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MEANS AND SIGNS OF CHANGE

AN aspect of the problems of the future that is never inquired into—that is not even mentioned, despite its obvious importance—has to do with the need for enthusiasm in community undertakings, for feelings of friendly interdependence in the pursuit of common goals. For the most part, the socially concerned person who has grown up in Western society has experienced "community spirit" almost entirely in its crystallized form of hardened social pressure and the brittle conformities which have lost all relation to active human ideals. The joy of human solidarity—of working "shoulder to shoulder" with other people, without self-interest—is becoming an unknown emotion in the West. Even those who sense this lack, and are tempted to think about it seriously, may be dissuaded by their recognition of the fact that such feelings are anticipated and endlessly exploited in socialist ideology. We live in a time when the spontaneous longings of human beings are in constant danger of being siphoned off into propaganda machines and subjected to sloganized political interpretation.

The Cold War, in other words, is too much a struggle of perversity with perversity, a conflict of one set of cultural delusions with another, instead of a legitimate encounter of rival political principles. How the peoples of the modern world will wear out these monstrous distortions and begin to reduce their differences to humanly manageable terms remains, for the present, an insoluble mystery. One thing seems quite certain: The forward steps to be taken in terms of social development, change, or reform, today, will have to be on a non-ideological, undoctrinaire basis. Somehow they will have to miss, ignore, or disparage ideological controversy by being the direct acts of human beings in behalf of immediate good.

For these reasons, there is manifest value in examining how the Western habits of sloganizing and ideologizing cultural-national intentions have created serious problems for the awakening peoples of the African continent. In *Foreign Affairs* for July, Ezekiel Mphahlele, a South African now living in Kenya, shows how Africans working for African self-consciousness and cultural dignity are harassed by these tendencies. Africans face not only the psychological problems of forging a new civilization for themselves, learning to combine their own past with what they want of European influence, but also must cope with their own absorption of the myth-and-propaganda-making style of the West. In his article "The Fabric of African Cultures, Mr. Mphahlele quotes a talk on African literature he gave in Dakar earlier this year. He questions the endless emphasis on *"négritude"* in contemporary African thought. He points out that it is only the Africans who, by reason of a European education and assimilation to European culture, *feel* the need to make propaganda about negritude. "The masses are naturally unaffected, and there is the same basic continuity in their lives that we see in most of black Africa." Negritude becomes important to those who are humiliated by personal experience of the persisting dominance of colonial institutions in Africa. In his talk, Mr. Mphahlele said:

> Who is so stupid as to deny the historical fact of negritude as both a protest and a positive assertion of African cultural values? All this is valid. What I do not accept is the way in which too much of the poetry inspired by it romanticizes Africa—as a symbol of innocence, purity and artless primitiveness. I feel insulted when some people imply that Africa is not also a violent continent. I am a violent person, and proud of it because it is often a healthy human state of mind; some day I'm going to plunder, rape, set things on fire; I'm going to cut someone's throat; I'm going to subvert a government; I'm going to organize a coup

d'etat; yes, I'm going to oppress my own people; I'm going to hunt down the rich fat black men who bully the small, weak black men and destroy them; I'm going to become a capitalist, and woe to all who cross my path or who want to be my servants or chauffeurs and so on; I'm going to lead a breakaway church—there is money in it; I'm going to attack the black bourgeoisie while I cultivate a garden, rear dogs and parrots; listen to jazz and the classics, read "culture" and so on. Yes, I'm also going to organize a strike. Don't you know that sometimes I kill to the rhythm of drums and cut the sinews of a baby to cure it of paralysis? . . .

Here is a man resisting ideology and false cultural myths. Here is a man with the good kind of sophistication, giving the thread of a promise that, just maybe, the Africans won't have to go through the entire cycle of pious self-deceptions and ideological hypocrisy that the West has endured, and by no means recovered from as yet. So far, African institutions and African self-conceit are not yet strong enough to silence him. He continues:

This is only a dramatization of what Africa can do and is doing. The image of Africa consists of all these and others. And negritude poetry pretends that they do not constitute the image and leaves them out. So we are told only half—often even a falsified half—of the story of Africa. Sheer romanticism that fails to see the large landscape of the personality of the African makes bad poetry. Facile protest also makes bad poetry. The omission of these elements of a continent in turmoil reflects a defective poetic vision. The greatest poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor is that which portrays in himself the meeting point of Europe and Africa. This is the most realistic and honest and most meaningful symbol of Africa—an ambivalent continent searching for equilibrium. This synthesis of Europe and Africa does not necessarily reject the Negro-ness of the African. An image of Africa that only glorifies our ancestors and celebrates our "purity" and "innocence" is an image of a continent lying in state.

