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BACK TO THE FARM

IN a book which brazenly mocks believers in the Gross National Product and laughs defiantly at the manifest deficits of the eternally failing family-size farm, H. Gordon Green, a Canadian writer and husbander of pigs, reports in some detail on the means he has developed to outwit the System. The book is *Professor, Go Home!*, with illustrations by Lowell Naeve (Harvest House, Montreal, paper $2.00, cloth $4.00). In a section celebrating the responses that rural life seems to evoke in human beings, Mr. Green tells how his father and a neighbor, Joe Gagnon, both old men, work to get-in the hay. Joe gashed his bald pate on a shingle nail, but claimed this only parted his hair, while the author's father, a hale eighty-four, insisted on working strenuously in the mow. Asked about the possibility of a heart attack, the elder Green coined a phrase, "When you've got to go, you've got to go," and went on forking hay. And, as his son says,

> . . . he has a good time. "Seeing this is my second childhood I might as well act like it," he says. He still likes to get into a marble game, or for that matter in almost any other game that the children happen to be playing.

The writer muses:

> I don't suppose I could ever explain men like Joe and my father to my partners at the office. My office friends are such serious, cautious men—ulcerated perfectionists, I am afraid, who insist upon doing the minutes" task with the utmost conscience and precision as they proceed toward some grand fallacy.

Well, is raising pigs any better? Mr. Green thinks so, and his book gives the reasons.

There will inevitably be readers who, while enjoying Mr. Green's barbs and appreciating the rustic truths amiably disclosed in this volume, will say at the end, "Well, it's really quite good, but I could never do farm work." For these readers, the book only adds a little melancholy to the disorders rampant in Western society. This reaction is something like saying that Gandhi understood the needs of India, but that social regeneration by means of the spinning wheel is hardly practical for a technological society like ours. And then, to clinch the ironic hopelessness of it all, one might tell a *Peanuts* story:

> When Lucy's friend complains to Charley Brown that there is nothing to do, he suggests that she go jump in a big pile of leaves. She seems to think this is a pretty good suggestion puts on her coat, and goes outside and walks around a while. Pretty soon she comes back to Charlie Brown and asks him, "Where does one go to purchase a pile of leaves?"

At this point it is helpful to pay a tribute to the man who says, in the face of all such situations, "Don't confuse me with facts; my mind is made up." For there is a sense in which this man is completely right. A time is finally reached, in the accumulation of discouraging facts, when there is no important conclusion to be drawn from them except their vast irrelevance. The "facts," in this case, are marshalled to show that the quest for authenticity in human life has become vain and useless. The facts are made to define the external environment and the conditions of life in a way which "proves" that if we want to become whole human beings, there are large projects to be undertaken, *first*, to make the environment "right" for so desirable a development. It's sort of like dressing up to get your picture taken with the family. Everybody has to have new clothes, and after the children are washed and polished you stand there with a glazed expression until the shutter clicks. The picture is terrible, of course, and you hide it in a trunk. It is only after two or three generations of expanding pretense in nonsense of this sort that a man like Samuel Beckett comes to be accounted a great dramatist.

But the man who has his mind made up isn't taken in by any of this chicanery. He is attentive to another order of "facts." The facts about the world and how nature confines and dictates to human life are seen to be irrelevant in the sense that Socrates found them irrelevant, or as Tolstoy found them irrelevant. In My *Confession,* describing his feelings before he made up his mind, Tolstoy wrote:

> I searched in all the branches of knowledge, and not only failed to find anything, but even convinced myself that all those who, like myself, had been searching in the sciences, had failed just as much. They had not only not found anything, but had also clearly recognized the fact that that which had brought me to despair,—the meaninglessness of life,—was the only incontestable knowledge which was accessible to man. . . . If you turn to that branch of those sciences which attempts to give answers to the question of life—to physiology, psychology, biology, sociology,—you come across an appalling scantiness of ideas, the greatest obscurity, an unjustified pretense at solving irrelevant questions, and constant contradictions of one thinker with others and even with himself. If you turn to the branch of knowledge which does not busy itself with the solution of the problems of life, but answers only its special, scientific questions, you are delighted at the power of the human mind, but know in advance that there will be no answers to the questions of life. They say: "We have no answers to what you are and why you live. and we do not busy ourselves with that; but if you want to know the laws of light, of chemical combinations, the laws of the development of organisms, if you want to know the laws of the bodies, their forms, and the relation of numbers and quantities, if you want to know the laws of your mind, we shall give you clear, definite, incontrovertible answers to all that."

