

## THE DRAMATIC ART

WHEN you look at a landscape, or read a description of a natural scene, you almost certainly try to determine at once whether it is to be an encounter with Nature or with Man. As spectator or witness, you will regard the scene differently, depending upon whether or not human beings are involved. Nature has unplumbed mysteries, but these are of another order than the mysteries represented by man. Only a broadly "cosmic" kind of awareness is able to assimilate natural with human mysteries, and for most of us doing this exacts a certain cost in understanding.

A natural scene has its splendors; it may even have drama—but when we speak of "drama" in nature, we are borrowing from what we know of the unpredictability of human beings to heighten the wonder of natural events. There is a sense in which we divinize nature by anthropomorphizing it in some way, to give it the greatest possible meaning.

If, as the natural scene unfolds, we discern the presence of a man, the mind floods with spontaneous and insistent questions: What is he doing there? What sort of a man is he? Is he just part of the scenery, or is the scenery only his setting? Bring a man into a forest glade and have him stand there, thinking, with hardly a clue as to what he is thinking about, and this development, if skillfully portrayed, may generate tension in the reader. Dress him like a cowboy or a "mountain man" and the tension is reduced. With this kind of "definition" of the man, the drama has become more or less predictable; some limits have been set. If the reader is familiar with Western stories, he now knows about what to expect. Then, in order to enjoy the book, he "forgets" what he knows about Westerns. This enables him to regain a little suspense; he both knows and doesn't know how the story will turn out.

The popular Western story—or any story in which the action leads to a predetermined conclusion—belongs to the *genre* of pageantry. The pageant has no surprises in its plot. The plot of the pageant is hardly a plot. You know how it ends. At best it is a colorful echo of a stereotype. The question of what will finally happen is settled and the watcher's attention can be given over entirely to enjoying the style of how it comes about. There may be minor surprises, but these are always in the texture and richness, in the form, of the spectacle, not in acts of human decision. The wonder is sensuous; moral sensibility is given a rest.

Pageantry is, of course, an indispensable resource of the dramatist. In a great drama the elements of the predictable and the unpredictable are indistinguishably woven together, as they are in life, and are disclosed only by the progress of the play. In drama, style is only the habit of human stature. Witnessing great drama tires you out—that is, you identify with the protagonist, agonize over his choices, suffer his failures, know his releases, and share, in the end, his transfiguring fate. Thus there are days when you want only pageantry; but you also know that you have to "keep up"; you know that exposing yourself to nothing but pageantry will make you unprepared for the unpredictable confrontations of life. Men who rely only on old predictabilities invariably come to a crossroads where no signposts have been erected, and then they have only blind desperation as their guide. The radius of the stage of life changes with the diameter of awareness, admitting new factors of experience, and men are obliged to choose. Will drama, or only pageantry, ensue? Drama is to pageantry what art is to decoration, what decision is to habit. Yet pageantry lies behind drama just as decoration is a part of art, and as habit sets the stage of decision.

The intellectual faculty enables us to take these matters apart for analysis and inspection. Without intellect we could not speak of them or show the differences between them. But since intellect can abstract, it can also distort, ignore, and suppress. A man—say, a director of plays—can become fascinated by the elegance he sees as potential in the forms of pageantry. For him drama becomes distraction, even intrusion. It violates the symmetries of his technique. It makes him lose *control*. To him, dramatists are deviationists. He has the contempt of an engineer for all ambiguity. He reacts as professional entertainers react to "educators" and "preachers." He is a small-time secular grand inquisitor who wants to drive people who talk about "freedom" out of town. He has the basic distrust and suspicion of Mechanists for all Humanistic psychologists. If an actor comes to him complaining that his talent for great individual roles is not being used, he says, "*Change your costume, wear a beard—just look at all the diversity and freedom we have provided for you egotistical people!*"

Then there are the Hunters—the people who say that life is not a drama involving individual human decision but a hunt for scientific facts. These people will tell you that the drama you *feel* is only a pseudo-drama made up out of your ignorance of the facts of life. Get the facts, they say, and you won't have to make any more of those terrible decisions. And then they say: "You know, you're not really capable of recognizing facts when you see them; you're too romantic; so we'll *tell* you what they are as we go on finding them. Anyhow, we've already got enough facts to know what ought to be done *right now*, so don't get in the way!" If you get fresh with these people and talk about "freedom," they say, "Here are some nice, simple, administrative alternatives to look over. We *want* you to be free! Go ahead and vote! "

But the true fact is that these hunter types can't really teach anybody anything; they can *tell*

*you*, but they can't teach you; they couldn't even teach in a kindergarten; least of all in a kindergarten. For there is genuine human drama in the kindergarten. It emerges from within the pageantry of the child's life. You can recognize the thrill of authentic human presence in a five-year-old. It comes and goes. It comes and goes in all of us. The teacher is a stage-manager who knows enough to keep the pageant open to dramatic moments; and sometimes, if he is wise, he is able to assemble the elements of a dramatic climax for everyone in the class.

