in fact prophetic dreams and that the prophecies came true.

Intense concentration on any specialty is likely to make matters not included in its purview seem irrelevant coincidences. But from a universal point of view, one centrally concerned with the nature of man and "an intelligible vision of reality," a confirmed prophetic dream is a strange and wonderful thing. It is so wonderful that it should have the power to dissolve any specialty indifferent to its implications.

So, from the dangers of specialization one may turn to the perceptive insight, the flash of truth which gains passage in the work of an artist. Take the statements quoted from Camus in these pages (Review, April 5), in which he explained to some Dominican monks why he, a freethinker, would not presume to tell them their Christian duty. Camus here shows his philosophical good manners, which grow to the dimensions of moral discovery simply from being recognized in a world in which nearly everyone has accustomed himself to the practice of telling other people what they ought to do. Camus' unblinking honesty gives philosophical content to practically all his thought. Put disciplined intellectuality, vivid artistry, and honesty together in a man, and ask him to write a book about what system is possible in the practice of truth in life, and you get something like *The Rebel,* which seems mainly concerned with the impossibility of such a system, and with what can be said in explanation of this impossibility.

Well, could there be a more modest attempt at philosophical system—an arrangement of approaches, that is, which maintains a respectful distance from the ineffable object, truth, yet indicates certain stages of progress in human inquiry? Quite possibly, Plato succeeded better than anyone else at offering such an arrangement, although it has not yet been tested in experience.

The prerequisite, that kings become philosophers, has been an insurmountable barrier, as Plato more or less expected.

Yet one thing is plain. The terrain of history is marked by peaks and high plateaus of achievement in being human, or in practicing philosophy. It follows that there must be intermediate positions between ordinary Athenians and a Socrates, or between an Emerson and those who wonder, wistfully, what makes an Emerson. We recognize high human excellence with no difficulty; why can't we have a properly normative scale to mark off progress in human development? What are the crucial steps a man must take to become a true philosopher? None of our theories about this has worked very well, thus far. Historical attempts at the classification of *people* have proved to be uniformly evil. Look at the injustice claimed to have been wrought by the simple intelligence test! It seems likely that the sorts of measurements of human attainment we know how to make are an actual barrier to progress in philosophy. Certainly nothing that makes it easy for bright young men to think of themselves as élites is good for the young men involved, or for the rest of us. Such young men turn into "boy Fausts," as Gerald Sykes has said.

Brightness probably has as much of a correlation with evil as with good. Are philosophers bright? Even the question is impudent. The understanding of philosophy moves in another universe of discourse. So perhaps the landmarks of philosophical progress *need* to be clouded, and the cloud-effects are themselves an essential part of the project. This would suggest that in starting out on a philosophical quest, we habitually seek the wrong kind of clarity.

Let us say that, apart from great metaphysical systems, and from the less structured systems of psycho-ethical precepts connected by an internal logic, the acceptable truths of philosophy are often embodied in maxims. A maxim is a statement in which you can feel the truth, but not exactly explain it. It is a wise saying, such as, for example: A philosopher is a man who knows how to make use of his pain.

He learns from misfortune. He profits by his mistakes. He is enriched by catharsis. And so on.

The fact is that, verbally, maxims don't tell you very much. A maxim, as Michael Polanyi has pointed out, is a pithy insight into what you already partly know. The maxim extends this knowledge by giving it unexpected resonance. But if you don't have the knowledge to begin with—if the maxim is not about anything you already know from doing—it falls flat as empty words.

The content of a maxim depends upon the internal and external experience of the person considering it. The reading also depends upon an unanalyzable reality in the human being. Our wise saying becomes specific when subjected to objective criticism. The experience of pain led Buddha to the philosophy of the Eightfold Path; it led Henry George to the theory of the Single Tax; and it led Lenin to make a Revolution. Other men are often led by pain to frustration and defeat.

All sorts of questions arise here. What right has a man to wait until he finds out the universal symmetries of life—becomes a philosopher—when people are suffering so much?

Yet it may be important to keep oneself open to wider meanings of pain while one is trying to deal with immediate needs. The potentiality for this openness might be called the philosophical potentiality. No doubt Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, and Stokely Carmichael each do private thinking about such matters.