Since *My Confession* is available in libraries, we shall not repeat here the answer Tolstoy found in his quest, except to say that it came in the form of the "decisional truth" of which Plato speaks, and that Tolstoy, not being a fool, did not try to convert it into "objective" truth. In its simplest form decisional truth changes the question from "What are the facts?" to "What do you do in relation to the facts—any facts?" How do you *decide?*

Mr. Green's delightful diatribe against the conventional array of facts in *Professor, Go Home!* belongs to a long line of books which declare the analogy between Nature and Man and invite the reader to a blending sort of study. Sometimes it turns out to be habit-forming. Once, after a cycle of bitter complaints from his family about the burdens and impracticalities of farm life in the twentieth century, Mr. Green put the farm up for sale and then told his wife and children at dinner. Of course, they jumped all over him:

> . . . as I listened to them scolding me for being so impetuous, I saw that it was not as I had thought at all. Sure, my family had protested the battle of the farm. They had protested it bitterly, just as I had. And like myself they had loved it just the same. Only it had taken a moment like this to make them realize that.
>
> I felt a little ashamed and very very happy. We had a half gallon of ice cream a little later and a box of chocolates for mother. And next day I called in to see the real estate man again.
>
> "Some of these bigger farms you have on your list," I said. "Some of these places that's just aching to be sold—how about showing me a few?"
>
> So the animals will only go to a new place and not to new owners. It is a beautiful place and I feel guilty that I am not yet brave enough to leave the office in the city and give the farm all of my time. But it will remain the really important part of my life. The rest I will endure yet a little to pay the feed bills.
>
> Which is why I am out in the barn now writing this as I wait through the cold dark hours with a lantern under my knees, beside a sow approaching the brink of maternity.

Mr. Green accomplishes such a happy balance between his Secret and the hard facts of rural life—that is, he weaves the subjective factor in and out of the daily chores so skilfully—that the market for tired Canadian farms will probably strengthen considerably in the next few months.

Well, is he playing fair? Will an amateur farmer or two gain a similar solid ground from following his lure? Nobody knows. It might work, so long as the experimenters realize that all the "facts" in such romances—reports on affairs of

the heart—are by nature ambiguous. The "truth" in such works is always an unheard contrapuntal line which you have to write yourself.

"Nature" is a great, big, often undiscriminated intuition of meaning in our time, as in earlier times. Rapport is the thing, and the real estate people don't stock it. Socrates stocked it, but most of the time he couldn't even give it away. Thoreau stocked it, but he was very candid about its asking price, and this frightens most people into buying well-recommended substitutes.

Then there is that puzzling, reverse rule of Lao-tse's which applies here: If you name it you can't have it! The habit of being practical dies hard. We don't mind semi-serious truth, such as Louis Armstrong's "If you have to ask, you'll never know," but when we are deciding about the Good Life we want a better guide than paradoxes. So we might just buy a farm.

The trouble is that it is difficult to find any angelic presence in a sow. Mr. Green found it, but he's kind of impractical anyhow. All you can say is that he bought a bigger farm for the right reasons, but he can't tell you what they are. And if you complain to Socrates, he'll ask you what made you think a farm would do any good; he got more out of living in the city.

There is a chapter in Raymond Rogers' book, *Coming Into Existence* (World Publishing Company, 1967), that seems written for just this problem. It is called "The Partly Examined Life," and it speaks to our condition. Toward the end Mr. Rogers says:

> . . . let us imagine a man who becomes aware of himself and the difficulties that confront him but never recognizes that he can take any action toward solving these problems. He can see what might have been and what could be if things were different, but he can see no way of coping with them as they are.

He won't buy a farm. It's too late for anything like that. He's right, of course. Green says a farm won't pay.

> He doesn't forge his own foundations for action (beliefs) or choose goals to work toward; he doesn't weigh alternative possible courses of action and make deliberate evaluations of the possibilities; he doesn't make calculated attacks on problems. This is a kind of life, it is essentially unexamined, and we agree that it is quite possibly not worth living.

This man knows too many facts. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* has him in thrall.

> Consider next a man who becomes aware of himself and the problems he faces, who is fully self-active and ready to tackle any difficulty, but who still doesn't do any self-examining. His way of living is to tackle whatever complexity is at the moment most bothersome or closest at hand and battle it through without asking himself questions, making evaluations, or weighing alternative possibilities. He develops attitudes but doesn't crystallize convictions from them. The closest he comes to self-examination is to reminisce about his past struggles and to express an attitude now and then. This might be called the reactive life. The person who lives it operates by reacting to separate environmental challenges rather than by planning an overall campaign. But he is active rather than passive. Is his life worthless? We don't believe so. It seems to us that there might be a lot of solid satisfaction in it. We see some impressive values inherent in and flowing from self-activity, whether it is based on self-examination or completely spontaneous.

