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WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

WE are not, of course, going to pretend to answer this question. To do so would be presumptuous, if not wholly impossible. What we are going to attempt is to point out what happens to people, to cultures or civilizations, when they stop *trying* to answer this question.

Every human society has some kind of going conception of what knowledge is. When you speak of an "age," in human history, you refer to a period of time in which there is a recognizable uniformity in peoples' ideas about knowledge. Various terms have been developed to describe this common ground in ideas. "Mind-set" is one of them. A more suggestive phrase is "climate of opinion," which was made popular a generation ago by Alfred North Whitehead, who borrowed it from Joseph Glanvil, a seventeenth-century English thinker. Glanvil regarded any dogmatic uniformity or orthodoxy in ideas as a confinement which free minds ought to break out of.

There are a number of books which give useful accounts of various climates of opinion. Carl Becker's *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (Yale University Press, 1932) is especially good, since it contrasts the Medieval world-view with the new spirit which brought on the revolutions of the eighteenth century. (Becker is an engaging writer and anyone who looks at one of his books is likely to end up reading everything this distinguished relativist historian put into print.) *Paideia* (Oxford University Press) by Werner Jaeger is excellent on the themes of ancient Greek culture, and all of Edith Hamilton's books on the Greeks and the Romans have an important place in this reading program. W. P. Ker's *The Dark Ages* (New American Library paperback) is a delightful classic on the period which followed the break-down of ancient civilization, and Charles Haskins' *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1939) describes the early awakening of the Western mind. Basil Willey's *Seventeenth-Century Background* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1934) is an exciting account of what may turn out to be the greatest period in English history.

These books by no means give a complete picture but they have in common the fact that they are interesting and pleasurable reading. For a study of all the historic phases or changes in the European idea of knowledge, John Randall's *The Making of the Modern Mind* (Houghton Mifflin, 1926) is probably still the best survey course available, but no survey course is good enough by itself. Histories of the philosophy of science ought also to be consulted, for some objectivity toward modern assumptions. Indispensable for this purpose is Edwin A. Burtt's *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (Harcourt, Brace, 1932).

The heroes of intellectual history are always the innovators, the rebels against the Establishment in respect to orthodox ideas of knowledge and truth. Among them, for example, were Socrates, Giordano Bruno, and Galileo. Of these three, the first two were executed by the guardians of public morality, and the third was put under house arrest by the Inquisition after he agreed to keep his heresies to himself.

What does this record of experience tell us about answers to the question, "What is knowledge?" It tells us that they may be dangerous to anyone who tries out a new answer on the public. Why should this be? Fundamentally, it is always the administrator class which objects. So long as people are in general agreement about what is knowledge and what is not, public responses can be predicted. Uniformities of belief in a population are the

means of control of that population. It follows that when you become interested in the beliefs of a people on the subject of knowledge, it is not enough to look up what they say they think. You need also to pay attention to the role of the administrators who rule the people. If the administrators are the dominant group, the beliefs about knowledge are likely to be simple and dogmatic, and the culture static.

This brings us to the book we want to discuss at some length—Czeslaw Milosz' *The Captive Mind* (available as a Vintage paperback, $1.25)—the kind of a book you keep on your desk where you can see it, as the reassuring presence of a free and original mind. *The Captive Mind* is about the relationships between administrators and the idea of knowledge. Briefly, it is a study of the conquest of the Baltic States by the Communist ideology, of the resistances encountered among the intellectuals, and of the almost incredible pressures exerted by the Communists to gain the conformity they believed was needed for the success of their political regime. The one thing they could not tolerate was any competition for the Communist idea of knowledge.

The Captive Mind is the most civilized criticism of the Communist ideology we have ever read—civilized, and at the same time uncompromising. But like all good books, it cannot be used for partisan purposes without being distorted and rendered useless. This book must be read as a study of the problems of Man, not merely as an anti-Communist tract.