Why are the hunters so rigid? Why do they want to abolish all drama and put controlled pageantry in its place? Why do they brag so much about their "magnificent productions"?

Well, they start out being Hunters because of the ignorance and the dishonesty of the Pretenders. The pretenders are directors of pageants which simulate drama. They may not start out as pretenders, but they end up that way. They talk about freedom but they keep everything under control. They talk about moral choice but they make all the choices for you. They talk about right and wrong, but they catalogue all the possible rights and wrongs. You are not ever left in doubt; if you have an unanswered question you can look it up in the book. In the Book.

But after a while it gets pretty hard to tell the difference between a Pretender and a Hunter. The Pretender will say, "You did that because you're a sinner." And the Hunter will say, "You did that because you're an anal erotic, or maybe because of sibling rivalry. We'll see." After a while there are two Books. And then, after a little while longer, you say to your friends, "Books are no good. All I need to know is *right in here*." And you slap your chest.

Well, there's *something* in there. There is something in human beings which demands drama instead of pageantry. Depending upon the cultural situation, that "something" comes out as originality in art, discovery in science, or heresy in religion. But every bit of drama that becomes

manifest in the world can be copied, word for word, line for line, and then performed by trained mimics under the direction of producers who understand the forms of the dramatic unities of the past. Sometimes these producers explain that they have studied the theatre and that they know how to dose pageantry with proper amounts of drama; it makes you wonder what they *really* know. Sometimes they don't bother to explain much of anything; it depends, they say, upon the intelligence of the audience and the questions people ask. Their technique often results in some good facsimiles.

Won't a good facsimile sometimes induce a genuine dramatic moment? Maybe, but *only* maybe. Authentic emergence of drama is never under mechanical control. The muse is invoked; it cannot be manipulated. How do you tell the difference between invocation and skillful manipulation? It is very difficult. There is no theoretical answer to this question. You have to be there. You have to participate in the drama, and then you'll know. And you may be the only one who does.

A truly human community grows with the development of various constellations of this kind of awareness of the climactic moments of the human drama. Such culture evolves a natural code. You don't *name* these moments; you don't anatomize their processes; you don't externalize their meaning. You just know that they happen and that they are real. You may symbolize them; in fact, you have to symbolize them. The symbols have various qualities and grades. Poor symbols degrade meanings. Good symbols serve best in invocatory acts; poor symbols relapse into rituals.

Symbols are the only means we have of deliberately sharing the drama we experience. Depending upon tradition, on the mentality of people, on their habits, and on their freedom from habit, symbols are variously read by human beings. Some symbols acquire a more literal meaning than others. A precise communication needs unambiguous symbols—perhaps "signs" is

the better word. Symbols capable of embodying high meanings only intimate. The higher the meaning the more delicate or elusive the intimation. A universal symbol communicates nothing in particular. This embarrasses or irritates people with only particular interests. Or it may start a universal interest going in them. You never know. You may be aware of probabilities, but you never *know*.

So a great work of art is above all a unique creation. It combines symbols in a way that has never been done before. Yet it has an unearthly familiarity. It achieves universality by being like nothing on earth, and this you feel from its resemblances at the level of insight instead of form. It has a generality you can't explain except by pointing to other great works of art that somehow convey the same generality. You know what you mean. You may be able to use a symbolic language which illuminates for others what you mean. But you can't really *say* what you mean. You find yourself saying less and less about more and more, and so you try to make your silences pregnant with meaning.

People will now call you the Mad Alchemist. What is hard to bear is the fact that there *are* mad alchemists. In a society dominated by Pretenders and Hunters, almost no one can tell the difference between a mad alchemist and one who is sane. This is the reason why great works of art are usually not recognized until they can be rubricized by the Academy in the next generation. In this way universal truths are stepped down until they are "safe" for popular consumption.

Of course, a genuine alchemist learns to expect all this. He never complains about being "misunderstood." He is too busy for such indulgences.

Today we suffer the ominous dangers of Total Explanation. Total explanation in mind means total manipulation in matter. If you know all about a man he is no longer a man. We all want to be understood, but never *entirely*. Total understanding would erase us as human beings. It

would deny that there are things we haven't yet understood ourselves, and haven't decided about. It would put an end to our history. To be completely understood would make us all post-historic.

This is the terrorism of the computer. It is difficult to talk about our minds, but comparatively easy to talk about computers. We imagine that, somehow, by understanding computers we may be able to understand ourselves. But the computer has no *self*. What terrorizes us is the fact that the computer seems to be able to do intellectual operations better than we can do them, and thus to replace much of our being; and if we have identified our being with no more than intellectual operations, then the computer will make us extinct. So the computer becomes a kind of symbol of everything and nothing—an electronic pseudo-absolute, but a functional absolute in the lives of people who have to externalize everything that they think they know in order to persuade themselves that they know it.

