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THE TROUBLE WITH GENIUS

HARDLY anyone will question the genius of Vincent van Gogh, or the claim that the world is a better place for his having lived and worked in it. One need not know anything about "art" to feel the intensity of this man's paintings. You have the feeling that the artist burned away all irrelevancies and that what remains on the canvas is the glowing core of a perception that is both personal and impersonal—personal, in that it was uniquely recorded by van Gogh, impersonal in that its rapture is communicated to others, almost without exception.

What did van Gogh think of himself? A small paperback study (in four languages) of the great Dutch painter, published by Bert Bakker in The Hague, offers a number of fragmentary quotations from his letters which give some clues. In 1883, he wrote to his brother, Theo:

> Now, about the time still left to me for working, I think I may assume without being premature that this corpus of mine will, *quand bien même,* carry on for a while,—let's say for another six to ten years. So I shall go on as an *ignoramus,* but knowing this one thing: *Within a few years I must perform a certain work.* [He died in 1890.]

In 1885, van Gogh wrote from Nuenen:

> Know this once and for all, if I ask for money I do not ask it for nothing, the work I do you can have for it, and if I am behindhand now, I am on the right road to getting in *front.*

And in 1888, from Aries:

> To be a link in the chain of artists we pay a heavy toll in health, youth and freedom, and we benefit not at all by it, no more than does a horse drawing a coachload of people who are out to enjoy the Spring.

Again from Arles, in 1888:

> I can do without Our Dear Lord, both in my life and in my painting, but, weak as I am, I cannot do without something greater than myself, namely, my life, my creative potentiality. . . . And in a painting I would wish to say something comforting like music. I would wish to paint men and women with something of the eternal of which the halo used to be the symbol, and which we seek in the radiation, in the vibration of the coloration we effect.

The editor of this volume, Dr. J. Hulsker, writes:

> The periods of mental unbalance increased during the last year and a half of van Gogh's life. Continued undernourishment and the feverish way he attacked his work must have wasted his body and weakened his mind. But in between his grey patches there were times when the light of his mind shone with all its former clarity, as witness the brilliant letters dating from this period. His sickness of soul, the nature of which could never be wholly understood, did not interfere with his work—rather was the contrary the case. Even the work he produced in his latter days all came about in moments of lucidity, though it does, of course, reflect all the passion of his moods and emotions which nature and the elements, the sun and the stars, heat and growth, aroused in him.

The thing that is horrifying about the story of Vincent van Gogh is the suspicion that the world will never learn to make a place for such men. Beyond doubt, van Gogh was a great painter; but more than this, he was a human being with the gift of perception of all "great men" (to use an almost useless expression), in that he saw and felt his role of being like "a horse drawing a coachload of people who are out to enjoy the Spring."

The great man knows, as van Gogh knew, that he has "a certain work" to do. There is no other issue in his life. It is not that the world must learn to pay him well; nor is it especially important that he be widely honored during his lifetime. Men cannot honestly honor what they have not yet learned to understand. About all we can say, on this question, is that a world that has the right to speak of its "freedom" will be a world in which

the van Goghs are permitted to work without suffering total indifference, even contempt, and without a lot of unnecessary obstacles placed in their path.

But who, someone may ask, is to tell us when a *real* van Gogh comes along? And the only possible answer is that there is no one to tell us. This is a somewhat frustrating answer for the planner of the good society, since what he wants is some sign from heaven, like the thirty-two marks of the Buddha, so that he can make provision for the true artist. The present idea seems to be that every now and then someone special is born, a kind of "God's fool," for whom conventional society ought to provide asylum.

If you object to this view of the problems created by genius in our midst, you will probably be told that, after all, the general arrangements of society cannot be scaled to the needs of genius. The greatest good for the greatest number must remain the criterion of social planning, and the artist—the great artist, that is—will have to take his chances along with all the other deviants who are left out of consideration, except on a salvage or social welfare basis.

What, precisely, does the artist challenge in our society? He challenges the normative conception of the human being, and normative ideas of human good. The typical normative conceptions of a conventional society produce a fairly detailed blueprint of the proper individual. This individual *fits*. His desires can be generalized on a statistical basis; he will marry at the age of 23.2 years and have 2.4 children. His income will fall within a certain range and he will incur corresponding expenses, so much for food, clothes, and housing, so much for medicine, vacation, and entertainment. You balance the equation and justify the *status quo* with it; or, if you don't like the result, you make up a revolutionary program with a new projection of income and institutions to serve human beings to better effect.

But here is a man whose equation is so starkly simple that he does not fit in anywhere. All he wants is brushes, paints, canvas, and a little nourishment—and he wants this, we may suspect, without being made to feel like a beggar or a pensioner. This was van Gogh's way of pursuing the eternal mystery, through his *work*. "During the seventy days preceding his death, van Gogh's productivity was incredible. He finished some seventy paintings and more than thirty drawings." He died, aged thirty-seven, on July 29, 1890.