Mr. Milosz is a Polish poet who was born in 1911. He survived the Nazi occupation as a worker in the Polish underground in Warsaw and entered the Polish diplomatic service of the new (Communist) Polish government in 1946. After serving with the Polish embassy in Washington as cultural attaché, and in Paris as First Secretary for Cultural Affairs, he broke with the Communists (in 1951), and has since lived as a writer in Paris. The first American edition of *The Captive Mind* was published by Knopf in 1953. The painful struggle of the author's decision to leave his homeland, where his work as a translator and a poet could be published in his mother tongue—for him, "the most important thing in life"—is described in his preface:

> As the nerve-centers of the country were mastered, one after the other, by the adherents of Moscow, I was forced to abandon my philosophic beliefs one after the other, if I was to keep from throwing myself into the abyss. The abyss for me was exile, the worst of all misfortunes, for it meant sterility and inaction.
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> In the end, I found myself driven to the point where a final choice had to be made. This was when "socialist realism" was introduced into Poland. This is not, as some think, merely an æsthetic theory to which the writer, the musician, the painter or the theatrical producer is obliged to adhere. On the contrary, it involves by implication the whole Leninist-Stalinist doctrine. If writers and painters are not forced to become members of the Party, that is because such a step is unnecessary. So long as they act in accord with "Socialist Realism" they are automatically and inescapably enrolled among the followers of Stalin. "Socialist realism" is much more than a matter of taste, of preference for one style of painting or music rather than another. It is concerned with the beliefs which lie at the foundation of human existence. In the field of literature it forbids what has in every age been the writer's essential task—to look at the world from his own independent viewpoint to tell the truth as he sees it, and so to keep watch and ward in the interest of society as a whole. It preaches a proper attitude of doubt in regard to a merely formal system of ethics but itself makes all judgment of values dependent upon the interest of the dictatorship. Human sufferings are drowned in the trumpet-blare: the orchestra in the concentration camp and I, as a poet, had my place already marked out for me among the first violins.
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> Look, then, dispassionately at my problem. At home in Poland were my friends, my relatives, theaters where my translations of Shakespeare were being produced, publishers ready to print what I wrote. Above all, my own country and my own language—what is a poet who has no longer a language of his own? All these things were mine, if I would pay the price: obedience.
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> The actual moment of my decision to break with the Eastern bloc could be understood, from the

> psychological point of view, in more ways than one. From outside, it is easy to think of such a decision as an elementary consequence of one's hatred of tyranny. But in fact, it may spring from a number of motives, not all of them equally high-minded, but from a revolt of the stomach. A man may persuade himself, by the most logical reasoning, that he will greatly benefit his health by swallowing live frogs; and, thus rationally convinced, he may swallow a first frog, then the second; but at the third his stomach will revolt. In the same way, the growing influence of the doctrine on my way of thinking came up against the resistance of my whole nature.
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> The decision to refuse all complicity with the tyranny of the East—is this enough to satisfy one's conscience? I do not think so. I have won my freedom, but let me not forget that I stand in daily risk of losing it once more. For in the West also one experiences the pressure to conform—to conform, that is, with a system which is the opposite of the one I have escaped from. The difference is that in the West one may resist such pressure without being held guilty of a mortal sin.

What this says, in brief, is that the people who hold a vested interest in intellectual orthodoxy—in uniformity of belief concerning what is truth and knowledge—are in the East the political administrators of their society; and this makes conformity an *official* requirement. It says, further, that in the West there is a similar demand for conformity, but that it is not official, although it may be very great, and growing all the time.

This comparison brings home to us the importance of the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States. The Bill of Rights declares that this country can have no official doctrine of knowledge and truth. While it is true that the pressures of the Cold War have instigated actions which have tortured the Bill of Rights almost to death, the amendments are still in force and we still have in high office men like Supreme Court Justice Black to declare their validity.