The computer is a practical man's practical nexus with infinity. It is La Place's mathematical surrogate deity embodied, not in flesh and blood, but in metal and juice. It is the closest we have been able to come to the reification of our Hunter ideal. It is reputed to be able to do all our work for us except the work of self-recognition—which happens to be our only important task. But we have good religious texts to support the beneficence of the computer: instead of repeating *Laborare est orare*, we now say, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not. . . ."

We can probably rely upon the computer to tell us, eventually, everything that can be known about the pageantry of the universe. If we can get adequate samples, the computer will extrapolate as far as we want to go. The computer can undoubtedly reduce every mnemonic operation in nature to a formula-abstraction—either in terms of flat-out laws or in probability equations; and no

doubt it can describe open systems as well as closed systems, so long as we nourish it with objective or objectified facts. One might go so far as to say that the computer is an electrically animated symbol of every effect-state that is or could possibly exist, amounting to an electronic Bible of all our yesterdays, with instant total inference. For a computer, inference and recall are the same thing.

The computer is filled with the magic of past infinity. In fact, its reductive genius merges manipulative magic and manipulative science into one, just as they were in antiquity. Conceivably, the computer might even eventually produce the elements of a crucial allegory concerning the nature of man—the same kind of allegory Camus constructed from the myth of Sisyphus. That is, the more the computer does for us, the more curd-like or superfluous will become all those parts of man which compete with the computer, until, finally, he just can't stand the isolation and *declares* himself. The pressure may help him to realize, at last, that those parts were not himself—they were only his psychological pageantry.

But this sounds a little like science-fiction romancing. The important thing is to find the right use for our abstracting ability. There is a sense in which there wouldn't be anything at all without the power to set limits—which is one of the effects of abstracting. An eagle wouldn't have wings without the natural power to set limits. A mosquito wouldn't know whom to bite. The measureless chaos of the universe gains form through the abstraction accomplished by the isolating power of sense organs. Then, another transforming degree of abstraction results from the power of thought—relevance-to-ends is the principle by which *we* abstract. And as our ends change, so does our science.

Only selves have ends, so science changes with the idea of the self. If we believe we are products of the external world, then our science will concern the facts and forces and processes of the external world. But if we find that science of

this sort turns us inside-out—exhausts our existence, denies what we feel to be our essential being—then we may aim our abstracting power in other directions, making it encompass other fields of awareness or experience. If we are made impotent by the static readings we get from abstractions concerned with external nature—if they reduce us to part of the scenery in the cosmic pageant, giving us no human roles at all—the trouble is not with the abstractions or our abstracting power, but with the use we make of them and the judgments we infer from them about ourselves.

Why do our selves escape us so easily? Selves are not finite facts. They are potentialities. Potentialities are unmanifest; they are *possible* potencies. You can't measure them. You can't prove them. You can only make them "become." And if you say they aren't "real," they will never become. The real self—the self with a future, which *endures*—is always the self that has not yet become manifest. The measurable, objective self is always a finite self. The "empirical" self, we sometimes call it. Compared to the real self, the empirical self is hardly alive. Nothing can be done about it. Its being is always in the past. To search for the self by recreating the past is a doomed undertaking. It is an attempt to revive the dead. The true self is not *in* the past. It never is. It can't be.

Pageantry is the wonder of the past spread out before our eyes. Drama comes with the announcement and entry of the self's potentiality. A well-constructed past leaves openings for potentiality in the present. A poor past makes a specious present, one with no visible or believable openings. A poor past is a past that makes you try to define the present with finality, thus removing meaning from the future. So the past is both prison and platform, confinement and release.

## *REVIEW*

### THERAPY ACCORDING TO PLATO

IF, as Alfred North Whitehead concluded, "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato," it is also the case that, throughout the term of this tradition, Plato has been seen by Western man through the eyes of scholars more intent on their own purposes than upon a full understanding of Plato. From Aristotle on, Plato suffered at the hands of his interpreters. What has not been well realized—not, that is, until the appearance of the work to be examined here—is the fact that Plato seems to have anticipated virtually all the major distortions of his thought, and to have dealt with them in advance in a corrective fashion.

This is one of the disclosures of *Therapeia*, by Robert E. Cushman (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1958, \$6.00). Dr. Cushman is professor of systematic theology and philosophical theology at the Duke University Divinity School. A delighting aspect of this work, which is subtitled "Plato's Conception of Philosophy," is its freedom from Christian apologetics. Save for half a page on the idea of "divine grace," the book, it seems to this reviewer, is impartially devoted to understanding Plato in terms of Plato himself.