Well, a man like that might buy a farm, but he could also become an astronaut. Or as a writer he might sell the *Reader's Digest* without any essential compromise.

There is one more intermediate step to consider:

> Finally, let us note the main features of the kind of life that most of us lead. We are aware of ourselves and of the worlds we face, and for the most part we address ourselves actively to our difficulties. We are not fully self-active but neither are we crippled by the feeling of being helplessly buffeted about by external forces. Once in a while we do a little informal, unpretentious, unsystematic, and somewhat inefficient self-examining, though we operate most of the time on the basis of attitudes. . . . We take some action consider the result, act again, think again, and so on. . . . we live the partly examined life. And though our lives would be much better if they were more thoroughly examined, we think they are far from worthless. The partly examined life, we maintain, is very much worth living, and we think its

> value is not derived entirely from the self-examining that it includes. . . . Occasionally one finds himself facing a situation with which there seems to be no way to cope. The self takes hold, starts some sort of activity, unifies, and battles through somehow. After the emergency is over, the "intellect" still fails to see how the job was done or how it could have been done. Obviously the self has resources other than the intellect to call on, and processes distinct from reflective thinking occur during dynamic unification. We're glad these resources exist, just as we're glad to be able to supplement and refine them by the use of abstract thought.

What is profoundly interesting, here, is the way Mr. Rogers has blocked in a hierarchical structure of subjective stages in the ascent to full human existence. The stages are not defined by external facts, but how human beings relate to them. The external facts are "neutral," so to speak. That is, they are always there. And "dynamic unification" can use practically any set of facts for its purposive exercises.

There are various archetypes in literature suggestive of this hierarchy. One of them is the Farm. Each culture evolves its own scenery for the stages of the partly examined life. We need the scenery or we couldn't get *involved,* and then getting uninvolved comes from the examination process. Becoming uninvolved means discovering that facts are interchangeable parts, not "unique." So, going from scene to scene, we develop the capacity for more searching self-examination as we go along.

What makes all these wonderful subject-object combinations work? Divine *Eros,* Plato would say; and the other kind of love, too, for as long as we need its spirited drive. And, as Mr. Green might remark, there is opportunity to study both kinds on a farm.

REVIEW
ORTEGA Y GASSET

THE only serious obstacle in the way of understanding Ortega's lectures on philosophy, first given in Spain in the late 1920's, is the utter simplicity of what he says. It is in the nature of the philosophic enterprise that its content should be both simple and profound, lucid and obscure. Both these aspects are in Ortega's writing on the subject, but the simplicity and lucidity come first. The obscurity arises partly from what Plato calls the "double ignorance"—false ideas—of human beings, which must be corrected, but also from the complexities of decision which lie before us all in a world filled with an endless array of choices. (The book under review is a new Norton paperback, *What Is Philosophy?*, translated by Mildred Adams, $1.65.)

Ortega is a wonderful combination of the analytical white light of the mind and the colorful particularity of a rich and playful temperament—a "Spanish" temperament, one supposes. No more inviting thinker has summoned the readers of the twentieth century to the philosophic obligation, and no more rigorous thinker has defined what must be done. Although Ortega often quotes Aristotle, we find him a Platonic philosopher; at times he seems blood brother to Socrates; but in another sense he is above all a European, and, for all the mess of European (including American) civilization, one begins to take pride in belonging to a time and culture which produced an Ortega.

Ortega's sense of surety gives no offense; it is the most real thing about him as a man; but, unlike many other thinkers, his confidence is born from systematic doubt, in the same way that Socrates' confidence was born from doubt. What is philosophy? he asks, then shows that it is by nature a most uncertain undertaking. His surety lies in the fact that he will accept only inescapable truths, and these, it turns out, while few, are absolutely fundamental. They illuminate the human situation as no lesser truths can.

The first truth, which Ortega takes from Descartes, is the prime reality of thought. A second truth is that thought can be wrong, so one learns to doubt his thought. But the fact of this doubting is beyond doubt. To be a man, then, is to *be* the thought which contemplates and criticizes itself. This, for Ortega, establishes the autonomy of man as thinker:

> Suppose, for example, that someone starts from the modern principle and says that the only thing which is beyond doubt is the existence of thought—with this statement he takes his stand on the level that we call modernity. But then he adds: of course in addition there is matter, the matter which physics knows, composed of atoms ruled by certain laws. If by that "in addition there is" he means that what physics says has the same operative rank as the principle of subjectivism, the statement is utterly absurd. This principle says that the indubitable real is nonmaterial arid that for it the rules of physics (a science which, like every individual science, occupies itself with secondary and quasi-realities) have no force. This is not to deny the truth of physical laws, but to relegate their operative force to the secondary order of phenomena which they concern; the order of phenomena which do not pretend to be basic. The idealist physicist, that is to say, the modern one, like the idealist philosopher, will have to explain how, if there is no other indubitable reality than thought, which is nonmaterial, one can talk with good sense and truth about material things, about physical laws and so on—but what he cannot do sensibly is to let physics exercise retroactive effects on the definition of that reality which is beyond doubt.