Carnara Laye's "Le Regard du Roi," Ferdinand Oyono's "Le Vieux Nègre et la Medaille" and Mongo Beti's "Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba" are not bullied by negritude. They are concerned in portraying the black-white encounter, and they do this, notwithstanding, with a devastating poetic sense of irony unmatched by any that one sees in the English novel by Africans. Nor does the fascinating work of the Congolese poet, Tchikaya U"Tamsi, require négritude to attain the power it has.

Négritude, while a valuable slogan politically, can, because its apostles have set it up as a principle of art, amount to self-enslavement—"autocolonization," to quote a French writer speaking of African politics and economics. We should not allow ourselves to be bullied at gunpoint into producing a literature that is supposed to contain a negritude theme and style. For now we are told, also, that there is *un style négro-africain* and that therefore we have to sloganize and write to a march. We are also told that negritude is less a matter of theme than style.

I say, then, that negritude can go on as a socio-political slogan, but that it has no right to set itself up as a standard of literary importance; there I refuse to go along. I refuse to be put in a Negro file—for sociologists to come and examine me. And yet I am no less committed to the African revolution. Art unifies even while it distinguishes men; and I regard it as an insult to the African for anyone to suggest—as the apostles of negritude often do—that because we write independently on different themes in divers modes and styles all over Africa, we are therefore ripe victims of Balkanization.

Let negritude make the theme of literature if people want to use it. But we must remember that literature springs from an individual's experience in the context of the culture and assumptions of the group. In its effort to take in the whole man, 1iterature also tries to see far ahead, to project a prophetic vision, such as a writer is capable of, based on contemporary experience. It must at least set in motion vibrations in us that will continue even after we have read it, prompting us to continue inquiring into its meaning. And literature and art are too big for negritude, this had better be left as a historical phase.

If African culture is worth anything at all, it should not require myths to prop it up. These thoughts are not new at all. I have come to them after physical and mental agony. And this is of course not my monopoly either. It is the price Africa has to pay. And if you thought that the end of colonialism was the end of the agony, then it is time to wake up.

Now what we have here is another chapter in the ancient contest between strident Puritan insistence on the tablets of the law, and the silent

Taoist system of administration. The artist, having found in himself at least one or two of the secrets of meaning, is always basically Taoist in his view of public affairs. He knows that the more you "do," the worse it gets. He knows that constant talk of "what must be achieved," the noisy setting of "goals," and, most of all, argument and hair-splitting about political righteousness are somehow subversive of all the natural virtues of man. He knows that the sloganization and advertisement of natural virtues soon makes them unnatural. He sees that aggressive definition of the Good Life makes it quite impossible to attain. Lao-tse put these principles with great simplicity:

> In the highest antiquity, the people did not know that they had rulers. In the next age they loved and praised them. In the next, they feared them. In the next they despised them.
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> How cautious is the sage, how sparing of his words! When his task is accomplished and affairs are prosperous, the people all say: "We have come to be as we are, naturally and of ourselves."
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> If any one desires to take the Empire in hand and govern it, I see that he will not succeed. The Empire is a divine utensil which may not be roughly handled. He who meddles, mars. He who holds it by force, loses it.

In any society, there are always people in whom feelings of this sort predominate. They are the best people in the society, for the reason that they are continuously creating out of themselves the natural social capital which comes as a by-product of the pursuit of transcendent ends. This capital is all that the manipulators, the politicians, and social moralists have to work with, and the more numerous and ardent the latter become, the sooner the capital is exhausted. When the Taoists turn political, you have a morally bankrupt state. The process is similar to what happens in a school where, one after another, the teachers are made over into administrators, until finally, you have some kind of a print shop run by counterfeiters of virtue, instead of a garden where young people grow into human beings.

The Puritans, who are the prime instigators of this process, can never get over their anxiety, because anxiety is part of being a Puritan. Somewhere, deep in their souls, they know they are killing the thing they love, and this makes them ever more stern and exacting of the people. Their passion for human self-defeat forces them to externalize every moral decision, so that they will be able to *watch* the emergence of the immorality they are certain will appear, since it is the only proof that they have been right all along.

The Puritan converts virtue into stereotypes which have lost their relation to life. Just look at the record. Some artist, forgetful of recent history, or untouched by it, makes a statue of a pioneer woman. She has her hand on a great wagon wheel, and she is peering westward, into a wondrous future. Her face is marked by lines of endurance and courage. A baby clings to her linsey woolsey skirt. You look at the statue, and while you want to identify with her, you *can't*—not any more. The slogan-makers have despoiled her of meaning. She was indeed a rugged individual, and she had the strength of her ordeals, but it seems obscene for her great-grandsons to make propaganda out of her courage in privation. *They* are not looking for that kind of ordeal; they just want a safe and secure *status quo,* untroubled by murmurs of dissatisfaction.