The most effective instrument used by the bureaucracy of administrators to enforce submission is fear. Milosz makes this comment:

> Fear is well known as a cement of societies. In a liberal-capitalist economy fear of lack of money, fear of losing one's job, fear of slipping down one rung on the social ladder all spurred the individual to greater effort. But what exists in the [Communist] Imperium is *naked* fear. In a capitalist city with a population of one hundred thousand people, some ten thousand, let us say, may have been haunted by fear of unemployment. Such fear appeared to them to be a personal situation, tragic in view of the indifference and callousness of their environment. But if all one hundred thousand people live in daily fear, they give off a collective aura that hangs over the city like a heavy cloud. Gold alienates man from himself; naked fear, which has replaced capital, alienates him even more efficiently.

We quote these comparisons of the East and the West by Milosz because they show that the same problems haunt both parties to the Cold War, although with different intensities and in different frameworks of assumption. It would be the greatest possible mistake to assume that somehow these two societies have nothing in common—as though, for example, the Communists all grew up on Mars and then decided with malignant intent to invade the earth and to pervert its moral life with their alien ideology. The Communists are a product of European civilization. Their views were a reaction to the social conditions of the nineteenth century and their idea of knowledge is drawn from the same basic experience of life and of nature to which the West has been exposed.

We come now to the question with which we set out: What is knowledge? Or rather, what do people generally mean when they speak of knowledge, today? Here, again, there is little difference between the backgrounds of East and West. Milosz has this paragraph:

> In the nineteenth century, with the rise of literacy, brochures popularizing scientific theories made their appearance. Regardless of the intrinsic worth of these theories, we must grant that from the moment they take on popular form they become something other than what they were as scientific research. For example, the simplified and vulgarized version of Darwin's theory of the origin of species and the struggle for existence is not the same concept that

it was for Darwin or for his scholarly opponents. It takes on emotional coloration, and changes into an important sociological element. The leaders of the twentieth century, like Hitler for instance, drew their knowledge from popular brochures, which explains the incredible confusion in their minds. Evidently, there is no place in such digests for the humble remarks of true scientists who assure us that the laws discovered are hypothetical and relative to the method chosen and the system of symbols used. Vulgarized knowledge characteristically gives birth to a feeling that *everything* is understandable and explained. It is like a system of bridges built over chasms. One can travel boldly ahead over these bridges, ignoring the chasms. It is forbidden to look down into them; but that, alas, does not alter the fact that they exist. . . .

Dialectical materialism, Russian-style, is nothing more than nineteenth-century science vulgarized to the second power. Its emotional and didactic components are so strong that they change all proportions. Although the Method was scientific at its origins, when it is applied to humanistic disciplines it often transforms them into edifying stories adapted to the needs of the moment. But there is no escape once a man enters upon these convenient bridges. Centuries of human history, with their thousands upon thousands of intricate affairs, are reduced to a few, most generalized terms. Undoubtedly, one comes closer to the truth when one sees history as the expression of the class struggle rather than as a series of private quarrels among kings and nobles. But precisely because such an analysis of history comes closer to the truth, it is more dangerous. It gives the illusion of *full knowledge;* it supplies answers to all questions, answers which merely run around in a circle repeating a few formulas. What's more, the humanities get connected with the natural sciences, thanks to the materialistic outlook. . ., and so we see the circle closing perfectly and logically. Then, Stalin becomes the crowning point of the evolution of life on our planet. . . .

It would be wrong to assert that a dual set of values no longer exists. The resistance against the new set of values is, however, emotional. It survives, but it is beaten whenever it has to explain itself in rational terms. A man's subconscious or not-quite-conscious life is richer than his vocabulary. His opposition to this new philosophy of life is much like a toothache. Not only can he not express the pain in words, but he cannot even tell you which tooth is aching.