A large part of this book is devoted to the irreducible certainty of this position. But what, precisely, does Ortega say about philosophy? In one place he says this:

> One might begin by defining philosophy as knowledge of the Universe. But this definition, while accurate enough, allows the very thing that is specific to escape from us, namely the peculiar dramatic quality and the tone of intellectual heroism peculiar to philosophy and only philosophy. In effect, the definition seems to balance the one we were giving for physics when we said it is knowledge of matter. But the fact is that the philosopher does not set himself in front of his object—the Universe—as does the physicist in front of his object, which is matter. The physicist begins by defining the profile, the

> outline of matter, and only then does he start working in an attempt to understand its internal structure. The mathematician defines number and extension by a similar process. Thus all the individual sciences begin by marking off for themselves a bit of the Universe, by limiting their problem which, once limited, ceases in part to be a problem. Or to put it in another way, the physicist and the mathematician know in advance the extent of their object and its essential attributes therefore they begin not with the problem, but with something which they give or take as already known.

Interestingly enough, the most thoughtful scientists of today provide oblique when not direct agreement with Ortega in that they point out that, because of the limited character of their "solutions," they are continually thrown back on themselves as subjects—and here, they virtually declare, lies the key to all scientific mysteries, and whether or not it can be turned to dispel practical mysteries remains to be seen. Their doubts, it may be said, are of a philosophical order; so they have joined Ortega, who continues:

> But the Universe on whose investigation the philosopher sets out, audacious as an Argonaut—no one knows what this is. Universe is an enormous monolithic word which, like a vague and vast gesture, conceals this concept—everything that is—rather than stating it. Everything that is—for the moment, that is the Universe. That, note it well, nothing more than that, for when we think the concept, "everything there is," we do not know what that "everything there is" may be; the only thing we think is a negative concept, namely the negation of that which would only be a part, a piece, a fragment. *So the philosopher, in contradistinction to every other scientist, sets sail for the unknown as such.* The more or less known is a part, a portion, a splinter of the Universe. The philosopher sets himself in front of his object in an attitude which is different from that of any other experts, the philosopher does not know what his object is, of it he knows only this—first, that it is no one of the other objects; second, that it is an integral object, the authentic whole, that which leaves nothing outside, and by the some token, the only one which is sufficient unto itself. No other one of the objects which are known or suspected possess this condition. Therefore the Universe is that which basically we do not know, that of which we are absolutely ignorant insofar as its positive content is concerned.

But what, it will be asked, can one *do* with this vast affirmation of "ignorance" and unswerving practice of doubt? This is the complaining voice of the naïve realist of scientific persuasion, who thinks that the lesser certainties of his specialty ought to be taken as a model for philosophic inquiry. Ortega might answer that this view would put an end to the countless self-decisions a man has need of making in order to live his life well. For the positive values of philosophic doubt it is really necessary to read Ortega—all of him, perhaps, in order to discover the practical wisdom that results. For one thing, Ortega reaffirms the position first declared after the Middle Ages by Pico della Mirandola concerning the nature of man, which became, in time, the foundation of all Liberalism and Humanism. In Ortega's inimitable language, the affirmation has this form:

> Plato asked, "What being is capable of cognitive activity?" Not the animal, for it is ignorant of everything, including its own ignorance, and nothing can move it to emerge from that. But neither is it God, who knows everything in advance and has no reason to make any effort. Only an intermediate being, somewhere between God and animal, cowered with ignorance but at the same time aware of this ignorance, feels himself impelled to emerge from it and goes, tense and eager, in one dynamic burst, from ignorance to knowledge. This intermediate being is man. It is the specific glory of man to know that he does not know—this makes him the divine beast weighted with problems.

We can easily forgive Ortega certain vanities—which are not personal, but "European"—because he believes them just. For example, he thinks the ancients were innocent of pure Cartesian subjectivity, when the fact is they knew a richer subjectivity than Descartes' intellectualized formula suggests. Where Descartes said, *Cogito, ergo sum,* the *Katha Upanishad* muses:

> The Self-Being pierced the opening outwards, hence one looks outward, not within himself. A wise man looks towards the Self with reverted sight, seeking deathlessness.

> Children seek after outward desires; they come to the net of widespread death. But the wise, beholding deathlessness, seek not for the enduring among unenduring things.

Here is anticipated Plato's critique of the partisan knowledge of the sciences.