In an article published in the *Humanist* a couple of years ago, Colin Wilson spoke of the frequency with which pain is host to great human achievements in thought, discovery, or invention. The sharp edge of pain is a provocative. It may be essential to the creative act. But pain may also dull a man to all but its obsessing ache, emasculate him, make him hopeless. Danilo Dolci

encountered this effect in Sicily. Perhaps the pain a man feels by rapport with the pain of others should be placed in a special category of emotional experience. In any event, it has been this sort of pain which launched the great humanity-serving movements of history.

In another context, Ortega wrote lucidly of the pain which seems always to be in the background of those who reveal a grasp of the world and its meanings far beyond that of other men:

> All the matters about which science speaks, whatever the science be, are abstract, and abstract things are always clear. So that the clarity of science is not so much in the heads of scientists as in the matters of which they speak. What is really confused, intricate, is the concrete vital reality, always a unique thing. The man who is capable of steering a clear course through it, who can perceive under the chaos presented by every vital situation the hidden anatomy of the movement, the man, in a word, who does not lose himself in life, that is the man with the really clear head. Take stock of those around you and you will see them wandering about lost through life, like sleep-walkers in the midst of their good or evil fortune, without the slightest suspicion of what is happening to them. You will hear them talk in precise terms about themselves and their surroundings, which would seem to point to them having ideas on the matter. But start to analyze those ideas and you will find that they hardly reflect in any way the reality to which they refer, and if you go deeper you will discover that there is not even an attempt to adjust the ideas to this reality. Quite the contrary: through these notions the individual is trying to cut off any personal vision of reality, of his own very life. For life is at the start a chaos in which one is lost. The individual suspects this, but he is frightened at finding himself face to face with this terrible reality, and tries to cover it over with a curtain of fantasy, where everything is clear. It does not worry him that his "ideas" are not true, he uses them as trenches for the defense of his existence, as scarecrows to frighten away reality.
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> The man with a clear head is the man who frees himself from those fantastic "ideas" and looks life in the face, realizes that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost. And this is the simple truth—that to live is to feel oneself lost—he who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look round for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost, is lost without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality.

Now we are getting a more rounded, more ultimate, meaning for the idea of using one's pain. Ortega compresses the idea into a single climactic moment, but the slow learning to be attentive to the pain of feeling "lost"—the "philosophic" pain?—may be spread over many years, with many premonitions of its final impact which are felt only vaguely, being mistaken for something else.

But what is certain is that Ortega's *meaning* lies in ourselves, not in his words, which are only clues. We understand him because we "know" what he means. We may know less than his full meaning, or we may know more—who can tell about such things?—but the knowing is an incommunicable reality in our lives. Yet we seem to be able, by using symbols of various sorts, to converse about such incommunicable matters. We know what we mean. These, at any rate, are the conditions of serious philosophizing. It may become possible, once these conditions are better understood, to say something normative about progress in philosophy. Meanwhile, the problems of making a normative scale are no excuse for failing to philosophize. For, quite evidently, only those who attempt to philosophize have enlightening things to say about being human. And only a growing knowledge of what it means to be human will enable us to make decisions, now, of which we shall not, some day, be bitterly ashamed.

REVIEW
A NEW HUMANIST MAGAZINE

WE have a new exchange—*Religious Humanism*, quarterly journal of the Fellowship of Religious Humanists, which is affiliated with the American Humanist Association and the Unitarian Universalist Association. The address is Box 65, Yellow Springs, Ohio, and the subscription, $4.00 a year. The editor is Edwin H. Wilson, a former editor of the *Humanist.* The orientation of *Religious Humanism* is naturalistic, with no relaxation of rational criticism of supernaturalist theology; actually, the criticism in the first issue is so effective that one hopes this task can eventually be laid aside and another kind of investigation pursued.

One of the limitations of the naturalist outlook is its habitual failure (with dramatic exceptions) to distinguish between the dark confusion of emotionalism and the genuinely mysterious in human life. The tough-minded naturalism of the twentieth century, typified by many Humanists, resulted from a long battle with theology, and stances shaped in polemical struggle are often indifferent to tender growths. Probably the most exciting event in twentieth-century thought, in this respect, has been the restoration of the incommensurable and the wonderful, on a naturalistic basis, in the idea of the peak experience, as found in the work of the Humanistic psychologist, A. H. Maslow. To see the difference between valid awe and corrupting religious fear, between the naturally holy and the speciously sanctified, between intuited transcendence and an extra-cosmic divinity—this may be the most important work of the Humanists of the future.