Of course, when you read *The Captive Mind* today, little triggers may go off from time to time. You may say to yourself, for example, that Stalin is now *dead.* You can't help this reaction, perhaps; we couldn't; but to go on and think that the passage lacks meaning would be to miss most of Milosz' point. This is a passage about administrators who are convinced that they have the laws of nature (or of God) on their side in a political struggle or contention. And while you may also say to yourself that this book was written about 1951, and that things are generally different, now, this would also miss the point.

Things are no doubt different now, in Russia. Since Stalin's death there have been a few independently humanistic expressions in Soviet literature. There have been the courage and the sacrifice of Boris Pasternak, and the courage and not yet the sacrifice of another and younger poet, Yevtushenko. According to persons who attended the recent Moscow Peace Conference, the visitors from Western countries were permitted to say exactly what they thought on the floor of the Conference. This is certainly a change from the old days. But such changes for the better do not make Milosz' 1951 analysis irrelevant. He did not write to put the Russians down, and the West up. He wrote to increase his own and his readers' understanding of the processes that go on in captor and captive minds, anywhere, any time. The campaign to impose Socialist Realism on the Baltic peoples was something he observed closely, first hand. It happens that the Russians did it to the Poles, and because, in the case of Communist societies the people who have charge of Scientific Knowledge are also the political administrators, the Polish experience has a kind of intensified "purity" as an illustration of the process. No bureaucratic society is immune to this process.

If you wanted to draw some kind of parallel with the United States, you might try to imagine what it would be like, today, if Mr. Welch of the John Birch Society had been president of the

United States for the past twenty or thirty years, with an enormously expanded FBI to do his bidding. Of course, in comparison with the elaborately worked-out doctrines of Diamat (Dialectical Materialism) and Socialist Realism, the Soviet administrators have far better intellectual resources than any of Mr. Welch's theories; the parallel has to do only with the compulsions to conformity. Communism draws on the full spectrum of nineteenth-century science to back its dogmas about social evolution—a vulgarized science, it is true, as Milosz points out, but bearing full authority to those unable to recognize the difference between the limited conclusions of research and the unlimited authority of an infallible Method—while the Rightists of the West support their claims with an unrecognizably over-simplified, vulgarized Christianity and a few stereotyped slogans of nineteenth-century economic doctrines. What is relevant in the comparison is that in both cases the people who believe they have "knowledge" feel perfectly justified in insisting that other people accept what they believe. The authorities on "Socialist Realism," Milosz shows, have no hesitation in demanding political control of "the beliefs which lie at the foundation of human existence." This is their understanding, as administrators, of political responsibility.

The American Revolution was intended to put a final end to that kind of administration. It was a revolution against any and every political claim to "final knowledge." This was the rule we made about politics for the future of the United States. However, we are still having trouble in enforcing this rule, as the recent Supreme Court case on Bible-reading in the schools made clear.

The question arises: Would it be possible, as a culture, and not as a political assembly, to make a similar rule for philosophy or epistemology? Could we say, with Lao-tse, for example, "The Tao which can be expressed in words is not the eternal Tao; the name which can be uttered is not its eternal name"?

Could it be argued that any "truth" which has the effect of taking away human freedom instead of increasing it, is false and not a truth at all?

While "freedom" is admittedly a subject which leads to much equivocation in argument, all men continue to seek it and need to try to understand it. The full meaning of freedom is perhaps the ultimate goal of human striving, so why not relate our account of truth to this goal?

REVIEW
A WARDEN ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

THERE seems to be a common denominator among leading opponents of capital punishment: they are dedicated individuals who give prodigiously of their time and energy to hasten the day when the death penalty—in any state or country—will be no more than a barbaric memory. Clinton Duffy, whose 88 *Men and 2 Women* (Doubleday, 1969) adds some valuable perspectives to the rapidly growing body of articulate literature on the subject, served for nearly twelve years as the warden of San Quentin prison. His appointment to this post was itself a notable event, for not only was Duffy a comparatively young man, but he was also known, even then, as an uncompromising opponent of capital punishment. As warden of California's largest penal institution, he accepted his responsibilities to carry out the laws of the State. Eighty-eight men and two women were executed during his administration, yet every death provided Duffy with an opportunity for outspoken public statement of his views. Now retired, Mr. Duffy still lives within sight of San Quentin walls, literally his "home" from days of childhood when his father served there as a guard. But even today, as he catches a glimpse of the prison's forbidding battlements, he is stirred by a memory of the follies and tragedies of state-imposed killing.