There are books which tell the story of van Gogh's life, of his courage and his misery, of his deep affection for common human kind and his longing to give to and do for others. It is easy enough, now that we know, or think we know, what he was, to charge his world and his times with willful neglect of a great man, but that is not the point. The point is, what are we telling our children about such men? The past is over and dead. What about the future?

It isn't a question of warning them about the symptoms of incipient genius. Are you going to tell them about the eight-hour day, or are you going to tell them about men who feel they have a *work* to do, and are willing to feel like a horse hitched to a dray in order to do it? Are you going to take them to Disneyland, or down in a mine, where van Gogh felt he ought to work for a while? What are you going to say to them about what it means to be a human being? If they have the right idea about this, *they'll* know what to do in the presence of authentic genius, and may even be able to recognize one when he comes along.

It's not a matter of showing children all the ugliness and unkindness in the world. They'll encounter that soon enough, and see it if they have had a share of sensibility and wonder. But what is the myth that will take them out of themselves enough to *care* about whether there is beauty or ugliness in the world? It is not just the great painters who have a compelling work to do.

Questions like this engender medieval longings. Is there a *Holy Grail* to be found?

What is the modern version of the Philosopher's Stone, or the Nibelungen Gold? We ought to be able to do a little better than a cattle drive to the railhead in Kansas, ending in the Chicago slaughter pens.

Do you really think that the steel-eyed, gray-haired men at Oak Ridge are going to find out the secrets of the universe for us? Do we really suppose that a majority for the Right Man next November has anything at all to do with our Security?

For all his lonely pain in his last days, van Gogh was not alone. He made this profoundly religious discovery: "I can do without Our Dear Lord, both in my life and my painting, but, weak as I am, I cannot do without something greater than myself, namely, my life, my creative potentiality." There are repeated truths and forged truths. All of van Gogh's truths were forged. When shall we try to teach our children to make this distinction? How old should they be? Do we need two sets of truths: One for the courageous children to forge for themselves, and another set of repeated truths for the timid ones?

Not long ago a writer quoted in these pages said that the coming generation suffers from a lack of good causes. What does this mean? It means that as a culture, as a civilization, we collectively don't know what to do next. It means that the momentum of the great movements of the nineteenth century has run down. It means that the plans and projects in which previous generations found inspiration no longer arouse and inspire.

Those people of the nineteenth century who knew exactly what needed to be done—where are they now? They were so sure, so optimistic, so confident of themselves. They were planning to make or remake the world, with science, progress, industry, or perhaps with revolution—it doesn't matter much which it was—and their efforts have carried over almost until the present. But now nobody knows, and the only thing left to do is to admit it.

Back in those days, when men were so sure, van Gogh was writing to his brother (1882):

> What am I in the eyes of most but a nonentity,—a crank, or an unpleasant fellow,—a man who has no position, or ever will have, in society; at any rate, a lesser man than most. All right, let's assume that that's exactly how things are. But I would like to show, by my work, what goes on in the heart of such a crank, of such a nonentity.

And a year later he wrote:

> In my opinion I am often *very rich*. Not in money, but (not every day, mind you) rich because I have found my vocation, something for which I can live with heart and soul, and which gives life inspiration and meaning.

How could a society with no place for such a man in its dreams do anything but a botch job of creating the future?

But what are we to do? Can we borrow from van Gogh his intensity upon having discovered his "vocation"? After all, it was *his* vocation, and it came to him, apparently, unsought. His drive to paint is reminiscent of the ancient idea of the artist as being almost obsessed by the Muse, he being only the responsive vehicle of a quasi-divine inspiration.

There are other difficulties. Even if we acknowledge the need of human beings to find some insistent vocation and to work at it with all their hearts, there remains the fact that a private, personal salvation through finding one's "work" seems a kind of spiritual selfishness—a fine artistic neglect of the world and its woes and dilemmas. Here is no "cause," but a kind of escape.

But what would you attempt? Solicit van Gogh for a membership in the World Federalists? He might, of course, surprise you and join, but this overlooks the possibility that the most promising of the plans and projects of the nineteenth century failed because this idea of individual vocation was left out of the statistical hash the planners made of the idea of the human being.

The *level* of national decision might have been very different if there had been a vital idea of individual role and work in the lives of the people of Western civilization. The important thing for a man to say to himself is not, "What will I have?" It is not even, "How free will I be?" It is, "What will I *do?"* What will I *make?"* It is only for this that freedom is important.