Meanwhile, *Religious Humanism* gives its readers excellent criticism of the cultural lag in liberal Christianity. The leading article in the Winter 1967 issue, "The Fatigue Phenomenon in Religion," by Johannes Auer, is concerned with the persistent use of old theological terms with fixed historical meanings by educated men who can't possibly accept those meanings:

> Sometimes one hears a so-called liberal minister refer in his sermon to "Jesus our mediator, who was crucified for our sins and who died for them." If questioned, the minister will reply that these expressions are not to be taken in the strict sense. . . . But in the meantime the minister uses these expressions in his pulpit; of the mental reservations which he pretends to have, his congregation discovers nothing. In fact, they don't understand it at all. They think—and they are right—that words should be used in a strict sense and are intended to make clear what the man who uses them wishes to say, but not to obscure his meaning. No, they fail to understand the situation. "Our minister must be orthodox," they say to themselves, "or else he would not be using these expressions." "No," the minister replies, "you are quite wrong. I am a thorough-going freethinker, I stand for liberty in matters of theology." Perhaps the man is right, for no one can deny that he is taking liberties with the theological terms he is using.
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> But this is downright dishonest; there is no other word for it. Moreover, no one is benefited by this camouflage, the minister, who attempts to pour new wine into old sacks with the result that they start leaking, is not; nor is the man in the pews whose brain by reason of this doubletalk becomes more and more confused. As a result, the pews become empty; which means that hundreds of thousands of people, who used to be regular churchgoers, stay away.

In an article entitled "Humanistic Judaism and the 'God Is Dead' Theology," Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine shows that it is the "God" language which has died, not some enormous divine "Being." Early in his discussion, this writer remarks:

> Most of my early exposure to religion in Detroit, where I was raised, was on the basis of guilt feelings. If one discussed the Shema, the so-called creedal statement: "Hear, O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is One," the Rabbi would never bother to demonstrate the intrinsic truth of the statement. He would rather point out how many people died to preserve it. It's pretty much like trying to prove the vitality of Christianity or its relevance by demonstrating how many Christians were swallowed by lions. In many cases "guilt-feelings-twisting" is probably one of the most powerful forces for the maintenance of denominational identity.

Like Mr. Auer, Rabbi Wine has trouble with the words used by liberal theologians. "I rarely," he says, "understand what they are talking about." This obscurity has the following explanation:

> Over 2000 years ago in Greece rational men had ceased to believe in the existence of celestial father figures. They were left with two alternatives. Either they could say, "No, I don't believe in 'God' as the word is ordinarily used." Or they could say (perhaps unconsciously), "I can't bear to give up the word 'God.' Therefore, I will find something or other in the universe I can use the word to refer to." The net result is that theology for the past two millennia has been a dreary attempt to save a word.

This writer recalls Sidney Hook's analysis of the use of the term God. The defense of its use by people who have outgrown the idea of a benevolent, personified "Father" is that all large terms in our language are ambiguous, and that if a man chooses the word God to designate, not a person, but rather the family of meanings which constitute his "highest ethical commitment," then no objection can be raised, so long as this new meaning for God is distinguished from the old. Prof. Hook replies:

> The new use always invites confusion with the old use and there is, after all, such a thing as the ethics of words. By taking over the word God as the religious Humanists do, the waters of thought, feeling and faith are muddied; the word itself becomes the object of interest and not what it signifies.

Rabbi Wine concurs:

> One cannot take an ordinary English word which is a *person* word in English, involving all kinds of sentences historically such as "God loves," "God knows," "God sees," "God hears," and by individual fiat turn it into a *thing* word, an *it* word referring to feelings and emotions or impersonal forces up there. To do so is neither ethical nor does it work.