But in the Western tradition, Ortega is another Socrates, another Pico. He is also Plato in his insistence that *life*—human life—is the play of the individual self within his field. The truth he discovers is the self he makes. Thus both Plato and Ortega. The latter says:

> The great fundamental fact which I want to bring to you is here. We have put it into words: living is a constant process of deciding what we are going to do. Do you see the enormous paradox wrapped up in this? A being which consists not so much in what it is as in what it is going to be: therefore in what it has not yet become! This essential, this most profound paradox is our life. This is no fault of mine, but in solemn truth this is just what it is.

So, also, Pico: "The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted. . .; you [Adam], by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, . . . trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature." And again Ortega: "The process of deciding on this or that is a portion of our lives which has about it a certain breath of freedom . . . 'Now' is our time, . . . With its features it limits the freedom of decision which motives our life, and in the face of that freedom it becomes our destiny." From this idea of a time—an epoch, a cycle of history—is born Ortega's philosophy of "Historic Reason" which proposes that we must know our time, fulfill, and then transcend it.

COMMENTARY
ANATOMY OF FUTILITY

A DIFFICULT—perhaps because it is accurate—article on the problems of the United States in Vietnam is contributed by Frances Fitzgerald to the August *Atlantic.* Only after you have read it two or three times does the complexity of the problem begin to clear into tangible meanings. Briefly, Miss Fitzgerald's point is that the United States has made an assumption about South Vietnam that does not even have a nodding acquaintance with reality.

This is the assumption that South Vietnam is potentially a nation-state which, given some military assistance—first a little, now a lot—will develop into a Western-style political entity. Miss Fitzgerald, who spent ten months in Saigon, shows that the culture of South Vietnam has *never* had this potential in any developed terms. North Vietnam does; that is, the leaders in the North have been sufficiently Europeanized—by Communist intellectuality if by nothing else—to grasp the Western idea of the nation-state and to be able to think about politics in terms recognizable to a Westerner. This is not the case in South Vietnam, where old ideas of Confucian society still preside over the chaos of broken and eroded social relationships and forms. Saigon is no more than an island of foreign identity—" a cosmopolitan excrescence on a land of peasants." Only the functions of war instruct the South Vietnamese in the ways of the West. "Unlike Hanoi," says Miss Fitzgerald, "Saigon has no industry of any size, and no effective trade unions to structure its growing labor force." Refugees have thronged to Saigon raising the population from half a million to three million—but "the villagers turn into city masses innocent of government as of the basic design of an urban society."

The Government of South Vietnam has little reality for the people. The only reality they recognize is the dark metaphysical presence of American military power. The government lacks legitimacy, even identity. A Saigon intellectual who ran for the Constituent Assembly said afterward: "I ran for the Assembly to oppose the government, and now I find that there is nothing to oppose." Premier Ky showed his understanding of this failure of identity, Miss Fitzgerald says, when he openly longed for a leadership like Hitler's. What he meant was that South Vietnam had no unified, fighting spirit, and Hitler at least knew how to generate this:

> To the horror of his Western audience Ky referred to Hitler because he could not refer to Ho Chi Minh. What he meant was quite simply that South Vietnam needed an anti-communist community as powerful as that of the Communists.

Even the government has had to be staffed by Northerners—anti-communist Northerners—because men from the North "understand the Western concept of nationhood and administration just as they understand the importance Americans attach to principles and programs which from a political point of view have no substance." For these and other, more complicated reasons, Miss Fitzgerald says:

> Given the present political circumstances, the United States cannot "nation-build"—that is, assist in the construction of a Southern alternative to the Viet Cong, for it has no materials to work with. "Ky is one single man," say the Southerners, he is neither good nor bad; he is nothing.

Miss Fitzgerald reaches this sober conclusion:

> The intractable problem for the United States is not the war but the peace—or the continuation of the power struggle in a vacuum of foreign military power. Short of destroying the Northern regime entirely, the U.S. military cannot extirpate Communist influence from South Vietnam; the obstacle is not so much the Northerners in the South as the Southerners who have defected to the cause of the North. In the absence of a coherent, nationalist regime in Saigon, pacification operates by force alone and not by conversion. Though regimes may change before the departure of American troops, they will in the event of their departure have to face the probability of a deep xenophobic reaction throughout the country which

will allow the NLF, like the Viet Minh before it, to lay claim to the title of the only true nationalists.

Meanwhile, the incredible optimism of the American "nation-builders" is revealed by the declaration of their champion, Premier Ky, that if he lost the election this fall to a civilian whose policy he disagreed with, he would respond "militarily." Explaining, he said, "In any democratic country you have the right to disagree with others."