Parents can hardly bring up their children to find answers to the right questions unless the parents are themselves asking the right questions. Ordinarily, American parents feel that they are doing their bit in the education of their children if they go to a few PTA meetings and read about why Johnny can't read, or that he will read a lot better after the bond issue has been passed. But parents who work only because they need money are people without a vocation. And people without a vocation are not in a good position to teach the importance of vocation to the young. Why, after all, should a beatnik imitate his father who has a job doing public relations for the gas company? Maybe the beatnik's way of saying "No" is not the best way to say no, but any kind of a no may be better than any kind of a faithless yes. Maybe some kind of a "lost generation" is part of the price that has to be paid—a kind of rent—for the time it takes to rediscover the importance of the idea of vocation.

One thing is certain: People with a genuine sense of vocation look at the world with eyes very different from those who have no vocation. And they look at other people with very different eyes. People who have found a meaning for their lives can see meanings in the lives of others. This is the sole foundation for human dignity and mutual respect.

Letter from
ENGLAND

LONDON.—Just published for the current year is one of England's most unusual directories. It is known, briefly, as *Crockford's,* its full designation being *Crockford's Clerical Directory.* Therein are set forth the names, degrees and livings or curacies, or, at the other end of the clerical ladder, the names of all the higher clergy of the Church of England as by law established. So far, this *Directory* differs in no way from an ordinary medical or law directory, English, American, or other. But *Crockford's* has one cardinal point of distinction. It contains, year by year, a long essay from an anonymous contributor dealing with some outstanding matter touching the Church. This contribution is in many ways unique to any such reference book, for it is, as a rule, highly controversial, hard-hitting and at times even disturbing to its clerical reader.

For example, a few years ago the anonymous editor gave notice to those whose names filled his pages that he would no longer put after their names the letters suggesting academic distinction, when these letters were obtained by the purchase of bogus American degrees. It appeared that large numbers of vicars and rectors, and, maybe, archdeacons, too, styled themselves as Doctors of Divinity, Masters of Arts, and so forth on the strength of fees paid to degree-peddling "universities" in the United States. Of course, all educated people in England are aware that the degrees of authentic United States seats of learning compare well with those of Britain or any other comparable State. But, as *Crockford's* editor pointed out, in a somewhat cruel, though justified, exposure of clerical vanity and virtual fraud, the United States also nourished in its clerical bosom certain vipers bent only on the acquisition of dollars from vain, foolish and dishonest foreign clerics. To give but one example—the so-called University of_____, with its Faculty of Divinity. The bait was a reference by letter to the clerical easymark abroad, expressing a desire to "honor" his great work for the Church by the conferring upon him an honorary doctorate of divinity. For this bait the degreeless parson sometimes fell. Nor was he often put off by the fee payable for that honour and for the appropriate academic millinery.

This year *Crockford's* turns its spotlight on the episcopate itself and discusses in a pointed manner the desirability of putting an end to the sort of divine who now holds the high ecclesiastic dignity of Archbishop of Canterbury. The successor to Dr. Fisher, it contends in the bluntest of phrases, must never again be an administrator, or some bishop without outstanding spiritual qualities. It further suggests the desirability of choosing the next Archbishop without reference to his status in the Church.

Why, then, this covert attack on the present Archbishop, or, at least, upon what he represents and stands for? The reason is probably the simple one that it is becoming apparent that the Church needs rather more than an ex-schoolmaster administrator, however high his reputation in that capacity.

The truth is, of course, that the See of Canterbury is one that may go rather easily to the head of a former Public School (English variety, *i.e.,* exclusive, class-tied school) headmaster. There are many temptations for the man who holds this office, for he ranks, in Law, immediately after the Sovereign, has two palaces and a very high stipend. The present holder of this office has a great reputation as an administrator. At twenty-two he was appointed Headmaster of a famous school. He has never acted as a parish priest, and, if gossip does not belie him, is an autocrat whose saying is "Since I was twenty-two I have given the orders." In addition, here is a high priest who dines much at the tables of the rich, appears at all great functions, but is not much known, if, indeed, at all, in the houses of the poor. Nor has he ever raised his voice against injustice or the making of atom bombs.

Now, if one is to take the tone of the anonymous volley fired from *Crockford's Clerical Directory,* it would seem that that representative organ of the Church feels that it would be a good thing for Dr. Fisher to retire and to make way for one more spiritually suited to that high office.

"The Archbishop of Canterbury," says his critic, "is the popular image of the Church of England, much care must go into the shaping of that image." And he continues: "The next Primate must know clearly where the Church is going, must be a man who will have the courage to speak plainly to extremists of all kinds." He might also, one might add, be wise to dine less at the rich men's tables and be seen more often among the poor

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
"BEFORE AND AFTER SOCRATES"

FRANCIS M. CORNFORD'S modest volume of this title is, even in its 1960 paperback version ($1.25), a beautiful book. The four lectures of *Before and After Socrates* were first delivered at Cambridge in 1932, yet they attract continuing attention.