But why all this reverence for Plato? Why should *anyone* be accorded so sovereign a position in philosophy? It is Dr. Cushman's contention that the mastery of Platonic thought in terms of its own criteria of truth and value is the only way to understand Plato without prejudice, and that the rewards of doing so are a complete justification of the attempt.

Plato's thought, Dr. Cushman holds, is self-authenticating. How shall we persuade ourselves of this? This question is indeed to Plato's point. *No one else* can persuade us of self-authenticating truth. There are no knock-down, externally compelling demonstrations of the importance of self-knowledge. The conclusion reached by Plato is that if men refuse to seek the self-authenticating kind of truth, nothing

can be done about it. All that remains for their instruction is pain. As Dr. Cushman says:

If self-examination is withheld, ignorance remains well-nigh invincible. In that case, the only remaining refutation of intransigent minds will be one Socrates explicitly noted in the *Gorgias*. If men refuse to acknowledge the sovereign imperative of the Good, then they are destined to live at odds and in perpetual discord and faction with themselves. The penalty for man's non-recognition of the true First Principle is the demoralization, even annihilation, of his own essential nature—the ultimate absurdity, one would suppose, into which the human spirit can fall. But this, precisely, is Plato's version of the present "fallen" condition of man.

What hope is there, then, if in the nature of things even those who know can never *make* other men see the truth? The ground of hope, for Plato, lies in his postulate that in every human heart, without exception, there is a secret longing for truth and the Good. A man without this longing, however covered up it may be, is not a man. This longing can be invited, but it cannot be manipulated. For this reason, "proofs" of a demonstrative character are never relevant to the inclinations of the soul. Such proofs always have to do with lesser matters—"scientific" matters which abstract from the totality of human life. Hence Plato's somewhat casual attitude toward all "final" conclusions. The *indisputable* truth is either externally unknowable or it is a truth of comparative unimportance—supererogatory to man. The certainties of science have their relative value in relation to material ends, but if allowed to rule philosophy they blind human beings to the need for self-authenticating truth. Socrates declares this in the autobiographical portion of the *Phaedo*.

If not even Socrates could prove the truth to another, what remains to be done? The entire body of Plato's writings investigates possible answers to this question. Virtue is knowledge, declares Plato. But can virtue be taught? The answer seems to be yes and no. If teaching is conditioning, virtue cannot be taught. But if teaching is inviting men to the experience of self-authentication, it sometimes can. Confidence in the potentiality of man for the practice of virtue, for the search for truth, for self-recognition

of the fact that the Good is *in* man, makes the faith which for Socrates eliminates the possibility of despair. So Plato's work is an affirmation of this potentiality, an analysis of the obstacles to its emergence, a prescription for removing these obstacles, and a tentative outline of the stages of human progress, which also amounts to a prognosis concerned with the healing of the ills of mankind in their fallen state.

Socrates encounters stubborn, knotty problems in the men with whom he converses. He learns, according to Plato, that there are two kinds of ignorance. There is first the ignorance of the child, who knows things inside himself that he does not yet recognize outside, in daily life. The type of this ignorance is found in the slave boy in the *Meno*. With little difficulty, Socrates "leads out" the inner knowledge of the boy.

The *Meno* presents an uncomplicated teacher-learner situation. Socrates, by easy stages, shows the boy how to convert unknowns into knowns. He makes no discoveries for the boy, but teaches him a method of discovery. There is no sparring around, no sudden embarrassments, no use of shame, no notable "confrontation." The boy just opens himself up like a flower to greater understanding.

But Socrates' work is seldom attended by this simplicity. His larger and more engrossing task is to find ways of dealing with "double ignorance"—ignorance compounded of false certainties, biasing securities, and partisan interests. Where does this kind of ignorance come from? How may it be exposed? In what terms will the exposure be accepted and some changes made? There is no sure method for this. The only valid change is *self-change*. The only effective conversion is self-conversion. As Socrates says to Polus: "If on my part I fail to produce yourself as my *one witness* to confirm what I say, I consider I have achieved nothing of any account towards the matter of our discussion." The dialectic persuades not to truth but to the method of self-discovery. As Dr. Cushman puts it:

Plato is less intent upon propounding neat answers to the riddle of human existence than on

locating the genuinely fruitful questions by the exploration of which others may be assisted to find answers for themselves. This is by intention, for, where things ultimate are at issue, Plato has no faith in borrowed findings, no faith in so-called truths which a man does not achieve for himself as a personal possession. And here indeed is a fundamental difference from Aristotle, who was subtly lured by definitive answers of supposedly enforceable demonstrations and who, consequently, was impatient with dialogue and preferred the declarative treatise. . . .