The reviews in *Religious Humanism* are particularly good. Works on Schweitzer's brand of liberal Christianity, on Theism, on the new theologians, and Paul Blanshard's study of the present-day Vatican are given careful attention. Since the Bonhoeffer-inspired furor in modern theology rages over territory where Humanists are at home, it is almost better to keep track of what is happening in religious thought by means of reviews in a magazine like *Religious Humanism*, than to attempt to sift all the excited verbiage in theological debate. Humanist reviewers pare the issues down by liberal application of common sense.

COMMENTARY
PLATO'S LADDER

WHILE this issue was being prepared for the press we came across a passage in Plato in which a "normative scale to mark off human development" is suggested. It appears in the middle of the *Phaedrus* myth. Here Plato is offering instruction in the nature of the soul. The natural activity of the soul is in flight upward to the ineffable truth. The gods have no difficulty in reaching the highest realm, but men are weighted down by their material involvements and achieve only lesser heights. The souls of men are graded by their characteristic activities on earth. The peak of knowledge and attainment is at the top of the scale, where language, as Socrates intimates, must fail in description. In Jowett's rendering:

> . . . the immortals, when they are at the end of their course go forth and stand upon the outside of heaven, and the revolution of the spheres carries them round, and they behold beyond. But of the heaven which is above the heavens what earthly poet ever did or ever will sing worthily? It is such as I will describe; for I must dare to speak the truth, when truth is my theme.
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> There abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul. The divine intelligence, being nurtured upon mind and pure knowledge and the intelligence of every soul which is capable of receiving the food proper to it, rejoices at beholding reality, and once more gazing upon truth, is replenished and made glad, until the revolution of the worlds brings her round again to the same place. In the revolution she beholds justice, and temperance, and knowledge absolute, not in the form of generation or of relation, which men call existence, but knowledge absolute in existence absolute. . . .

The souls of men, moved by memory or glimpses of high reality, yet confined by earthly attachments, are not so fortunate as the gods. They rise, see a little, then fall, "by reason of the unruliness of the steeds." Yet some rise higher and see more than others, thus strengthening the wings which enable flight. While those who fall back accustom themselves to feeding on mere "opinion," the hunger for the heights is not entirely lost. Plato explains this, then proceeds to the "scale" of attainment, which is divided into nine levels or categories:

> The reason why the souls exhibit this exceeding eagerness to behold the plain of truth is that pasturage is found there, which is suited to the highest part of the soul; and the wing on which the soul soars is nourished with this. And there is a law of Destiny, that the soul which attains any vision of truth in company with a god is preserved from harm until the next period, and if attaining always is always unharmed. But when she is unable to follow, and fails to behold the truth, and through some ill-hap sinks beneath the double load of forgetfulness and vice, and her wings fall from her and she drops to the ground, then the law ordains that this soul shall at her first birth pass, not into any other animal, but only into man; and the soul which has seen most of truth shall come to birth as a philosopher, or artist, or some musical and loving nature; that which has seen truth in the second degree shall be some righteous king or warrior chief; the soul which is of the third class shall be a politician, or economist, or trader, the fourth shall be a lover of gymnastic toils, or a physician; the fifth shall lead the life of a prophet or hierophant; to the sixth the character of a poet or some other imitative artist will be assigned; to the seventh the life of an artisan or husbandrnan; to the eighth that of a sophist or demagogue; to the ninth that of a tyrant;—all these are states of probation, in which he who does righteously improves, and he who does unrighteously, deteriorates his lot.

Fortunately, the classification occurs in a myth; it is only suggestive, perhaps even playful, although, in the placement of sophists and tyrants, Plato is undoubtedly making serious points.

But since the reader almost certainly fights with the classifications as he reads them—we all know artisans and husbandmen who are manifestly better men than many politicians and traders—the difficulty of literal classification is plainly apparent. So with all theories of caste and station in life, all external criteria of human excellence. These are never more than conditioned symbols of the hidden qualities of human beings, and no greater social corruption exists than the situation which results from taking these symbols literally. Yet the stages of human development undoubtedly exist, and our intuitions of their reality produce most of the dilemmas of social philosophy and much of the pain and contradictions of politics.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
AN UNAFFLUENT BEGINNING

[This is the story of the founding and early days of The School in Rose Valley, Moylan, Pennsylvania. It is told by Grace Rotzel, who was its director for thirty-four of the nearly forty years of the school's existence. The account is reprinted from the Parent's Bulletin for April.]