Most of the condemned individuals were known to Duffy—known, as we discover from the tone of his text, without negative bias and without maudlin sympathy. Particularly effective are the author's arguments that "the deterrent theory" of the threat of death for capital crime does not work. A good example is Duffy's account of one Arthur Eggers, who killed his wife while serving as a deputy sheriff. Eggers had seen several men condemned to death. After Duffy had gotten to know Eggers well, he asked him the crucial question. The conversation began:

"Arthur," I said, "what in the world ever made you think you could get away with this? You must have known that anyone who commits murder, even a cop, might end up here."

"I didn't think about it until after it was all over," he said.

"Why didn't the possibility of the gas chamber stop you from grabbing the gun in the first place?" I asked.

"That wouldn't stop anyone if he was mad enough," Eggers said. "And I blew my top completely. I caught my wife cheating, and I was going to kill her so she could never cheat again. I didn't have another thought."

"Including the gas chamber?"

"The gas chamber!" Eggers spat the words contemptuously as he looked through the bars of his cell. Then he said, "Why hell, warden, the gas chamber does only one thing—it kills people. But I'll bet it never prevented a murder. I used to believe in capital punishment because I figured if a guy killed a cop, for example, he ought to be executed to keep other guys from killing cops. But it doesn't work that way. Gas chamber or no gas chamber, guys will always be killing cops. People will always he killing people. You can't control anger, or passion, or greed, or jealousy, or fright, and that's what causes most murders. Only crackpots and the state kill in cold blood. Everybody else has a reason."

"Are you sorry you killed your wife?" I asked.

"Sure I'm sorry," he said, "I loved her."

"Would you kill her again under the same circumstances, even if you knew you'd go to the gas chamber for it?"

Eggers looked earnestly at me. "Warden," he said, "the gas chamber would have nothing to do with it."

The gas chamber never has anything to do with it.

Similar testimony is provided by a letter to Duffy by a "high IQ" murderer, principal of a junior high school in southern California. "David Moore" is still alive, his sentence having been commuted to life imprisonment, so that his real name is not given, but his intellectual capacities are plainly revealed in this communication. Here was a man who was once an asset to his

community, yet because of a temporary aberration he killed three members of his school board and two other persons associated with teaching and administration. "Moore's" letter says:

> Because of my own experiences, I've always been intensely interested in how these men dealt with their remorse, guilt, contrition and similar feelings. Too, whether they were engaged in some kind of expiation activity, and just how they truly felt about killing someone. I wondered what they planned to do about it, how they were going to live with it, or die with it, and what role they thought they might assume in society now that they had killed. Thus, we talked as one convict talks to another, one murderer to another, and at times dug down to some rather basic feelings and ideas.
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> Over the years I've learned that a man who can kill somebody is not a particularly unusual or peculiar type of person. It seems to me that if the conditions and the circumstances were right, almost any man could or would kill or attempt to kill. Outside of the few who kill for very obvious reasons, most of those who kill are never quite clear in their own minds about the killing. What is available seems to be called up through fog and hash—blurred and obscured.
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> Surprisingly, few of the murderers who are brought to prison have deep, moving feelings of remorse about what they have done. . . . There is something about the convicting, imprisoning, and condemning procedures that tends to wash out and thin down the feelings of remorse, guilt, and sorrow.