Prof. Cornford (of Cambridge) is particularly enlightening when he shows how both Socrates and Plato objected to anthropomorphism, whether in terms of the vision of many "Gods" or one. Anthropomorphism, he explains, leads away from all truly "spiritual" considerations. For one thing, after a cycle of subjection to belief in an anthropomorphic deity, people tend to react in the opposite direction, as with the Greek naturalists, drawing "the conclusion, not that the spiritual world has been misconceived, but that there is no such thing: nothing *is* real except the tangible body composed of atoms." Cornford continues: "The result [in the case of the Greeks] was a doctrine that philosophers call materialism, and religious people call atheism. The Socratic philosophy is a reaction against this materialistic drift of physical science. In order to rediscover the spiritual world, philosophy had to give up, for the moment, the search after material substance in external Nature, and turn its eyes inward to the nature of the human soul. This was the revolution accomplished by Socrates." This seems to us a point of signal importance too often glossed over in efforts to show similarities between Socratic and Platonic philosophy and traditional Christianity. We quote from Cornford's last lecture:

> It has always seemed to me unfortunate that the word "God" (which is, after all, a religious word) should have been retained by philosophers as the name for a factor in their systems that no one could possibly regard as an object of worship, far less of love. In the Middle Ages, the subtlety of scholastic rationalism was strained to the utmost in the attempt to reconcile Aristotle's God with the God proclaimed in the Gospels.

The second lecture, on Socrates' philosophy, illuminates the meanings of words like "soul" and "virtue":

> Socrates' discovery was that the true self is not the body but the soul. And by the soul he meant the seat of that faculty of insight which can know good from evil and infallibly choose the good. Self-knowledge implies the recognition of this true self. Self-examination is a discipline constantly needed to distinguish its judgment from the promptings of other elements in our nature, closely attached to the body and its distracting interests. Self-rule is the rule of the true self over those other elements—an absolute autocracy of the soul. For this inner judge of good and evil is also a ruler. The true self is a faculty, not only of intuitive insight, but of will—a will that can override all other desires for pleasure and seeming happiness. The soul which sees what is really good infallibly desires the good it has discerned. Socrates held that this desire of the enlightened soul is so strong that it cannot fail to overpower all the other desires whose objects the true self sees to be illusory.
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> This is the meaning of the Socratic paradoxes: "Virtue is knowledge," "No one does wrong wittingly." People commonly say: "I knew it was wrong, but I couldn't help doing it." Socrates replies: That is never really the truth. You may have known that other people think what you did was bad, or that you had been told it was bad; but if you had known for yourself it was bad, you would not have done it. Your fault was a failure of insight. You did not see the good; you were misled by some pleasure which seemed good at the moment. If you had seen the good you would also have willed it, and acted accordingly. No one does wrong against his true will when once that will has been directed to its object, the good, by a genuine and clear vision.
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> The special name given to the true self in the later writings of Plato and Aristotle is *nous*, a word commonly translated by "reason." To the modern ears "spirit" is a less misleading term, because "reason" suggests a faculty that thinks but does not also will. Plato and Aristotle regard this spirit as distinct from the *psyche*, which is inseparably associated with the body and perishes with the death of the body. For the perfection of the spirit the Greeks used the ordinary word for "goodness," *areté*, and this had better not be translated by "virtue." "Virtue," at all times, means conformity to current ideals of conduct. The virtuous man is he who does what the rest of society approves. The Socratic

philosophy dismisses this conformity under the name of "popular virtue." Plato puts the virtue of "the respectable citizen" on the same level with the unremitting pursuit of duty characteristic of bees, ants, and other social insects. This is not what Socrates meant by "goodness." The whole content of his mission was to supersede the childish morality of blameless conformity by an ideal of spiritual manhood rising above the commonly acknowledged bounds of human capacity. This was to substitute for a morality of attainable virtue, such as the world respects and rewards, a morality aspiring to a perfection unattainable save by a few men whom the world has rejected while they lived, and only learnt too late to worship as heroic or divine. Such a man was Socrates.

For readers who incline to be reincarnationists, we should also call attention to Prof. Cornford's explanation of the way in which the philosophy of rebirth became integral with Platonic ethics. For Plato was not only a disciple of Socrates. He was also inspired by Pythagoras, who held that men can become divine because they are, in essence, a part of "the divine fire irradiating the universe."

It is not hard to imagine [Prof. Cornford writes] the effect of contact with such a philosophy upon the mind of Plato, already imbued with the Socratic morality of aspiration. He has allowed us a glimpse of that effect in a short dialogue, the *Meno,* which opens the series of the middle group. Pythagoreanism suggested to Plato the doctrine of Reminiscence, here announced as a solution of the problem of knowledge. Reminiscence, moreover, implies an immortal soul that can remember knowledge once possessed and forgotten. . . .