Then, if you look back to the thirties, you remember those ridiculous arrangements of the Communists at their mass meetings—big pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and a sign which said: "Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism." The Communists couldn't really debase the historical images of Washington and Lincoln, but they could and did pervert for a great many Americans the simple meanings of words like "cooperation," "world brotherhood," "internationalism," and "human solidarity." At times you wonder if there oughtn't to be a law against organizations talking about "ideals" and how to realize them through political action. The end-product of the misuse of the grand

generalities of social aspiration is the kind of sick reaction you get, nowadays, to the simple objectives of UNESCO educational material. An effort to bring to schoolchildren an understanding of the peoples and children of other lands is regarded as a sneaky attack on the sovereignty and freedom of the United States. These people are prevented by their fears from asking themselves what good there can be in a sovereignty which must survive on a diet of suspicion of and isolation from the humanity of the rest of the people in the world.

When political perversions of social ideals are permitted to set the meanings of words and ideas, fanatical minorities begin to gain control of definitions of social good, and the public air is filled with their cries of suspicion and denunciation. In a very short time, Gresham's Law operates at another level, and the bad currency of ideals drives out the good; then you get government by a bureaucracy which takes its standards from the witch-hunters. A not quite obvious effect of such practices is that, if the bureaucracy says you are all right for a certain job, or sufficiently conventional in your thinking to be allowed a passport for foreign travel,—you have in effect the *approval* of the bureaucracy—and this, of course, is a bothersome and nervy situation for the bureaucrats. Have they really been careful enough? Suppose someone not quite all right should slip through the net? So the standards tend to be more demanding all the time.

You won't be able to penetrate this argument with talk about "ideals." You can't overcome a delusion with a currency that has been thoroughly counterfeited by the delusion. You have to make an entirely new start with a fresh issue. How to go about this is the central problem of modern society. What is needed is the shock of recognition which comes from suddenly realizing that people whom you thought were your opponents are *thinking your thoughts,* wanting the things you want, and valuing the things you value. This is the only way to break the ideological stalemate, to restore the dialogue about the good of man to a form in which actual communication takes place.

A self-governing society is a society in which people trust one another *before* they suspect one another. It is a society which has an instinct for shaping free institutions, from recognition that repressive institutions, if allowed to dominate, will always redefine the conditions of the good life until no good life is possible. How do people learn to trust one; another? They learn this by *working together* in activities in which ends are naturally joined with means.

Thus the act of rescue for trust and freedom has to be an act of daring which *begins* with trust and freedom. By such acts we have at least a chance of regaining feelings of human solidarity, of understanding the non-acquisitive fruits and the spontaneous joys of cooperation. The one thing that cannot be permitted is the politicalization and propagandization of these acts. The Taoist principle must rule:

> He who is self-approving does not shine. He who boasts has no merit. He who exalts himself does not rise high. Judged according to Tao, he is like remnants of food or a tumour on the body—an object of universal disgust. Therefore one who has Tao will not consort with such.

There are further principles which apply pointedly to our present condition:

> When terms are made after a great quarrel, a certain ill-feeling is bound to be left behind. How can this be made good? Therefore, having entered into an agreement, the Sage adheres to his obligations, but does not exact fulfillment from others. The man who has Virtue attends to the spirit of the compact; the man without Virtue attends only to his claims.
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> He who tries to govern a kingdom by his sagacity is of that kingdom the despoiler; but he who does not govern by sagacity is the kingdom's blessing. He who understands these two sayings may be regarded as a pattern and a model. To keep this principle constantly before one's eyes is called Profound Virtue. Profound Virtue is unfathomable, far-reaching, paradoxical at first, but afterwards exhibiting thorough conformity with Nature.

One difference between Lao-tse's time and ours is that today there is the possibility of these ideas being recognized as *laws of nature,* instead of the revealed wisdom of a mysterious sage. In any event, you could argue that in Lao-tse's time there was no hope of such wisdom being practiced except by men whose understanding far exceeded that of the people over whom they ruled, while now, there is no hope of its having any effect on our society unless it begins to be understood by people in general.

In fact, the most encouraging thing about the present is the slow seepage of this kind of thinking into the collection of viable ideas about human relations, human growth, and the educational process. It is manifest that without a deep change in thinking at this level, our politics, which is no more than the gross instrumentation of the prevailing philosophy, cannot possibly change. But the change is coming, although very slowly. It is coming by way of the slow penetration of what, for lack of better identification, we may call Zen and Taoist attitudes in education. The emergence of the "non-directive" idea in both education and therapy is a further illustration. It is coming by way of the strange and wonderful discoveries of Dr. Carl Rogers as a teacher who no longer wants to "teach," because it makes him feel presumptuous—and this, of course, makes him an extraordinary teacher.

How can we be sure that these are signs of a great change? We can be sure because these are the symptoms of a spontaneous, self-generated, and growing *respect for man,* in our society.