There is also the poignant story of a nephew of one of the prison guards, whose son became a killer. Duffy recalls arguments with this man, before the birth of his son, when he was a strong advocate of the death penalty:

> "It's the only way to handle a killer," he said. "When a man commits a murder he must pay the price."
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> "The price doesn't have to be death," I said.
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> "I wonder how you'd feel if the victim of one of these fiends was a loved one of yours," he said.
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> "And I wonder how you'd feel if the killer was a loved one of yours?" I retorted.

Warden Duffy finally got his question answered. The guilty son, Warren, was a model prisoner, helpful to fellow-inmates and guards alike. He died taking with him to the execution chamber many abilities for useful service. Convinced of his guilt, and no doubt influenced by his father's attitude towards the death penalty as a necessity, Warren was content with the decision of the state to kill him.

In strong contrast is the pointed comment of another murderer who remarked, just before his execution: "I don't mind dying for what I did. I just don't want these sons of bitches killing me in their own dirty rotten way." Duffy minces no words on the inevitable injustice worked on condemned men—a point on which California's Governor Brown has been outspoken. A closing chapter of *88 Men and* 2 *Women* tells why Duffy finds the death penalty intolerable:

> I hate the death penalty because it is so horribly unfair. A Nixon and a Murphy die after a drunken brawl, while a Bender lives after a deliberately planned murder. A Regan dies and a Fellows lives because a phone call was made seconds too late; yet both are equally guilty. Three men die for one murder while one man lives after killing five. A Chessman dies for a non-fatal kidnaping while a Brown lives after committing an almost identical crime.
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> A man does not die for the crime he commits. He dies because he committed it in the wrong state, or in the wrong county of that state, or at the wrong time, or because he faced a tough judge or jury goaded by a determined district attorney, or because he couldn't afford adequate counsel. There is no rhyme or reason or consistency to the imposition of the death penalty, for human factors are involved, and the thoughts and actions and conclusions of human beings are variable and unpredictable.
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> A man dies because of his sex or the color of his skin. Women are rarely executed for crimes comparable to those that lead men to the gallows or the gas chamber or the electric chair; yet their victims are quite as dead, their acts often quite as atrocious. Negroes are more likely to die than white men and for less serious crimes. Rape is a capital offense in most southern states and if committed on a white woman by a Negro almost surely means execution. On the other hand, a white man who murders a Negro may get off scot free.

I hate the death penalty because it almost always hits the little man, who is not only poor in material possessions but in background, education, and mental capacity as well. Father Daniel McAlister, former Catholic chaplain at San Quentin, points out that "the death penalty seems to be meant for the poor, uneducated, and legally impotent offender."

"The educational level on condemned row is low," Father McAlister recently wrote me. "It's lower than that of the general inmate population, and much lower than that of the community. Individuals of better than average ability, like Chessman, are few and far between."

There is also the question of an ultimate ethical standard:

I hate the death penalty because it makes a mockery of our moral code. It is as wrong for all to kill as it is for one; yet when the state kills, it's legal and when an individual kills it's not. In effect, the death penalty permits the state to say, "Do as I say, not as I do," and sets a horrible example for others so inclined to follow. Worse, perhaps, it lends logic to the rationalizing of convicts who, almost to a man, present the argument, "If it's all right for you to kill, why shouldn't it be all right for me?" The answer, of course, is that it isn't right for anyone, but this is more than the criminal mind can grasp.

Here we should like to add a few passages from Miriam Van Waters' introduction to Wenzell Brown's *They Died in the Chair* (Popular Library, 1958). Mrs. Van Waters is Principal Officer of the Massachusetts Correctional Institution and speaks out of long experience in rehabilitation work with young criminals:

From 1925 to 1932 I presided over Juvenile Court of Los Angeles hearings, in the course of which I heard twenty-three murder cases committed by children thirteen to nineteen years of age. In each, a constructive plan was made for the young offender. To my best information, not one has been rearrested for any offense. From 1932 to the present I have supervised the Reformatory of Women, now called Massachusetts Correctional Institution, in Framingham. When I took over, eleven women lifers were in the community, pardoned under parole conditions. Not one committed any subsequent offense.