When we set out to seek a definition of Justice, must we not in some sense already know the thing we are looking for? But if we know it, what need is there to look for it? The theory of Reminiscence replies that knowledge of the perfect Forms, and indeed all knowledge of truth and reality, is at all times present in the soul itself. The knowledge is there, but latent and unconscious. What is called "learning," or the discovery of truth, is the recollection of this latent knowledge raised to the level of consciousness. The soul is guided in the search by its own dim vision of a truth that is always present, needing only to be seen more clearly, and coordinated with other parts of the whole system of Truth. Also, if knowledge is at all times present to the soul, the soul must be immortal and independent of the body and its senses.

COMMENTARY
WHO WILL BREAK THE RULES?

SCIENCE AND HUMAN VALUES by J. Bronowski, a Harper paperback, is an impassioned and perceptive defense of the profession and practice of science. In these days of suspicion and accusation of the grave men who hold the power of life and death over the world in their mysterious equations, it is natural and right that they should have able defenders. Dr. Bronowski is an able defender. He shows beyond doubt that the professional scientist is a man of originality and invention, as creative in his way as the poet or the dramatist. Science, says Dr. Bronowski, is not a catalogue of dead facts. It is not the fruit of mere mechanical calculations. Its stuff is the substance of dreams come true. Toward the end of this book, the author sums up:

> Has science fastened upon our society a monstrous gift of destruction which we can neither undo nor master, and which, like a clockwork automaton in a nightmare, is set to break our necks? Is science an automaton, and if so has it lamed our values? . . .
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> On the contrary, like the other creative activities which grew from the Renaissance, science has humanized our values. Men have asked for freedom, justice and respect precisely as the scientific spirit has spread among them. The dilemma of today is not that the human values cannot control a mechanical science. It is the other way about: the scientific spirit is more human than the machinery of governments. We have not let either the tolerance or the empiricism of science enter the parochial rules by which we still try to prescribe the behavior of nations. Our conduct as states clings to a code of self-interest which science, like humanity, has long left behind.

We can accept all this, and still be obliged to ask certain questions that Dr. Bronowski does not raise at all. While he shows that scientists are whole human beings whose skills are informed by a touch of genius, whose ethics are of the sublimest sort, he says almost nothing about the image of man which results from scientific studies.

It is certainly the case that a popular sort of scientific dogmatizing rushed in to fill the vacuum left by the disintegration of traditional religion. We have had Man the Machine, Man the Hairy Ape, Man the Automaton of Reflex Action, and Man the Creature of Complexes and Neuroses. We have had all these images of man, if not directly from the scientists, at least at second hand from the dealers in scientific gospel. *Somebody*, at any rate, is responsible for these unnerving images.

The puzzling thing about our civilization is the curious freedom from responsibility for its ills of all its fine specialists. Not I, says the scientist. I will make a nuclear warhead, if you vote that I should make one, but they are nasty affairs if you set them off, and I will not be responsible.

Dr. Bronowski wants the scientists to stand with poets as representatives of human dignity. But we know of no poets who are loaded with defense contracts, having to blame the backwardness of States for the misuse to which their songs are put.

The masses are ignorant, all right. They are bought and sold, just the way the scientists are bought and sold. You can make all the excuses you like for an abstract discipline. You can even fill out the abstraction with the vivid examples of worthy men. But what you cannot do is justify labors which everyone knows make possible the death by incineration of millions upon millions of human beings. What sort of "dignity" is there in this? A good man walks away from such a profession. A good man says, as Albert Einstein said, "Were I a young man again, I would rather be a pedlar. . . ."

Who is to shake the confidence of those who perpetuate the life and authority of that other abstraction, "The Government," if the best men among us say that it is none of their affair? Are you going to leave *that* responsibility to the outcasts, the beggars, the students, and those who sleep under bridges?

We have distinguished men who do what they are told by their Culture. We have men who insist that they must be offprints of their times, even when they "know better." In a democracy, knowing better doesn't count because you abide by the rule of the majority. So you make the bombs. Man the Machine makes the Bombs. Man the Hairy Ape makes the Bombs. Man the Conditioned Reflex with the Irrational Drive makes the Bomb because his Government tells him to, and he signs himself, Obedient Servant.

Whose bare back are the sins of the age to fall upon? Is everybody innocent? Everybody, that is, but the dumb masses who keep the demagogues in power who keep the governments backward?