Letter from
EASTERN EUROPE

A CONVINCING case can be made for the proposition that anyone seriously trying to understand human society should make a thoughtful trip through Eastern Europe. This is not a statement of faith in the average tourist, who manages, with the assiduous help of the authorities, to miss almost everything except the gross outline. A few days ago in Moscow I was being shown through a small, de luxe hotel kept by the Government for its special guests. "This is a quiet hotel," said the agency official. "There are no American tourists hueing and crying about the hall." (The comment is quoted with colloquial precision, and while my guide had the grace to look aghast at what he had said, there is an uncomfortable amount of truth in such judgments on tourists, and not only American ones.)

This trip (Sofia, Bucharest, Moscow and Warsaw) convinces me that the Socialist governments are growing bolder in the management of internal economy. Since an economy is basically people, this can also be viewed as human management. Even in a Socialist state and under an authoritarian form of organization, people are the basic stuff government has to cope with.

This coping takes interesting forms. Some years ago I was fascinated by the methods used to spread culture in the Socialist world. Great art—drama, music, ballet, more than the printed word, perhaps—was made selectively available to a wide sector of the public at low prices. Expurgated? Of course; stringently so; with a seriously deadening effect. Today the center of Moscow is a veritable honeycomb of theaters. John Gielgud is doing *The Ages of Man,* and Shakespeare is elsewhere on view. Two theaters now operate full-time within the Kremlin's very walls. The old Bolshoi, looking a bit dowdy, still packs them in.

What people here enjoy in the way of creature comforts is determined by a combination of several factors—ability to produce, ability to purchase and import, various policy decisions on production and import, and equally important policy decisions on prices and wages. The law of supply and demand, suitably rewritten, still operates. During an earlier trip to Moscow we were literally pursued by people who wanted to buy our obviously Western clothes. Muscovites are now notably better dressed, and this form of chase has disappeared. Several years ago there were large, succulent oranges in the Intourist hotels for visitors—at 75 cents each; but none for the public. This week Spanish oranges were being sold on the street to considerable queues of ordinary people, who bought in quantity at about 70 cents a pound. I saw a gaggle of Moscow's street-cleaning women, carrying their twig brooms, marching down the street, all sucking oranges.

In the hotel restaurant there is now a fruit-cart pushed from table to table by an attractive young lady. It contains apples, oranges, bananas—and pineapples A young man and his girl, sitting at my table, discussed the display at some length and finally bought a pineapple. It cost them $3.30. I went on to the Bolshoi, where my (medium-priced) seat for *Rigoletto* was valued at just over half a pineapple.

The price of the pineapple has no importance. What matters is the fruit's existence, some thousands of miles from where it grew, and the comparison of its cost to that of a seat at the Bolshoi. On hunch, I would say this was probably a political pineapple from Cuba, or from Ghana, sent in part payment for an airplane or some other industrial product. Also important is the cash in the young man's pocket. Since I couldn't explain this phenomenon myself, I had to ask. "Oh!" said the director of an agency dealing with foreign cultural relations—"we Soviets have lots of money these days. Things are a lot better." This smiling response being something less than an answer, I asked a professor of economics. "When

there are more things to buy," he said, "we just pay more wages and salaries to buy them with."

Voila! Beat that for a simple account of political economy! It's a neat trick, even when you control most of the factors, and in a human situation you often can't.

The Poles have other ways, some more and some less successful. Several years ago I reported on the phenomenon of quantities of small cans of British Nescafe on sale at street stands for about $4.00 a can. There is little Nescafe now. The regular food stores offer Czech powdered coffee, however, priced at about $2.00 for the same size can. There is no attempt to duplicate quality or satisfaction in the replacement of Western goods by those locally produced. But this is a process which solves a number of problems, all at once: Coffee is cheaper; foreign exchange is no longer necessary; a worrisome and difficult black market is out of existence; and trade in a primary product with an underdeveloped country is stimulated. Again, as with the increase in Russian wages, here is a neat regrouping of economic factors in human management.

A colleague, visiting the Socialist world some months ago, suggested that the ideologue's dream, "New Soviet Man," is not appearing; instead, one may think, men of the Socialist world are beginning to resemble people of the West. In the gross view, this would be admitting genuine coexistence, or the possibility of parallel paths toward the same end of human betterment. But after experience in detail, one comes away from the Socialist world with the almost unimpaired conviction that the individual remains forgotten. Movements, institutions, sweeping rulings, ideology—all take preference over a mere man.

Yet this is a relative conclusion. Some months ago a very senior Soviet educator revealed in conversation a consciousness of the interrelations between the individual and his social world which would have done credit to any thoughtful educator, anywhere. He described many aspects of progress in the Soviet Union's 47-year history: almost full literacy has developed out of the former 75 per cent illiteracy; crime has diminished; more and more functions of Government are being taken on by concerned citizens, acting in unions, communities, collectives and other primary groupings and clubs. I cannot confirm all he said, but this man obviously was deeply committed to these developments and believed in their potential for the future. He expressed special interest in the effect of automation. In a machine-society, he said, a man needs both contact with nature and the "experience of wonder." Will the efforts of such educators create an entirely new type of man, or will they instead be working for a widely acceptable definition of human good, though approaching it by a road unacceptable to most of us?