Mrs. Van Waters continues:

At present four women are serving life sentences in our reformatory. To tell of their industry, trustworthiness, sense of responsibility and self-sacrifice would be impossible in this space. They are not so much "model prisoners" as active participants in the rehabilitation of others. Had these women been put to death, humanity would have lost incalculably. So much for the reconstructive abilities of persons who have committed murder.

But there is the third phase of concern: religion and social welfare. As President of the American League to Abolish Capital Punishment I have presided over a nation-wide group of people who are convinced that the death penalty is a relic of barbarism and should be abolished. As the stories in this book clearly illustrate, the death penalty is not an effective or proven deterrent; is costly to the state; is often motivated by considerations of revenge, and obviates any possibility for moral rehabilitation through religious and social service agencies.

These are the conclusions of one who has spent a lifetime in the field of prevention and treatment of crime.

COMMENTARY
"THE ILLUSION OF FULL KNOWLEDGE"

THE Western world has never openly submitted to the doctrinal assertion of possessing "full knowledge"—not in the manner that has corrupted politics and intellectual communications in Communist-ruled countries, but has rather rested in a practical sort of confidence that Western leaders, Western scientists, know what they are about.

Actually, for the West, the present is a time of break-up in certainties and theories of knowledge. You don't hear, any more, the kind of popular assurances that were so widely expressed in the 1920's and the 30's. There is no longer the feeling that scientific progress has made human progress a "sure thing," and the question of knowledge and how it is really obtained is so wide open that it is a thoroughly frightening subject. What shall we put in the place of the objective, measurable "reality" which the scientific method was slowly developing for us, fact by fact?

Are there nothing left but subjective criteria of reality and truth? Some men, we are obliged to admit, do very well with subjective criteria. Take for example Henry Miller's discussion of Walt Whitman in this week's Frontiers. Both these men, Miller and Whitman, founded their lives upon subjective criteria. And you might add Thoreau, whose inward sense of reality was obviously much clearer than some people's awareness of the everyday outside world. Suppose we developed accounts of fifty or a hundred such men—if we looked, we could probably find them: would this give us the basis for some initial propositions about knowledge, to occupy the void left by what we have lost?

This is not the sort of question you can rush on by. What we long for in our weak moments is a kind of knowledge which promises to work for us no matter how weak or foolish we get. We like to think of having our certainty somehow "on tap," so that we can turn it on when we need it. We want it codified, indexed, and *available.* Public, orthodox religion has always had these qualities, amounting to a controlled and objectified version of the inward experience of someone else—the Revealer, whether man or God. A "revelation," it has been said, is always something that happens to somebody else.

The eighteenth century found reasons for overthrowing the authority of this kind of knowledge—very good reasons, we may say. And in its place we were going to put another kind of knowledge—knowledge you can put your hands on—*scientific* knowledge.. But the Communists made politics of this optimism by relating the idea of scientific certainty with social justice, and we know, now, how ill-mated were these ideas.

What next? While the Communists slowly wear out their faith in the pseudo-scientific dogmas of their ideology, what ought we to be doing? Can we have a theory of knowledge which will work, yet is not subject to the familiar forms of verification? .How could such a theory become popular? If the coherence of a civilization depends upon widespread acceptance of commonly received truths, can we devise new subjective criteria that will win this common acceptance, yet not turn into dogmas or suffer politicalization? These questions seem to be at the root of the difficulties of our age.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
EDUCATION FOR PRIVACY

AN extraordinary number of people have been moved to independent sociological self-consciousness by the influence of David Riesman's best known work, *The Lonely Crowd.* To some degree all of us, whether children or adults, are members of a "crowd," and recognition that the peculiar animism of "group thinking" actually causes a feeling of "loneliness" invites reflection. How is *this* loneliness to be assuaged? What does its subtle presence imply as to the nature of man?