These are days when we need men who *accept* responsibility. And if Dr. Bronowski is right in saying "it is not the scientist who can govern society," that scientist can at least refuse to be armorer to "a code of self-interest which science, like humanity, has long since left behind."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

"LIVING CLOSE TO NATURE"

HOWEVER banal this phrase, there is no doubt that man's "conquest" of the natural world, with the alienation that has unfortunately accompanied it, stands in sharp contrast to the sort of simple life which avoids both ulcers and mental illness. We have written about the values of "nature experience" many times in this department, for it is during the earliest stages of childhood that a capacity for appreciation of "wilderness" areas can be awakened. Later, when the child becomes a man or a woman, recourse to woods, hills, field or stream may assist many problems of a troubled psyche in a way than can otherwise be duplicated only by major accomplishments in philosophy.

Of course, exposure to Nature may not necessarily "take" with every youngster, since "nature experience," when meaningful, is primarily an attitude of mind. But on the other hand, the state of mind which appreciates quiet and solitude, which knows calmness of the soul, is certainly latent in everyone and, barring the interference of psychological complexes, may best be encouraged by a periodic removal from the pace of urban living. We know a police lieutenant who is just finishing his full term of service in one of the most difficult Los Angeles areas, and who now derives his greatest pleasure from wandering through the mountains. He is neither a tired man nor a bitter one, but, in our opinion, simply a person who is spontaneously seeking replenishment of the psyche after exacting work with the disharmonies of human relationships which of necessity come to the foreground in police work.

The naturopaths and health food people have long been making constructive propaganda by description of the Hunzas of the Himalayas. From the standpoint of health alone, this fabulous example of "living close to nature" is almost without parallel. The Hunzas continue in isolation in a valley of Pakistan, having maintained their traditions of physical and mental well-being for some two thousand years. A New York *Mirror* Magazine story (June 1) on the Hunzas summarizes a report on this "veritable utopia," *Hunza Land*, by Dr. Allen E. Banik. Dr. Banik feels that the longevity and health of the Hunzas confirm recent scientific speculations that almost all diseases can be prevented, and even cured, through proper nutrition. George Rosenberg, who writes the *Mirror* piece, explains why so many Hunzas live well past the age of one hundred in vital good health:

> In a strictly agricultural society the Hunzukuts live almost entirely on a diet of grains, vegetables and fruits which they grow themselves.
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> The soil is constantly enriched by naturally purified mountain streams, deposits of rich minerals left by avalanches and waste vegetable matter, all of which is returned to the ground. No synthetic chemicals exist, hence the naturally nutritive values of the diet have never been diminished.
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> "As a matter of fact," reports Dr. Banik, "commercial fertilizers are forbidden by law. Everything that is taken from the soil is returned to it. And since pests are negligible, no insecticides are needed."
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> It has long been known that nutrition is a major factor in physical well-being. But inadvertently, the Hunzukuts have left nutrition in nature's hands and, Dr. Banik concludes, the sooner their type of non-chemical farming is adopted by the rest of the world, "the sooner men, women and children will begin to enjoy the radiant health that only natural foods can provide."

According to Dr. Banik, Hunza women of eighty give the appearance of being forty, while men frequently live to be 120 years old and father children at the age of ninety. The usual childhood diseases are unknown, and, to continue with Mr. Rosenberg's remarks, "all this has been accomplished, unintentionally, through a philosophy of life that prescribes tranquility and goodwill for the psyche, and for the body a diet of nature's own foods that provide the ideal in nutrition. It also includes air that is never soiled by the pollutants of 'advanced society'."

The relationship between "nature experience" and philosophy is an intimate one. One young person of our acquaintance, a teen-ager, was recently led by his interest in nature from Thoreau to Emerson. With the aid of quotation, the young naturalist explores the breadth of the Emersonian world-view:

> Emerson concludes that, after all, there is no place in the Universe that is foreign to us. "The near explains the far. The drop is a small ocean. A man is related to all nature." The reason all things are related, is that ". . . from the beginning to the end of the universe, she has but one stuff. . . . Compound it how she will, star, sand, fire, water, tree, man, it is still one stuff, and betrays the same properties." Nature, Man and God, then, are one in essence or kind, and differ only in degree of conscious spirituality.
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> If this is true, it is indeed a wonderful truth, for it gives a physical reality to the philosophical concept of Universal brotherhood. Even what we call friendship must be an unconscious recognition of this concept. Thus there is much truth in Emerson's statement: "A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of Nature." The purpose of Life, in Emerson's mind, must, then, include brotherhood. And yet it must be even more too, for Life is ever in motion—not confused, but directed motion; it is *going* somewhere. Throughout his writings, Emerson postulates this idea of evolution—not Darwinian, but spiritual evolution. He looked into the plant kingdom and said: "Plants are the young of the world. . . . They grope ever upward towards consciousness; the trees are imperfect men, and seem to bemoan their imprisonment." He looked into the animal kingdom and saw: "A subtle chain of countless rings/ The next unto the farthest brings/ And, striving to be man, the worm/ Mounts through all the spires of form."
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> What is left for man to reach? Again Emerson, the seer, the transcendentalist, the Man, speaks: "The purpose of life seems to be to acquaint man with himself. . . . The highest revelation is that God *is in every man."*

In a recent column in the Los Angeles *Times* (July 3), Ed Ainsworth reflects upon some of his all-time favorite books that have "given insight into the hearts and minds of brave men and the inner recesses of nature's wonders." He writes:

> Consider Joseph Wood Krutch's *Voice of the Desert* and *Desert Year.* No one can read these and not be philosophically uplifted at the almost poetic beauty with which he sets forth the incredible perfection of evolution and adaptation in a world of aridity and struggle.