Dialectic, especially in the form of *elenchos* or cross-examination, is the art of inquiry rather than of demonstration. It is a method calculated not so much to enforce a thesis as to discover one. It does not derive consequences from postulates its business is to authenticate postulates. Through its power of crystallization, a man formulates the real issues and asks the fertile questions which may lead of themselves to self-confirming answers. For we cannot comprehend what Plato means to accomplish with *elenchos* unless we understand that, in the proper sphere of its operation, Plato discounts all answers except those a man gives to himself, inwardly consenting to the import of the converging lines of evidence. So he provides a method by which a man may be both inquisitor and witness. . . .

Plato's conception of Wisdom is governed by his conviction that truth relating to ultimate reality resists propositional status and cannot be corralled and contained. Truth *about* reality is subordinated to truth *as* reality. Where man's relation to ultimate Being is involved, truth and reality are inseparable, for reality is embraced in immediate apprehension. Manifestly, then, truth *as* reality is not something admissible of transference by some men to others. Accordingly, the function of philosophy is that of rightly disposing men toward truth.

The function of speech is in the practice of this irenic, "disposing" art. Socrates calls it his "art of midwifery," which seeks to bring truth to birth and also obliges him to distinguish between live births and miscarriage in ideas. But persuasion through speech is subject to the misuse which is commonly called "rhetoric," as practiced by the Sophists. Thus long sections of the Dialogues are devoted to distinguishing between the Dialectic and common sophist practice. The rhetoric of the Sophists "tends, in neglecting prior questions about the aims of life, to

entrench men in their devotion to unexamined goals by making them all the more successful in securing them." The virtue they inculcate, Socrates says, is not virtue at all, but the gaining of advantage. "It leaves human life unexamined and unchanged." The Dialectic has an opposite purpose. It explores initial assumptions and weighs their value. Unlike "logical development" and deduction, which can "ignore first principles of thought and move unsuspectingly above the level where decision is already made and both consent and commitment given," the Dialectic pursues thought to its source in the *ethos* of men's lives—to the basic ethical-moral orientation which governs all their decisions.

While virtue cannot exactly be "taught," it remains true that only the man who recognizes virtue as the substratum of knowledge can assist others in finding their way. Virtue cannot be taught because it is *decisional* truth—the kind of truth a man realizes only by acting upon it. But the Dialectic may lead to and indicate the thresholds of decision. Or, as Dr. Cushman says:

If knowledge, in the last resort, is insight, it manifestly cannot be conveyed even if its conditions may be induced. The conventional notion of instruction had to be replaced by a new and more suitable *paideusis* which would make room for "recovery" of knowledge out of the self. For such knowledge alone is virtue.

Where there is "double ignorance"—the ignorance of false opinion—"it is Plato's consistent word that the *elenchos* must first reduce the mind to 'perplexity' by admission of contradiction among espoused opinions and to the end that the desire of learning may replace obstinate assumption." But whence comes the true desire to know, which is the prerequisite of knowing? It comes, Plato says, from *Eros*, of which there is a higher and a lower. The true therapy is this: "The master-physician is he who can distinguish between the nobler and baser loves, and can effect such alteration that the one passion is replaced by the other; and he will be deemed a good practitioner who is expert in producing love where it ought to flourish but exists not, and removing it from where it should not be."

There seem endless analogues to be drawn between this extraordinary display of Plato's intentions, methods, and ends, and the emerging temper of much in modern thought. These parallels are in themselves a remarkable testimonial to the symmetry in Plato's philosophy and its conformity to "Nature." The parallels are seen in the findings of the humanistic psychologists, in the new scientific theory of knowledge proposed by Michael Polanyi, and in the insights of the existentialists. Gandhi is easily recognized as a Socratic sort of philosopher, likewise Ortega.

At the end of the book, Dr. Cushman still asks the question, but what of the man who resists, with whom all the arts of the *elenchos* have failed? Plato, he says, has no answer to this question. And, indeed, if there were an answer, we should not be men but manikins which can be manipulated into "goodness" by some supernatural power. But we are men—unpredictable men—and Plato will not have it otherwise. Dr. Cushman suggests that "divine grace" is a Christian aid to accepting this dilemma, but "grace" is also by definition unpredictable and hardly a help to us, since by waiting for grace men may fail to make what efforts they can of themselves. There is not a solution, but at least a rational extension of the problem of destiny, in the Myth of Er, to which Dr. Cushman does not refer; and the pain which Plato predicts for those who prefer discord in themselves to the discovery of truth has a general embodiment in the principle of *Nemesis*, by which men, after sore suffering, may be led to seek explanation of their pain. But these are the only omissions that we have been able to find in a book which should do much to make Plato's thought a living presence for modern man.