THE cost of a venture into new territory, of putting muscles and driving power on an idea, is always much more than the money involved, and in this case, The School in Rose Valley, though conceived and born in the affluent Twenties, was short even on money from the beginning. Dr. Ryan warned the initial group of parents that starting a school was more expensive than they thought. He said they should only consider it if they could guarantee a budget of $16,000, or $400 tuition for 40 children. Since the largest tuition in the area was $150, it was out of the question to find 40 children with parents able and willing to pay $400. He also stressed the importance of equal tuition for all ages based on commensurate needs. He pointed out that because the early childhood years, where the learning habits are formed, are most significant in the educational process, the teachers of the youngest should have exceptionally good training and experience, and further, that a smaller tuition for the three year olds gave support to the idea that nursery school was merely a baby-sitting convenience, a prevalent notion that it was our duty to counteract.

After much thought and discussion, parents decided to do what they considered possible, and start; so it was 29 children instead of 40, and $250 tuition instead of $400, and not all of the 29 paid the $250. As a matter of fact, it was not until 1940 that the budget reached $16,000, and during our first ten years, we moved, financially speaking, like the inchworm, although I feel certain there was more fun in our humping than in his. There were alternate periods of exhilaration and depression, involving blisters, sweat, sore thumbs and aching backs, but also involving the stimulation and excitement of working together for a common purpose.

During the first year money behaved reasonably well. The School was incorporated in 1930; we had a small budget, a small building fund for the new classroom; two parents gave Mr. Rawson $65 by means of which he doubled the size of the shop; the Depression hadn't yet seeped into our thinking, and we took on another teacher for the second year.

Then we came to with a start. At the end of that year the big cold wave of the Depression almost submerged us with a deficit of more than half the budget. This could have been the end, but the buoyant enthusiasm aroused in the first two years intensified the determination to survive, and it was this spirit, plus the generosity of Adele and Maurice Saul that kept us afloat. The Goals and Aims Committee (dubbed facetiously the Golden Aims as time went on) made a minimum, medium and optimum plan for the next year, of which we adopted the minimum, lopping off the top and bottom groups, guaranteeing teachers 75 per cent of their salaries, the other 25 per cent to come if and when (and whens were not expected). We then began referring nursery school applicants to an approved nursery school in the area, which we gave educational support, but no money, and continued this arrangement until 1938 when the Whitney Foundation recognized our contribution to adult education with a gift that made possible the establishment of a nursery school on the premises.

The Depression, however difficult, had some advantages, for the stringent change from the helter-skelter Twenties gave time to consider what values were important, challenged people to find resources within themselves, and made it necessary for the School to examine and evaluate every step of the way. The resourceful and not easily discouraged Incorporators started then on a three-year plan which included looking for a permanent site, and studying ways to improve educationally and financially. Since a tenet of the School was that parents should be vitally connected with the problems, the Depression offered an opportunity for this connection. In February 1933, the Admissions Committee reported "that the feeling generally expressed is one of enthusiasm and appreciation of the School with the usual lack of certainty about application because of financial conditions." To meet this, the Tuition Exchange plan was thought out by which the School presented a scale of hourly rates, from 75 cents an hour for clerical services, lunch-getting, housekeeping, etc., to $3.00 an hour for specialists in art, music, science, etc. This met both the needs of the parents and the School, and

gathered an understanding group who were working on the same basic ideas at home as at school for the optimum development of children. The School came to be known as a place where parents could work and were needed. One child, on asking his friend to come to his school, got the answer, "I can't. My mother doesn't work there." Over the years it has often been reported that children asked their mothers to work at school, or, if they couldn't, asked them to please try. To be sure, problems sometimes arose when mother and child were working too closely, but in the majority of cases the conflicts were worked out satisfactorily with considerable long-term gain, for nothing is more important than the understanding acceptance by parents of what a school is doing.