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

OF DEATH AND THE TIMELESS VISION

SOMETIMES MANAS readers not only recommend books, but send them along for inspection. By this means we have for review a pocket edition of William Barrett's *Irrational Man* (Anchor, 1962; 95 cents), an account of the genesis and significance of existential thought.

One way of putting Barrett's central theme would be to say that breaking out of the limitations imposed upon thought by historical and cultural forces necessitates awareness of their existence. From Joseph Glanvil to Alfred North Whitehead, there have been analyses in plenty of the confining influence of "climates of opinion," "mind-sets," "provincial frame of references," etc. But an examination of one's personal servitude to the ideas of his times is a subtle and difficult task. The existentialist, in Mr. Barrett's view, is determined to discover a core of response within the individual which is beyond specific cultural or temporal influences. At the center of each being is an experiential power which cannot be derived from anything temporal at all—perhaps the Tao which has no name.

In terms of the development of modern science, appreciation of the reality of the irrational is indicated by Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy, Bohris Principle of Complementarity, and Godel's mathematical theories. It is in this context that Barrett introduces existentialism, with special emphasis upon Heidegger:

Mathematics is like a ship in mid-ocean that has sprung certain leaks (paradoxes); the leaks have been temporarily plugged, but our reason can never guarantee that the ship will not spring others. This human insecurity in what had been the most secure of the disciplines of rationality marks a new turn in Western thinking.

> The concurrence of these various discoveries in time is extraordinary. Heidegger published his *Being and Time,* a somber and rigorous meditation on human finitude, in 1927. In the same year Heisenberg gave to the world his Principle of Indeterminacy. In 1929 the mathematician Skolem published a theorem which some mathematicians now think almost as remarkable as Godel's: that even the elementary number system cannot be categorically formalized. In 1931 appeared Godel's epoch-making discovery. When events run parallel this way, when they occur so close together in time, but independently of each other and in diverse herds, we are tempted to conclude that they are not mere "meaningless" coincidences but very meaningful symptoms. The whole mind of the time seems to be inclining in one direction.
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> What emerges from these separate strands of history is an image of man himself that bears a new, stark, more nearly naked, and more questionable aspect. The contraction of man's horizons amounts to a denudation, a stripping down, of this being who has now to confront himself at the center of all his horizons. The labor of modern culture, wherever it has been authentic, has been a labor of denudation. A return to the sources, "to the things themselves," as Husserl puts it; toward a new truthfulness, the casting away of ready-made presuppositions and empty forms—these are some of the slogans under which this phase in history has presented itself. Naturally enough, much of this stripping down must appear as the work of destruction, as revolutionary or even "negative": a being who has become thoroughly questionable to himself must also find questionable his relation to the total past which in a sense he represents.

Existentialist literature is often said to be "preoccupied with death." In the works of Sartre and Camus the mood is clear enough—an awareness that our constant proximity to death can become a liberation from all that is temporal, since we need to *realize* that all that is temporal may cease any moment. Discussing Heidegger, Barrett summarizes:

> Only by taking my death into myself, according to Heidegger, does an authentic existence become possible for me. Touched by this interior angel of death, I cease to be the impersonal and social One among many, as Ivan Ilyich was, and I am free to become myself. Though terrifying, the taking of death into ourselves is also liberating: It frees us from servitude to the petty cares that threaten to engulf our daily life and thereby opens us to the essential *projects* by which we can make our lives personally

> and significantly our own. Heidegger calls this the condition of "freedom-toward-death" or "resoluteness."
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> We really know time, says Heidegger, because we know we are going to die. Without this passionate realization of our mortality, time would be simply a movement of the clock that we watch passively, calculating its advance—a movement devoid of human meaning. Man is not, strictly speaking, in time as a body is immersed in a river that rushes by. Rather, time is in him.

We also have at hand the transcript of a talk given last summer at the University of Mexico. "Can Death Be Valued as a Means?" by Robert Rein'l. Dr. Rein'1 is professor of Philosophy at Arizona State University and, though he shows no particular proclivity for existentialist thinking, his observations have a correlative interest:

> Conscious experience appears incomplete. One does not have an adequate idea of its beginning or ending. Considered in terms of behavior, beginning and ending do not offer special difficulties provided there is agreement on what sort of behavior is definitive of experience. The observer may note within his own experience the beginning and ending of the characteristic behavior in the person he is observing. However this does not provide a concept of experience that includes immediacy. It removes it—*safely* as some would say—beyond the bounds of the concept, leaving it in the observer where it need not itself be noted. But if immediacy is included, then when one thinks, for example, of one's experience that stretches between waking and sleeping one cannot discover a first or last bounded phase. Of course one cannot infer from this that there is no first or last phase. One notes that the first and last can be observed from without, in connection with behavior, but not from within. There is no intuitive idea of the beginning or ending of experience.