## COMMENTARY

### PLATONIC MYSTICISM

WHILE there is no entry in the index of Dr. Cushman's *Therapeia* for "Mysticism" (see Review), this seems a good time to consider the objection to Platonic mysticism made by scholars who are otherwise Plato's firm admirers. Leonard Nelson (*Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy*), for one, seems in his title essay to think that Plato deserts the sharp, insistent clarity of the Dialectic when he "gives his doctrine of ideas [Forms] its ambivalent, half-mystic, half-logicizing character," and in a later paper Nelson complains that mysticism relies on "powers" at the cost of ethics. It replaces morality with asceticism, he says, which is a turning away from the world.

Eric Havelock (in *Preface to Plato*) feels that Plato compromised his tough-minded opposition to imitative imagery by suggesting that the Forms are in some sense visual. Havelock admits there is a difference in the receptivity to this ideal "inspiration," but remains suspicious:

The mental condition is one of passivity, of a new sort, perhaps. The poetic type of receptivity gained through imitation was an excited condition emotionally active. The new contemplation is to be serene, calm, and detached. It is to be like the "inspection" of a religious rite as opposed to participation in a human drama. Plato has changed the character of the performance and has reduced us to silent spectators. But we remain sight-seers. Are we not simply being invited to avoid hard thinking and relapse into a new form of dream which shall be religious rather than poetic?

Yet it seems unjust to suspect Plato of giving up on hard thinking because he speaks of a kind of awareness which transcends it. He seldom if ever suggests that such visions *contradict* it.

Ortega, discussing Western mystics in general, may reveal the ground of this prejudice when he remarks:

They [the mystics] pretend to arrive at a knowledge which is superior to reality. If the spoils

in the form of wisdom which the trance yields them were actually worth more than theoretic knowledge we would not for a moment hesitate to abandon the latter and make mystics of ourselves. But what they tell us is trivial and insuperably monotonous. The mystic's reply is that knowledge gained in a state of ecstasy transcends all language and is by its very superiority a wordless knowledge.

One sees at once what Ortega means. He is not ready to embrace *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues) as offering the last word, merely because of a claim made by someone calling himself a "mystic." Always a just man, however, Ortega adds: "Fortunately some mystics were thinkers of genius before they were mystics—men like Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, and Bergson," and while he is not impressed by their mystical findings he refuses to deprecate "the work of mystic thinkers." Perhaps, when we know more about these things, we shall be better able to distinguish between intellectually disciplined mystics and the gushy sort. Plato, at any rate, was not among the latter. As for "wordless" findings, Plato's seventh epistle makes ample sense on this question for all serious readers. And if later mystics have claimed supernatural "rank" for their deliveries, Plato can hardly be convicted of this, either.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves THE BAUHAUS: II

THE Bauhaus curriculum was built on the conception of the "creative teacher." Artists of proven ability to produce vital works were chosen for positions and were afforded wide opportunities for their further development by being given time and space for their own private work. Bauhaus methods and curriculum were a changing matter based on certain stated aims, but the Bauhaus educational philosophy was similarly an evolving thing which grew with experience and practice. It was perhaps clarified in its most explicit written forms in years after the school had ceased to exist. Mies van der Rohe once said:

The Bauhaus was not an institution with a clear program—it was an idea, and Gropius formulated this idea with great precision. . . . The fact that it was an idea, I think, is the cause of this enormous influence the Bauhaus had . . . around the globe. You cannot do that with an organization, you cannot do that with propaganda. Only an idea spreads that far.

*Bauhaus Bücher* propagated the ideas of the Bauhaus around the world. Gropius brought aspects of the Bauhaus program to the Graduate School of Architecture at Harvard University. Moholy-Nagy established the "New Bauhaus" in Chicago, which became the design department of Illinois Institute of Technology, and his writings *The New Vision* and *Vision in Motion* strongly influenced techniques of design instruction in the English speaking countries. His books were adapted to elementary and high school instruction as "the materials approach" to art education. Albers adapted the Bauhaus ideas to the needs of a small college devoted to general education at Black Mountain, North Carolina, where the apprenticeship system of the Bauhaus was applied to dance, music, theatre and creative writing as well as to the visual arts.

The basic point of departure for the Bauhaus philosophy was Gropius' view of the role of the

creative artist in the reshaping of living space to better satisfy man's psychic and material needs. The idea was already implicit in his first proclamation of 1919:

The complete building is the final aim of the visual arts. Their noblest function was once the decoration of buildings. Today they exist in isolation, from which they can be rescued only through the conscious, cooperative effort of all craftsmen. Architects, painters, and sculptors must recognize anew the composite character of a building as an entity. Only then will their work be imbued with the architectonic spirit which it has lost as "salon art."

The idea has been extended in *The Scope of Total Architecture* where Gropius presents his view of the role of the architect and designer in the comprehensive transformation of the human environment. The designer and architect? Gropius insists, must create through his work an original, constructive expression of the spiritual and materials of human life, renewing the human spirit instead of repeating the thought and action of the past.