A time of decision came in 1933 when the prospect of moving to a new site was balanced by the very real possibility of going down the drain. Money was tighter than ever, land very expensive in the Valley, Foundations interviewed had made it clear that they were giving only for adult education. The situation was indeed loaded with obstacles. At a full meeting in the Old Mill all the dour financial facts were laid out alongside the educational and community accomplishments of the preceding four years. The mood that evening was pessimistic, even defeatist, until Craig Janney threw a spark that cleared the air. He arose with a question, "Why not build a schoolhouse ourselves? We have the time. We built the stage in this mill for the Gilbert and Sullivan Chorus, and working all night, with the women feeding us beans and coffee, was an experience I look back on with pleasure. Why not do it again?" This changed the atmosphere. Plans began in earnest, and when people left that meeting, the predominant feeling was, we *can* do it.

In December pledges showed $4135, a sum representing sacrifices and conviction from about twenty families. When Owen Stephens and Craig Janney, architects, asked to plan a building, said the cost could be cut to fit that figure, and when Adele and Maurice Saul offered to loan the School three acres of land on which to build, the Board authorized the construction of a building to be ready by September 1934.

As soon as the frost was out of the ground in March, week-end work began on the 900-foot ditch to bring water to the orchard site. It was a test of muscles and endurance, but raw spring days as well as balmy ones saw men, women and children out there, men digging and laying pipe, women offering gingerbread and coffee, children playing around, and everybody eating lunch under the apple trees. Only a small percentage of fathers were technically equipped; professors of Sanskrit, literature, finance, artists, lawyers, researchers, wheeled barrows of cement, laid foundation blocks, nailed on roof and siding alongside wives and older children. Not a bit of labor was hired except the bulldozing for the basement: the plumbing was installed by one whose regular assignment was designing medical instruments for the Johnson Foundation; the building was wired by fathers who worked for the Philadelphia Electric Company; and a heating system was put in by a father in the furnace business. Work continued from March until September on the 35-by-90-foot structure we call the Main Building. It was incomplete at the opening of school but the weather was mild, and fathers continued to work weekends well on into the winter. Also during that fall, Mr. Rawson and the children took down the Mushroom, the classroom built on Vernon Lane at the old site, and erected it as The Chip (Off the Old Block). In this, the first of many building projects, we learned that we could have what we wanted if we wanted it enough, and in addition, that building in itself offered a more interesting experience than we had dreamed possible.

By June 1935 we were on the way. The budget was encouraging, having a small manageable deficit; we were living under our own roof, which meant continuity for at least five or ten years, and therefore we could start some of the projects for which we had been waiting; we were no longer scared of what people would say, for they had already said it; hence anything seemed possible.

GRACE ROTZEL

FRONTIERS

Whither Liberal Education?

FOLLOWING a lecture one of my students asked me if I could state briefly what I called the "failures of a modern, liberal education." After I did so a number of students who were milling around stated that they thought the points made ought to be expanded into a series of lectures or, at least, into a paper. Another suggested that I ought to list these points and comment on them briefly for publication. I am accordingly following through on the last suggestion.

1. *New ideas are seen as queer or foolish by most people.* Whitehead has noted the historical continuity of this phenomenon. I have found this to be notably the case when one introduces people to the political and social ideas of *decentralist thinkers.* It is really remarkable, when you think about it, that people are bewildered in the face of decentralist ideas in a section of the country where the doctrine of States' Rights—an outlook so close to the political philosophy of decentralism—is dominant in the thinking of its people. It is doubly puzzling when we remember that a decentralist outlook characterized the thinking of some of the Founding Fathers, like Jefferson.

2. *Fear and dislike of Socratic method.* Socrates was unparalleled in the exercise of that type of serious analysis needed for the exploration of a person's commitments and presuppositions. This, of course, is the meaning of the statement "Follow whither the argument leadeth." Our egalitarian philosophy now encourages the conviction that conversation is the art of talking at one another rather than with one another. We interpret an analysis which exposes the thinness of an idea we hold as an affront to our personal dignity. Since we identify the ideas we had as major indicators of our personal worth and leadership qualities, the deflation of an idea analytically is felt as a personal attack. If this attitude should grow with the passing of the years, it spells the demise of one of the best features of the liberal tradition.