Or, as Kenneth Burke puts it (see Frontiers): "This situation is particularly awkward since the faction with which we are there identified is itself hard to identify with democracy."

Apart from the toll of death, mutilation, and destruction, which goes on day after day, the worst thing about the intervention in Vietnam is the blind insistence on the part of American policy-makers that South Vietnam become something it does not understand and does not want to become. This insistence is turning countless people in that country into time-serving hypocrites or conformists for the sake of survival. People go through the motions of agreement with their "advisers" because there is nothing else to do.

But to care about such matters requires a sort of identification which is not well served by the habits of ideological thinking. A people more concerned with the names and forms of a political system than with the flesh and blood, the hearts and minds, of human beings is a people made blind to its own inhumanity. And it is one of the more discouraging features of power—perhaps the worst of all—that it enables men to act blindly for a time with impunity.

To reject this blindness is a difficult thing for those who have only an habitual identity—a merely inherited idea of who they are. It is difficult, yet it can be done. As John Sommerville has pointed out, "Government without the consent of the governed is relatively easy to bring about," but "War without the consent of the warriors is impossible."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE BAUHAUS: III

IF the Banhaus method utilized theory, systematic experiment, and intellectual categories, such devices were but a basis for general understanding and a controlling agent in creative work, leading ultimately to direct sensory experiences with qualities and possibilities of material. It stressed the "biotechnics of creative activity" and recognized the intuitive directness of the brilliant mind. Gropius points out the importance of processes below the level of consciousness in artistic creation:

> Artistic creation draws its life from the mutual tension between the subconscious and the conscious faculties of our existence, fluctuates between reality and illusion. The subconscious or intuitive powers of an individual are uniquely his therefore. It is futile for an educator in design to project his own subjective sensations into the student's mind. All he can do successfully is to develop his teaching on the basis of realities, of objective facts common to us all. But the study of what is reality, what is illusion, requires a fresh mind, unaffected by the accumulated debris of intellectual knowledge. Thomas Aquinas has said, "I must empty my soul that God may enter." Such unprejudiced emptiness is the state of mind for creative conception. But our present intellectual emphasis on book education does not promote such a mental climate. The initial task of a design teacher should be to free the student from his intellectual frustration by encouraging him to trust his own subconscious reactions, and to try to restore the unprejudiced receptivity of his childhood. He then must guide him in the process of eradication of tenacious prejudices and relapses into imitative action by helping him to find a common denominator of expression developed from his own observation and experience.

Moholy-Nagy similarly points out the intuitive nature of the creative process:

> It is the artist's duty today to penetrate yet unseen ranges of the biological functions, to search the new dimensions of the industrial society, and to translate the new findings into emotional orientation. The artist unconsciously disentangles the most essential strands of existence from the contorting and chaotic complexities of actuality and weaves them into an emotional fabric of compelling validity, characteristic of himself as well as his epoch. This ability of selection is an outstanding gift based upon intuitive power and insight, upon judgment and knowledge, and upon inner responsibility to fundamental biological laws which provoke a reinterpretation in every civilization.

Many of these Bauhaus insights regarding the creative process were, no doubt, the contribution of Klee, who in his address *On Modern Art* before the Jena exhibition in 1924 developed the simile of a tree, with the trunk—like the artist—an intermediary "gathering and passing along what arises from the depths below." It is not the forms of the visible world which are crucial, he points out, but the discoveries we make of a deeper life and broader region of being when we return to the ultimate sources and formative powers of nature. It is from this deeper perception, Klee believed, that the artist must derive inspiration. In *Ways of Studying Nature,* he referred to nature as the *sine qua non* of all artistic preoccupation. But to Klee nature was not merely physical reality but also the "inner life": "The object expands beyond its physical limits through our knowledge of its inner being."

Education was to the Bauhaus a matter of putting the creative process into motion, of tapping inner, integrative potential in every healthy man. It was a matter of making man an artist. Moholy-Nagy writes:

> From his biological being every man derives energies which he can develop into creative work. *Everyone is talented.* Every human being is open to sense impressions, to tone, color, touch, space experience, etc. The structure of life is predetermined in these sensibilities. One has to live "right" to retain the alertness of these native abilities. . . . Only art—creation through the senses—can develop these dormant, native faculties, toward creative action. Art is the grindstone of the senses, the co-ordinating psychological factor. The teacher who has come to a full realization of the organic oneness and the harmonious sense of rhythm of life should have a tongue of fire to expound his happiness.