All of which, perhaps, is to say that freedom from bondage to time and the apparent imperatives of time-induced responses is to view each moment in a non-temporal perspective, and so to transcend the temporal imperatives. As Mr. Barrett has pointed out, the general tendency towards closed systems, or homeostasis in thought, awakens a rebellion against the narrowly logical. Barrett sums up:

> The phenomena of mass society and the collectivization of man are facts so decisive for our age that all conflicts among political forms and among leaders take place upon and within this basis. Collectivization proceeds by reducing man to an object in functional interplay with other objects (men), returning him ironically enough in some sense to his primitive status as a natural object in use, from which history long ago disentangled him. Collective being is becoming the style of our epoch, despite our Sunday-morning lip service to the ideals of the dignity and value of the individual. Subjectivity is already considered a criminal offense under totalitarianism, a morbid excrescence by our own Philistinism. Against such threatening historical weather, that subjectivity takes on the human dignity of revolt; the reality of the negative shows itself in man's power to say *No.*

COMMENTARY
COMMUNITY LIBRARY PROJECT

WHEN, a little over a year ago, Mrs. Fannia R. Steelink moved into the East Los Angeles area, she found herself living in a neighborhood where more than two thousand children of school age had no library, except one two and a half miles away to which the children would have to walk through heavy industrial traffic.

Obtaining the cooperation of the Lou Costello Recreation Center, Mrs. Steelink began to build a library for these children. Other people helped, and the Costello Community Library officially opened on April 16 during National Library Week. Mrs. Steelink reports that the children are responding with great enthusiasm. She also writes of the need of small children, from six to ten years of age, to learn how to read. In this part of Los Angeles, as elsewhere, the schools are overcrowded and many of the children can hardly sign their names and addresses. A project to help them read is growing out of the library work. But the great and immediate need, Mrs. Steelink says, is "books for children" and volunteers to help at the library.

Speaking of the children who have helped the library to grow, Mrs. Steelink writes:

> I believe I will never forget this wonderful experience. One eleven-year-old, her eyes shining, said to me: "Some day some child will come to this library and see all the beautiful books and will want to become a doctor, or a teacher, or an engineer. Yes, you will see, it is going to happen! I myself want to become a doctor, so when I grow up no automation will take away my knowledge." Another girl, twelve and a half years old, said she is determined to become a musician. . . . We do not pay enough attention to the determination of the children.

The Costello Community Library, Mrs. Steelink says, has already accumulated a fine collection of books for adults. The need for children's books, however, is "desperate." Nearly always, they must be bought. Further, children's books are easily damaged or destroyed. As a pertinent statistic, Mrs. Steelink observes that 75 per cent of the total use of California Public Libraries is by children and the young of school age, kindergarten through college.

Send contributions of books to Mrs. Steelink at the Costello Community Library, 3121 East Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90023. Donations of money are turned over to the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks to be used for supplies and the acquisition of books.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE USE OF RELIGION

A CHAPTER in Rudolf Dreikurs' *Children: The Challenge* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1964) titled "Use Religion Wisely," introduces some considerations regarding religion in the home. Dr. Dreikurs explains why religion can never be inspiring to children if it is used mainly to compel "improved behavior." He writes:

> A child has no need to be "bad" unless he has met obstacles in his environment that have caused him to become discouraged and turn to misbehavior as a way out of his difficulty. Since the child has a purpose in his misbehavior, moralizing does not change it nor remove the obstacle. It adds to his discouragement. When we hold up the ideal for which we all strive and point out to him how far short he falls, we are only adding to the discouragement that made him fall short to begin with. Far from needing the condemnation implied in moralizing, the child needs encouragement and help out of his difficulty.
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> The child knows he must be good. Having no idea why he is "bad" (since the purpose of his behavior is unknown to him) he despairs of ever reaching his ideals. A conflict develops between what he knows he should do and what he finds himself doing. Since he cannot go in two directions at once, he must learn to pretend. He learns to hide behind good intentions when his real purpose may be quite the opposite. Wherever moralizing is used to stimulate good behavior, we find children with false fronts. They attempt under all circumstances to appear in the best moral light. They develop a horrible fear that their true worthlessness (their false self-concept is very real to them!) will show through the front. The more energy they spend on "appearances" and upon fear the less they have for true growth and development.