So, setting out with Nature for a guide, we have ranged all the way from a police lieutenant studying wild flowers, to physical longevity, to definitions of "God."

FRONTIERS

The Meeting of Extremes

IN the traditional account of the life of Plato, it is said that one day a visitor came to see the Athenian philosopher and was surprised to find him standing motionless in the hall with arm upraised. His curiosity aroused, the friend asked, "What are you doing?" Plato replied, "I'm punishing an angry man."

The explanation was that one of Plato's slaves had done something which outraged his master, who was about to strike the servant when he realized that he was acting in anger, and stopped. Feeling that he had interrupted a dangerous tendency in himself, Plato decided to hold the posture of striking for a while, so that he would not forget his mistake.

Well, we may say, this is a nice little homily. But somewhere between Plato's time and our own, such pieties ceased to interest us. In fact, we may not even allow that it is a story worth repeating, since it misses the real point, so far as we are concerned, which is that Plato should never have been *able* to strike another human being, and of course, he shouldn't have had a slave. In short, the reactionary social setting of Plato's little domestic drama is so abhorrent that the philosopher's practice of self-control in the nick of time seems ostentatiously irrelevant.

The proper safeguard against the impulse of one man to strike another is not the former's conscience or philosophical principles, but a *constitution* which defines the rights of all human beings and sets clear limits to aggressive behavior of this sort. Philosophy may be a fine thing, but what men must have is the security of political guarantees. This demand for political guarantees is an instinct of modern man.

Even if you were to argue that Plato, after all, was the first great political thinker of Western civilization—that he was the ancestor of practically all the constitution-writing which came after him—you still would not win much respect for him in this situation. It is a question of the principle of authority, and where it should lie, and not a matter of one man's virtue. The idea of the constitution as the source of authority does away with reliance on the virtue of individuals. Constitutions, we say, while admittedly imperfect, are more reliable than individual virtue. The dictates of virtue are subject to the variability of individual ideas of the good—to all the uncertainties, that is, of philosophy, or all the corruptions of religion. We are rational men and we want a rational community, which is a community in which we know where we stand. The rational community is the community ordered by open covenant—by social contract.

So, we got what we wanted—a social contract embodying fixed principles to govern the relationships of human beings according to certain fairly clear ideas of value: Freedom, Justice, Equality. These values are defined in our constitution in political terms.

But where did we get the values? We got them, of course, from the philosophers, from Plato and others. No one will contest the fact that the argument justifying constitutions was originally an argument from philosophical assumptions. Notions such as Natural Law and the Rights of Man are philosophical notions, and our constitution is based on these notions.

What makes constitutions work? There are three general classes of reasons for proposing, accepting, and using a constitution for the regulation of human affairs. One class of reason is the philosophic reason, which proposes that it is *right* for men to live in a certain way and to abide by certain rules. Righteousness leads to the common good and is also held to be an end in itself. Another class of reason includes all reasons of self-interest. Here, you have to argue that the reasons of self-interest are not effective unless they reach the level of what we term *enlightened* self-interest. For example, a man does not need to admit the importance of the ethical foundations of

government in order to see the sense of obeying the traffic laws. His self-interest gives him a common sense reason. The ethical theory behind government often drops out of sight entirely when it comes to the tax laws, and self-interest, here, is not a very effective motive for compliance. For many men, this is a gray region of morality in which expediency reigns, bringing us to the motive of fear. When righteousness and self-interest are insufficient, men will still obey constitutions from fear of punishment for offending against their laws.

To this analysis the psychologists would add all the complexities that they have discovered in their study of the springs of human behavior—elements which no doubt give continuity to the function of organized societies and which need to be understood. But since we are here concerned with the ground for deliberate human action, such matters may be left unnoticed.

In general, we may say that constitutions are instruments of a mixed character, reflecting the mixed character of human motivation, and that it is natural for this to be so. We may say, further, that constitutions *float*, so to say, in a sea of these mixed motivations, and that the operations of constitutions are bound to give evidence of the changing currents in this sea. If, for example, the current of the philosophic justification of constitutions becomes weak and indecisive, other currents flow in to replace its function. The argument for the constitution, or for revisions in the constitution, changes with the change in the currents. There is never anything more than an approximate relationship between the currents of motivation and the constitutional process, but the relationship must and does exist, and it does change. At one time, for example, Righteousness was plainly derived from sources outside and above politics, in either philosophy or religion. Today, the connection of Righteousness with philosophy and religion is almost entirely rhetorical. The effective definitions of Righteousness now come from politics itself.