The method and philosophy of the Bauhaus were evolved from a conception of the artist as a whole man and art as an intense organic activity having biological origins and continuous with other more common human activities within the social environment. Instead of emphasizing the teaching of specific art skills and techniques or a single standard of aesthetic excellence crystallized into art principles, it approached art in terms of the processes—experimental and psychological—whereby the artist at an intense level integrates perceptions, thoughts, and feelings in the creative act. It must be admitted that the Bauhaus itself was always particularized toward architecture and design, yet it saw its task as a general educational problem, and its philosophy was, at least by implication, one for general education: Man, in order to respond effectively and most humanly to the problems of society, should be trained to act as a creative artist. This would involve the development of an intensity of dedication, an acuteness of sensibility, an ability to make use of subconscious, intuitive processes of creation, and a sense of the functional possibilities of all available resources.

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FRONTIERS

Identification and Autonomy

THERE is little difference, really, between an old-fashioned almanac and the daily newspapers—both deal with facts, not explanations—although the almanac supplies certain useful information about sunrise time, the moon, the tides, and tells you about such matters as the capital of Peru and the order and names of the presidents of the United States. The newspapers give no such reliable information. They report how many Viet Congs were killed in an action 380 miles north of Saigon, they show you a picture of Newark cleaning itself up after some riots, and they tell how the Arabs are recouping their scattered energies. There is no attempt to contribute to an understanding of what is going on in the world. Papers are like an almanac in this. Actually, an understanding of these events would render them—or many of them—irrelevant and hardly worth noticing at all. In circumstances informed by understanding, you could say, the newspapers would go out of business. The condition of their survival is general ignorance, which gives the things they report on an air of vital importance.

Many years ago, in his life of St. Francis, G. K. Chesterton devoted his Preface to an exposure of the practice of journalism. He wrote:

> Newspapers not only deal with news, but they deal with everything as if it were entirely new. Tut-ankh-amen, for instance, was entirely news. It is exactly in the same fashion that we read that Admiral Bangs has been shot, which is the first intimation we have that he has ever been born. There is something singularly significant in the use which journalism makes of its stories of biography. It never thinks of publishing the life until it is publishing the death. As it deals with individuals it deals with institutions and ideas. After the Great War our public began to be told of all sorts of nations being emancipated. It had never been told a word about their being enslaved. We were called upon to judge the justice of the settlements, when we had never been allowed to hear of the very existence of the quarrels. People would think it pedantic to talk about the Serbian epics and they prefer to speak in plain everyday language about the Yugo-Slavonic international new diplomacy; and they are quite excited about something they call Czecho-Slovakia without apparently having ever heard of Bohemia. Things that are as old as Europe are regarded as more recent than the very latest claims pegged out on the prairies of America. It is very exciting; like the last act of a play to people who have only come to the theatre just before the curtain falls. But it does not conduct exactly to knowing what it is all about. To those content with the mere fact of a pistol-shot or a passionate embrace, such a leisurely manner of patronising the drama may be recommended. To those tormented by a merely intellectual curiosity about who is kissing or killing whom, and why, it is unsatisfactory.

But Mr. Chesterton did not exhaust the repertoire of possible reactions with this closing comment. He left out simple boredom—the kind of response which might be expected from those who, after a lifetime of looking at the papers, have come to realize that a press report of some brush-fire war is a communication they can relate to with no greater insight than would be used in inspecting an account of the height of the white caps off San Diego, or of the depredations of a tornado in Kansas. We know these things will go on and on, as surely as bread rises for a baker, and with the same significance to the people in the newspaper business. And just as, in most cases, the bread has been rendered devoid of nourishment to give it a long shelf-life, so the news has been rendered devoid of meaning in order to make its consumption effortless and quick.

Well, how does Mr. Chesterton help us, in this situation? Can his preface to a book published some forty years ago be of any use? What is his *point?* His point is very much the same as Marshall McLuhan's. He tells us how these misleading impressions come to us, instead of exploring what is behind the impressions themselves. He shows how *illusory* to human understanding is the spectacle of life in terms of the public prints—the mass media. This is obviously what interests us in Chesterton's preface. It doesn't matter that some of the events he uses for illustration are so "dated" as to be

incomprehensible except to people a lot over thirty. The truth of what he says is not in the least diminished by this.

Is, then, the way we look—or are made to look—at "the facts" more important than the facts themselves? Or, to ask the question more urgently: Is the way we look at the facts a major factor in determining what we get out of them?

In an article in the *Nation* for July 17, Kenneth Burke goes a step further than Mr. Chesterton. Mr. Burke is not as lucid as Mr. Chesterton, even though what he says seems more important. He doesn't waste time indicting the mass media—who couldn't care less—but rather explores a dynamic in human thought and feeling which helps to explain *why* we collaborate so willingly with the directives they provide. For they do provide directives—whenever they stop measuring waves and take the time to tell us what we have to do, right now. Mr. Burke lacks lucidity partly because of the generality of his discussion and partly because of a dispassionate skipping around so easily possible to a man who has been thinking at this level of generality for most of his life. The skipping around is not easy for the rest of us, but we can enjoy Mr. Burke's wry humor whenever his point is clear.