This is simply a way of saying that morality cannot be coerced—if by morality we mean a sense of ethical perception. Further, while enforced codes of conduct may easily be mislaid or supplanted, the habit of response to force continues. The people of the Middle Ages, dominated by the all-encompassing power of the Holy Roman Empire, would hardly have resisted the National Socialism which overtook Germany in the 1930'S; heresy hunts, thought-control, and an atmosphere of perpetual threat were characteristic of both periods. Dr. Dreikurs finds the psychological roots of later distortions of personality in the threat of punishments in the hereafter:

> If the child is old enough to have a concept of time after death, and threats of punishment in the hereafter are used he may develop a morbid fear of death, of the future, of the unseen. Such fear, rather than "straightening him out," cramps his style, denies him freedom of growth and the strength to assume responsibility. He is already in trouble or he wouldn't misbehave. Now, in addition, he must face this unseen ogre who will punish him for his unhappiness. He may even develop an unspoken or unacknowledged hatred for this God who punishes. Since such a feeling is beyond expression, the child adds more to his false front. This kind of conflict between his real intentions and his pretense can lead only to further maladjustment or even to neurosis.

The threat of punishment in an afterlife has figured largely in the Christian ethos and has certainly contributed to a thousand and one variations of neurosis, as Dr. Dreikurs suggests. Apart from theology, the words attributed to Jesus have a great deal to do, however, with the problem of liberating the spirit of man. Jesus had one central message, which was that the known dimensions of the physical world, including the power-structure of priesthood, king and emperor, had very little to do with the kingdom of the spirit; beyond the this-dimensional universe was an other-dimensional realm—the kingdom of heaven—which could never be acquired by the means which seem so effective on earth. For example, Jesus points out in St. Matthew (Lamsa's translation from Aramaic): "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been administered by force, and only those in power control it." (11:12.) Here, "until now" is the key. The Gospel continues, exploring a different view of spiritual attainment:

> He related another parable to them, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field.
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> It is the smallest of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is larger than II of the herbs; and it becomes a tree, so that the fowls of the sky come and nest in its branches.
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> He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like the leaven, which a woman took and buried in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened. (13: 31-33.)
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> Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure which is hidden in the field. . . . (13 :44.)
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> Jesus said to them, Have you understood all of these things? They said to him, Yes, our Lord.
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> He said to them, Therefore every scribe who is converted to the kingdom of heaven, is like a man who is a householder, who brings out new and old things from his treasures. . . .(13 51-52.)
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> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth shall be released in heaven. (16: 19.)
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> Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the scripture, The stone which the builders rejected, the same became the corner-stone; this was from the Lord, and it is a marvel in our eyes? (21:42.)

The implications of such passages seem clear enough. They state that the metaphysical world is as real as the physical world, and that, while the physical world metes out punishment and yields rewards under pressure, the metaphysical world can only be entered by those who have a subtle sight and whose conceptions become increasingly transcendent. The perennial fault of religion, as theology, is that it first confuses metaphysics and then, more often than not, debases its principles. When the glories of the kingdom of heaven are made for temporal authority, the "false front" is very apparent.

In respect to the highest criteria of morality, our children need encouragement to seek within themselves for the roots of ethical perception. They need to know that ethical perception is spontaneous, and belongs to the kingdom of heaven, while rewards and punishments, at their best, as well as at their worst, define men's interrelations when ethical perception is absent. There comes a time in the life of every man when he realizes a basic truth: that he rewards and punishes himself.

There come times in the life of every child when he is ready to perceive something of this truth. This, we maintain, is the area of religion in relation to ethics which the young should be helped to understand. The "challenge of children" is not the challenge of an alien presence, but the challenge of ourselves.

FRONTIERS

Meaning in History

THE really bad boy of Western civilization, as we read Erich Kahler's latest book, *The Meaning of History* (George Braziller, 1964, $5.00)—and we are not positive that Dr. Kahler intends this conclusion—is Augustine of Hippo. For it was Augustine who systematically expunged from early Christian thought all pagan elements of a cyclic understanding of the passage of events and the meaning of the human enterprise. Augustine took up the study of history in order to get rid of it, once and for all. At his hands, temporal events became meaningless. The only crucial relation, for him, was the spiritual relation. Earthly achievement, and therefore history, had no value—or worse, it was delusive. This doctrine and its influence, spread by the not inconsiderable intellectual powers of Augustine, was the start of the secularization of the idea of history. For if, by a ruthless mutilation of the wholeness of life, you throw out as unimportant the entire category of earthly events, then in self-defense the believers in the significance of earthly events must work out a theory of their independent meaning, and this is the secularization of history.

Dr. Kahler is another of those modern scholars who are effectually revising Milton Mayer's claim that contemporary Westerners are "vestigial Greeks." Dr. Kahler is not "vestigial." He gives the ancient Greek idea of the meaning of history a living role for present-day thought. He makes it his business to undo the harm begun by Augustine. His general purpose becomes clear in a discussion of what he understands by meaning.