There are two reasons for this change. First, philosophy has largely lost its command of the respect of the human mind. The reasons for this are multiple and perhaps obscure, but the fact is undeniable. This change has thrown the major burden of the justification of the constitution upon the motive of self-interest, and the prime value of self-interest is Survival. There is only one kind of survival which constitutionalism understands, and that is political survival. It follows that all notions of Righteousness must now obtain their definition from concepts of political survival, which has become the highest good.

And now we see the point of beginning with Plato, poised in self-discipline, with arm upraised. This is precisely the position of the great Nation-States, at the present time. But their motives for self-restraint are not, we must add, as admirable as Plato's. Plato had no reason to fear anything but the reproach of his own conscience, his philosopher's idea of the good, but these States are restrained chiefly by the thought of the consequences to themselves, should they strike.

Now, we worry, not so much about the consciences of the heads of States, but about whether their grasp of national self-interest is enlightened enough to avoid a common self-destruction. It is agreed that while men sometimes act, in a spirit of righteousness, against their own self-interest, this sort of behavior is practically impossible for States. Philosophers are made from the practice of self-denial, among other things, but States are put together from complex compromises which make it possible to deal with mass motivations having a broad base of self-interest. States can hardly be expected to rise above their origins.

Well, what shall we do now? We dealt with the unpredictability of individual virtue by establishing a constitution for the government of men in the social community. Can we not do the same thing in relation to states—set up a still higher authority? This is an obvious argument,

and it is repeatedly offered by men of intelligence and good will.

But in order to do this, we must return as oceanographers to the sea of motivation, in which the mechanism of social control, the constitution, either national or international, must inevitably float. What are our resources for motivating acceptance of a constitution with authority over the behavior of States?

The fact is that they are not very good. The move from Righteousness to self-interest as the primary political appeal has tended to make the Eternal Truth—if it exists, and we are now beginning to hope that it does—depend upon the vote of the majority. The politics of self-interest inevitably fortifies egotism and ignorant pride. The philosopher sees this, but he has no prestige. He is impotent. What can he do against the harsh current of self-interest, except offer himself as a sacrifice? The politics of self-interest does little more than create a lust for security, which, transposed into the vocabulary of the philosopher, means certainty, and certainty is the one thing which, from the beginning of time, the philosopher has been obliged to deny.

We have two encouragements. One is the fact that many thoughtful men are beginning to point out that there is no use in tinkering with constitutions so long as we ignore the sea of motivation which inevitably determines whether or not the constitution can be made to work. This is another way of saying that we cannot ignore the individual. It is a way of saying that Plato in the act of self-restraint has become a vitally important image for our time. For if the individual does not learn to restrain himself, States *cannot.*

It may be argued that there is not *time* to re-educate the individual. There is always time, if there is nothing else to do. And the man who says that there is not time is one who has to re-educate himself along with the others. For he may be deceiving himself and others with his anxious insistence upon emergency. The philosopher is a man who acknowledges no emergency desperate enough to permit evil or foolish actions. Evil or folly is usually justified by a political argument founded upon self-interest, and the philosopher stands above self-interest. This is *his* certainty, to which he longs to convert the world.

The other encouragement comes from a sort of conspiracy of events which collaborates with the intransigence of the philosopher. It is the fact that the States which stand with arms upraised, ready to strike, are ready with something much more threatening than their bare hands.

The threat of violence has meaning only so long as it is capable of being measured. The violence threatened by the modern State is a violence which has no intelligible measure. It is no exaggeration to say that the potential violence of nuclear weapons is rapidly reaching infinity. Such weapons will exercise influence only so long as men can still *pretend* that they can be used as rational instruments with measurable effect. When that pretense is no longer possible, the control exercised by means of these weapons, entirely through fear, will break down. You may be able to threaten a man with a club and get him to do what you want him to do. But when a group of men start threatening one another with immediate dissolution of the universe, a point of gibbering idiocy is not far off. Rational—that is, constitutional—relationships, at least, become quite impossible.

You take away the motive of righteousness—that eliminates the philosophic current in the sea of motivation. Constitutionalism can limp along for a while without the idea of righteousness. But when you take away the motives of fear and self-interest, by working them to death, *then* what happens?

There is only one thing to do: Go back to work on Plato's old project—making kings into philosophers and philosophers into kings. Our only important amendment, not wholly unfamiliar to Plato, is that in a Democracy all men are Kings.