Such a conception of the role of the creative artist as designer and architect entails a conception of education beyond the training of a skilled specialist. It does not, Moholy-Nagy points out, put subjects at the head of the curriculum but "man in his natural readiness to grasp the whole of life." Gropius writes similarly:

The fact that the man of today is, from the outset, left too much to traditional specialized training—which merely imparts to him a specialized knowledge, but does not make clear to him the meaning and purpose of his work, nor the relationship in which he stands to the world at large—was counteracted at the Bauhaus by putting at the beginning of its training not the "trade" but the "human being" in his natural readiness to grasp life as a whole.

Education to play its role in industrial society therefore involves the development of broadly creative individuals with an awareness of the problems of men and a broad knowledge of modern technology and scientific method which

could be used in the solution of these problems. Moholy-Nagy in *The New Vision* writes:

Our educators have the task of coordinating the requirements of a normal development of human powers, laying the foundation for a balanced life even in the elementary schools. Leonardo da Vinci, with his gigantic efforts and his superhuman achievements, is the great example of the integration of art, science and technology. It seems that our time will be able to create similar basic conditions, similar atmosphere, to produce a similar personality. Our time is one of transition striving toward a synthesis of all knowledge. A person with imagination can function now as an integrator. Of course, for the time being, he has to push aside all wishes for the thoroughgoing complexity which only a mature time can offer. He must be merely a vital pioneer on the vast and unbroken territories of our period. Here every necessary action can lead to a creative solution. If somebody doubts that one individual can ever achieve such a multitude of solutions, the answer can be that it may come not alone from individuals but from working communities. . . . The next step must be the solidarity of all cultural workers and their conscious collaboration.

In developing its educational program the Bauhaus affirmed the relevance of science and technology to the education of the creative artist. It encouraged the use of contemporary techniques and materials. It saw the artist's function in designing for mass production. It recognized the relevance of scientific findings for use within the creative process. It even adapted the scientific method to its own educational processes, developing theory and experiments relating to the problem of the visual arts. This can be perceived in the paintings and writings of Klee and Kandinsky who, during the period of their Bauhaus teaching, systematically explored the expressive and structural possibilities of visual elements. Klee has written:

Exact research . . . can bodily bridge the distance from one thing to another. It can preserve an ordered attitude in chaos. Art . . . has been given sufficient room for exact investigation, and for some time the gates leading to it have been opened. What had already been done for music by the end of the eighteenth century has at least been begun for the pictorial arts. Mathematics and physics furnished the

means in the form of rules to be followed and broken. In the beginning it is wholesome to be concerned with the functions and to disregard the finished form. Studies in algebra, in geometry, in mechanics characterize teaching toward the essential and the functional, in contrast to the apparent. One learns to look behind the facade, to grasp the root of things. One learns to recognize the undercurrents, the antecedents of the visible. One learns to dig down, to uncover, to find the cause, to analyze.

Such efforts at systematization can be seen in Kandinsky's book *Point to Line to Plane* and in Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* and *Das Bildnerische Denken*. Gropius writes:

The hand masters matter through the crafts, and with help of tools and machinery. Conception and visualization are always simultaneous. Only the individual's capacity to feel, to know, and to execute varies in degree and speed. True creative work can be done only by the man whose knowledge and mastery of the physical laws of statistics, dynamics, optics, acoustics equip him to give life and shape to his inner vision. In a work of art the laws of the physical world, the intellectual world, and the world of the spirit function and are expressed simultaneously.

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*(To Be Concluded)*

## *FRONTIERS*

### Art and Morality

WRITING on "Literature and Political Action" in the July-August *Dissent*, Lawrence Hyman dissents from the view he attributes to "critics as diverse as F. R. Leavis, William Empson, Lionel Trilling, and Wayne Booth," to the effect that "the moral concern to be found in literature is basically the same as the moral concern we have in ordinary experience." He argues that if the moral concerns of a poem or a novel were like those in daily life, they would no longer be "art," but mandates of righteousness and action. Great literature or art, he says, performs another service:

. . . great literature has a "spiritual impact," but . . . this impact is dependent not on the answers the novel or poem may give to us but on its power to make us question the answers we already have. It is not a moral direction we must look to in literature, but a disturbance. Yet it is a kind of disturbance and this will be my final point, that the moralist, of all people, needs most.

This is the argument against "socialist realism" as amounting to abdication in the arts; it is the perception which made John Reed say that while the revolutionary movement was a great thing, it played hell with his poetry. A similar awareness made Ezekiel Mphahlele point out that while the doctrine of Negritude might have some political uses for Africans, it should not be allowed to infect poetry.