Obviously, meaning is concerned with purposes and goals. To find meaning in a process is to relate the elements of the process to the realization of some kind of value—some end which human beings would like to reach. But, says Kahler, there is more to "meaning"' than this. All processes leading to ends take place in time, and during this passage of time the processes have a *form.* Reasoned recognition of the order in that form gives another kind of meaning. If you don't seek this kind of meaning, also, you will be tempted to try the oversimplification practiced by Augustinc to get rid of what happens *in time,* and to talk only of the end, the goal. Augustine's serious theological problems, Dr. Kahler suggests, grew out of his impatience with time, his desire for a here-and-now sort of salvation. Nothing short of a miracle could accomplish this for human beings. Either the realization of ends would be gained by themselves through blood, sweat, and tears—in *history,* that is—or some *deus ex machina* would have to assume responsibility. Augustine chose the latter solution. Salvation came from Christ, not man. Man, in fact, had very little to do with it. Perhaps Augustine didn't feel able to save himself, and wanted some powerful assistance. At any rate, he put the whole process off on God, and became an anxiety-ridden although exceedingly subtle defender of this position, leaving its logical consequences for the Middle Ages to develop, the Calvinists to make a *reductio ad absurdum* of, and the eighteenth century to throw out in wrath and contempt. The central difficulty was the problem of free will. For if, after all, God solves all problems, what does man do? Nothing, said Augustine, although with some complication. Ever since, Western man has been trying to get back his autonomy.

Dr. Kahler's interest is in regaining for history a sense of the deep meaning that lies in its *form.* His own sense of purpose is put in his last paragraph:

> The problem of the meaning of history is the problem of the meaning of man, the problem of the meaning of a human life. We stand at the crossroads between the annihilation of the West and the unification of humanity. This is the time, if ever there was one, to raise fundamental questions. . . .

One ought, after reading this book, to go back to the author's earlier volume, *The Tower and the Abyss,* which is a minute study of the divorce of the sense of meaning from human life, in consequence of the technologization of modern

society. It is a measured but none the less burning and brilliant analysis of the anti-human realities in contemporary civilization. He now turns to the study of history as a possible means of regaining our humanity. And it is the Greek view of history he chooses as a model. To us, he points out, Greek history may *seem* to have been "scientific" in the modern sense, but it was not. He writes:

> What makes it appear scientific is, apart from its (not always dependable) attempt at factuality, precisely its underlying assumption of a stable, absolute, natural order of things, of a regular and predictable recurrence of events. Thucydides, too, believed that human processes always repeat themselves and convinced as he was of the basic stability of human conditions, he sought to derive from history ever valid connections of cause and effect, and general principles of human behavior. But this quasi-scientific view of history, which is also manifest in Aristotle's *Politics,* was by no means the same as that of our modern "historical science" which evolved under the domination of the natural sciences. The Greeks did not yet seek knowledge simply for knowledge's sake, nor essentially for technological and economic advantage. They were not concerned with that aimless amassing of facts, such as is practiced in our historical and social sciences, with that theoretical pragmatism, collecting data for future use, which, even should they be called for, could hardly be reached in the endless files of incoherent material. Greek historical research was pragmatic in a way utterly different from ours: the Greeks wanted to know in order to achieve an orientation in their world, in order to live in the right way knowledge was closely connected with action, it was indeed a part of action. And living and acting in the right way was not necessarily equated with acting *successfully.* It means acting and living in accordance with the cosmic order. Research, empirical as well as speculative, was therefore essentially search for the meaning of the cosmic order, meaning, not as purpose and end—for within recurrence of events no purpose of or goal of human life was conceivable—but meaning as established form. From pre-Socratic to Stoic thinking the quest for the meaning of the cosmic order, which human conduct had to follow, was the prime motive of inquiry.

Reading Dr. Kahler is a pleasurable and enriching experience. His tracing through the Middle Ages of the struggle of human rationality to make the inherited assumptions of Christian theology submit to the canons of reason has the effect of restoring intellectual and moral unity to Western history, and it shows the origins of modern science in the conclusions of the scholastic philosophers.

His book is also a demonstration of the fact that *meaning* is something that is discovered, realized, and set forth by individuals. An encounter with meaning is an encounter with the mind of a human being. Men seeking meaning may set out in the same general direction—the direction, say, chosen by Spengler and Toynbee, and also by Dr. Kahler—yet the explication of felt meaning must be private before it can be made public.

A final note: One wishes that Dr. Kahler were as well acquainted with the resources of Eastern philosophy as he is with that of the Greeks and the later Europeans. For Indian thinkers, for example, cyclic recurrence was not devoid of meaning. They held that metempsychosis goes on within metamorphosis: there is an underlying growth of soul. We suspect that some of the Greeks thought this, too, although they may not have said so explicitly. And there is certainly a sense in which Empedocles said it, in *The Purifications.*