This *Nation* article is a study in *identification.* It is a demonstration of the various meanings that can be put into the word "we," and of how those meanings affect human decision. A basic polarity is involved. Identification means submerging yourself in the "identity" of a group, letting some popular conception of group interest become your own, and acting upon it. The other pole is *autonomy.* The autonomous man refuses identification—that is, autonomy represents the state of being identified with yourself, as distinguished from others, or somebody else. But even this, like identification with others, is a relative affair, although the distinction remains crucial.

Mr. Burke sets the problem of decision for individuals with the large example of current foreign policy. With what sort of a public "we" will the individual identify?

> . . . the interests of a nation [Mr. Burke writes] are not necessarily identical with the interests of a party in power. Obviously, any party in power will use all the rhetorical and administrative resources at its command to make such identification seem absolute. This is a natural and wholly understandable aim of any political faction, be it in power or out of power.
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> But surely among the major virtues of a democracy such as ours is the fact that we are not constitutionally required to accept any administrative policy without question, regardless of the exigencies that may beset us. Insofar as a policy can be changed by orderly procedures of government, there is nothing treasonous in debating the advisability of changes. There is nothing in the United States Constitution that outlaws the swapping of horses in the middle of a stream. If the citizens want war when an administration wants peace, or if the citizens want peace when an administration wants war, it is their duty to peer beyond the kinds of persuasion and self-persuasion (in brief, the kinds of identification) that make administrative policy and national policy seem identical.
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> However, the problems of identification become more complicated in cases of this sort insofar as a national administration makes alliances with foreign governments or factions, or even is itself responsible for their holding office, as is apparently the case with Premier Ky. For though a decision to withdraw our fighting forces from Vietnam would certainly not involve "letting our boys down," so far as sparing *them* the horrors of war is concerned, there would be the further problem involved in the fact that we are now identified with Premier Ky and those of his cabinet who have not yet resigned. This situation is particularly awkward since the faction with which we are there identified is itself hard to identify with democracy. And so, alas! there is a tangle of identifications atop identifications, some of them clearer than others. . . .

This is a socio-political statement of the problem of identification. Should the question be pressed further? On what basis ought a man to make his over-all value judgments regarding self-identification? This is a way of asking what is the *ideal* conception of self, to which all partial involvements or identifications should be

subordinate. Mr. Burke illustrates various issues in relation to identification, one of which is the following:

> . . . noting that any specialized or autonomous activity fits into some larger unit of action, we might sum up the relation between autonomy and identification thus: "The shepherd, *qua* shepherd, acts for the good of the sheep, to protect them from discomfiture and harm. But he may be 'identified' with a project that is raising sheep for market."

Such illustrations can be multiplied. How will a vegetarian feel about the solicitude of a cowman for his cows, in a Western story? Can he conscientiously *enjoy this story?* Ought, in other words, the practice of virtues in behalf of a partisan interest always to be examined for evidence of betrayal in a more inclusive context?

Then there is the kind of identification typical of the employee of a large organization, spoken of by Friedrich Juenger in *The Failure of Technology:*

> The physician who taps an automobile driver for blood in order to learn whether the driver has taken alcohol is an official of the work organization, he watches over its undisturbed function, just like a traffic policeman, or a judge who metes out a fine in case of traffic violation. Ability and aptitude tests do not test the capacity for independent thought, but the capacity to react mechanically to some mechanical stimulus.

It may be said, but that is the physician's *job*; he has to make the tests. But where, and at what point, for what compelling reason, do you refuse to regard human beings as parts of a big machine?

These are questions which may not have a final answer, except in relation to some practical situation, but if such questions are never asked in general theory, we may not think of raising them in relation to practical decisions. At issue, then, is not the hot emergency which has to be dealt with at once, but the habit of mind, the measure of awareness that is maintained toward oneself and one's identifications. Are such questions raised only after the provocation of extreme horror—such as the napalming of children in the Far East? Usually, when they are raised in such situations, we find ourselves bound hand and foot by partisan identifications entered into casually—helpless to do more than express some horror of our own. The reason for this reduction of our freedom to act lies, it seems clear, in the fact that we have not raised the questions earlier, before the results of our once plausible identifications reached this hideous extreme.

But *when* should we have raised them? We don't know. The only solution that seems safe for people who want to behave like human beings is to raise such questions all the time.

One thing is clear: We'll get no help from the daily newspapers. Neither the environment-makers nor the decision-makers of our time have any interest in helping people to form such habits.