3. *Misunderstanding of the religious impulse.* Our leading religious thinkers—men of the stamp of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich—recognize that the basic nature of the religious impulse consists of those sentiments which bind men to one another in feeling and shared value. The genuine religious impulse is invariably accomplished by a willingness to share our good fortune and underwrite mutual help in the face of adversity. The characteristic feature, however, of Western religious life is an emphasis on denominationalism, churchgoing, separatism and ritual. The important thing among followers of a conventional, religious outlook is to give lip-service to public morality. It is rare to find the expression of religious concern accompanied by any effort to question the relevance of an ongoing and traditional, religious outlook for the circumstances and problems of our time. It is even rarer to find the values of the religious impulse given genuine expression in the work contexts and social contexts of our daily lives.

Religion is for Sunday and for a lonely togetherness which, when over, leaves a gnawing hunger for a deep and meaningful, personal relationship—a hunger which is even more intense after people have dispersed than it was before members of the lonely crowd got together. At church we increase the density of the *physical space* we occupy, while simultaneously reducing its *psychological and social density.* To many powerful, worldly figures, religion is a *conserving force.* To lovers of power, influence, prestige and the public image, religion is something which is truly present only if it prompts one *never to make a wave* and to cheer the status quo, forever. Thus religion turns into anti-religion when religious leaders insist that it be used to prevent needed *social change.*

4. *Semantic misevaluation.* Those individuals who call themselves *General Semanticists* have spent their lives showing people

how language is abused and misused to create misunderstanding and friction. Those who have heard the expression, "semantic difficulties," and have, at best, a smattering of the ideas of the General Semanticists, imagine that semantics is concerned with the difficulties of achieving common meaning in the use of words. They therefore tend to think of individual and group misunderstanding as solely a breakdown in *verbal communication.* This is, of course, not the true nature of General Semantics. This latter is a discipline concerned with how language is used *emotionally and socially* to create misunderstanding, bias, conflict, ostracism, mistrust and fear. The manner in which people use derogatory labels to try to crush individuals who hold to unpopular ideas, who, perhaps, are seen as constituting a threat to one's privileges, or who are individuals we dislike because we do not understand them, is the most characteristic concern of General Semantics. Those who practice the General Semantics point of view are interested educationally in developing devices which will undo our pathological use of language, that is, null and void what they call "semantic misevaluation."

The General Semanticists are aware that modern man still engages in "magical thinking." In this respect he is still a primitive. He differs from the primitive in his choice of magic words. The magic words of modern man stem largely from gossip, rumor and hearsay and from power-seeking and, status-climbing. They are political terms like the following: radical, ultra-liberal, troublemaker, visionary, agitator, etc. They are terms of character assassination like the following: corrupt politician, snob, psychopath and egotist. The purpose of all magic words is to isolate from his fellows the person to whom they are applied, by frightening people into avoiding the person resented. Considering the suggestibility, moral cowardliness and hard-mindedness of the average person, magic words invariably succeed in doing what they are supposed to do. It takes an individual blessed with a strong and compassionate character, who possesses a clear sense of direction and a well-thought-out sense of values, to be able to resist the semantic misevaluations of magical thinking. Such an individual has to be one who is unwilling to run with the herd—a social maverick, if you will. Unfortunately there are few of these around. As a result magical thinking is in the ascendant.

People who are evasive, who are incapable of candor and clear thought, who avoid confrontation and love to play social and intellectual games of hide-and-seek, are usually precisely those people who unwittingly specialize in semantic misevaluation. However, they usually pat themselves on the back and provide themselves with what psychologists call self-reinforced rewards, by telling themselves that their pathological, linguistic habits are proof that they are good diplomats and know how to handle men. This kind of self-deception is gradually leading to an American form of Nu-Think. This latter can be characterized by the following slogans, with apologies to Orwell: DISHONESTY IS DIPLOMACY, INJUSTICE IS PRUDENCE, MEDIOCRITY IS LEADERSHIP, IGNORANCE IS PRACTICALITY, EVASIVENESS IS GOODWILL, SYCOPHANCY IS TEAM SPIRIT and LEADERSHIP MEANS RETREAT.

The Russians have no monopoly on NU-THINK. It is only their brand of it which is different from ours. If, however, the failures of modern liberal education continue to grow apace, we shall eventually produce our own Orwellian Kremlin and its headquarters, unfortunately, will be in the colleges and universities of the land.

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