Mr. Hyman declares the importance of a crucial region above "moral" issues, saying that loss of awareness of this region will make us diminished men. He suggests that this "universal" point of view is "amoral," the reason being, apparently, that it disarms the activist of his righteousness:

The civil rights worker, intent upon driving off the white mob, is naturally enough blind to the pathos and courage that might be present in a member of that mob. And if he is to be effective, he is, or should be, oblivious to the divided feelings that may be present in his friends and even within himself. The

man of action must concentrate on what is relevant for his purpose.

This seems to say that in order to act, the morally aroused man must learn to deny—or at least temporarily ignore—a part of himself. For reasons of moral interest he must reject the French maxim, *To understand all is to forgive all*. His justification is that the pain of all mankind is at stake.

The work of art serves us in less passionate hours, helping to restore the humanity that may have been diminished by action. While novels and poems provide no mandate for action, "we may find in them something that is of value to all people, but particularly to those of us whose lives are dominated by moral imperatives." This:

The work of art, particularly literature, deals directly with the essential danger of any system of morality. For any idea by its very nature is prone to cut us off from the immediate experience which first produced the idea. . . . To be fully human we must not only have a moral imperative but an ability to go outside of that imperative and see things simply as things—outside our own categories of right and wrong.

So, nothing human is alien to the great artist. And the capacity to rise above praise and blame is, as John Dewey said, "the heart of the moral potency of art." But how can this be regarded as "amoral"? Doubtless Mr. Hyman would answer that the spiritual impact of great art is amoral because, as he shows, it unfits men to act.

This is the real question: *Does* it unfit us to act? Must it?

Gandhi would not agree. Non-violent action was for him a course directed by the insight of this "higher" morality. That is, while hardly an "artist," except perhaps in some Blakean sense, Gandhi evolved a mode of action which was to be lit up by precisely the awareness Mr. Hyman says action must shut out—awareness of "the pathos and the courage that might be present in a member" of the opposition. Gandhi's conception of morality rests on this principle. What disarms

the partisan moralist—one might say, the confidently righteous moralist—arms the nonviolent moralist with the only power he is willing to use.

Action which would of necessity make us less than "fully human"—to use Mr. Hyman's words—was in Gandhi's eyes action which could only perpetuate the partisanships that eternally turn men against each other. He did not "condemn" people who chose this kind of action, but he insisted that there was a better way. This refusal to condemn has been at the heart of the discipline of nonviolent action from its very beginnings. As Erik Erikson points out in his notable study in the September 1965 *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Gandhi regarded every confrontation as a confrontation of *equals*. He included his opponent in all his plans. In the first strike which he led in India, he exacted from the starving mill workers in Ahmedabad "a pledge that they would abstain from *any destruction*, even of the *opponent's good name*." He would permit no moralistic condemnation of the mill-owners and, as Erikson says, he specifically prevented "cumulative aggravation of *bad conscience*, *negative identity* and hypocritical moralism." In short, instead of avoiding recognition of the suppressed moral qualities of his opponents, he relied on them. At the same time, Gandhi had a new kind of toughness:

. . . he gave his opponent the maximum opportunity for an informed choice, even as he had based his demands on a thorough investigation of what could be considered fair and right: he told the workers not to demand more than that, but also to be prepared to *die* rather than demand less. The *acceptance of suffering* and, in fact, of death, which is so basic to his "truth force," constitutes an *active choice without submission to anyone*; whatever masochism we may find in it, it is the highest affirmation of individualism in the service of humanity.

Gandhi's respect for the potentialities of all men was so fundamental and far-reaching in its implications that doctrinaire moralists—even doctrinaire pacifists—are seldom able to accept

his view as "organizationally" practical. In respect to the application of nonviolence, for example, he said:

For me the matter does not admit of reasoning beyond a point. It is one of complete conviction that war is an unmixed evil. I would not yield to anyone in my detestation of war. But conviction is one thing, correct practice another. The very thing that one war-resister may do in the interest of his mission may repel another war-resister who may do the exact opposite and yet both may hold the same view about war. The contradiction arises because of the bewildering complexity of human nature. I can only, therefore, plead for mutual toleration even among professors of the same creed.

One sees, at any rate, that Gandhi found instruction for action in that region of awareness above the conflicts of partisan morality. It led him to the view that justice cannot be obtained without an equal will to do no harm. One can see him as a twentieth-century Socrates, repeating after the old Athenian teacher of men, *It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong*. This was truth for Gandhi as for Socrates, and whether it reaches beyond the perspective of the highest art (it didn't for Tolstoy), as Keats seemed to say when he proposed that "poetry is not so fine a thing as philosophy," is a question we leave to others. The poets, at any rate, as the War Resisters League annual calendar shows with abundant evidence, often come very close to the Gandhian mandate without sacrifice of their "art." This is not really a collection of poetic propaganda—call it rather a moral "happening," a revealing coincidence of morality and art.