Martin Ten Hoor's *Education for Privacy* suggests a subjective journey inward from the peripheral interests of our lives, as an approach to the "loneliness" problem. Dr. Ten Hoor is professor of philosophy and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Alabama. In *Education for Privacy,* he focuses many of the perspectives of Emerson and Thoreau on the contemporary scene. "Group thinking" involves only one portion of the brain—the same portion, perhaps, as that which so infallibly guides the flight of flocks of birds in perfect formation through the sky. But another portion of man's intelligence represents something new and different—his self-reliance, the capacity to move *against* the flow of collective impressions, whether familial, community-oriented, nationalistic, religious, or ethnic. The disadvantages of "group thinking" become more obvious as both populations and communication between them increase. Participation in organizational endeavor typically submerges individual differences of opinion in order to assure realization of organizational aims. It is easy enough to learn all about "cooperation" in education and in politics, but social-mindedness exacts a certain price. Dr. Ten Hoor puts it this way:

> "Many hands make light work" (lightening the mental as well as the physical burden)—this and dozens of other proverbs in every language attest to the satisfactions which we derive from working and playing together.
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> Organizations are powerful generators of social-mindedness. In properly selected company, social-mindedness becomes auto-intoxicating. Life in the organization stimulates enthusiasm, not only for the particular organization involved but for the virtue of organization in general. Meeting regularly with veteran enthusiasts in the organization soon warms the new member to the cause. The constant talk about aims and ideals, about wrongs and injustices, excites the imagination so that gradually not only do the corporate purposes come to seem more and more important and desirable but the chances of realization seem to be steadily improving.
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> It is vision of these benefits that leads the individual to forget the price he must pay for them, which is the right to decide for himself how his life is to be lived. The human mind is like the human body: lack of exercise of its vital functions results in their degeneration. When people get the habit of depending too much on others to solve their problems for them, as they do when they join numerous organizations, they lose the capacity of applying thought and imagination in private analysis and solution. The general result, for both leaders and followers, is the *demoralization of the individual as a private person.*

This is the theme of *Education for Privacy.* There is nothing new, of course, in such descriptions of the human situation, but "the crowd" now exhibits so many neurotic manifestations of loneliness that the issues involved have more immediate relevance, perhaps, than before.

Many years ago (in 1916), Dorothy Canfield Fisher published a volume which borrowed the title of Emerson's well-known essay, "Self-Reliance." Mrs. Fisher's book was reissued in 1929 with an introductory essay which proposed that if the author's thoughts on self-reliance deserved attention thirteen years previously, they had grown far more important since. A similar progression, surely, applies today. Mrs. Fisher discusses self-reliance in relation to "children and ourselves":

> Enlightenment has come from psychologists and those specialists whose profession brings them into contact with the mental ills of adults. They are the ones who have seen that children, especially in the modern world, spend long and impressionable years as involuntary parasites, and who have reflected that the position of a parasitic dependent is not a congenial, happy, or natural one for any human being save one who has the soul of a parasite. And this, thank Heaven, few of any younger generation ever have. The question of self-reliance is now seen to be bound up with the matter of self-respect, one of the recognized bases of a healthy life. Many of the disagreeable doings of children, from bragging and bullying to teasing and cringing, from "showing off" to morbid shyness, are found to be despairing, inexpert attempts to escape from inferiority to equality. And many strange miseries of grown-up existence are proved to be scars left from too long and too thorough-going an experience of helplessness.
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> To be entirely dependent for any security in life on another faulty human being—that situation traditionally drives to madness anybody with a decent amount of self-respect. But that is the situation of the younger generation, not only (as in former times) in young childhood, when it is biologically natural and necessary, but during the long period also of education and professional training. Years after they are biologically adult they are economically (and hence according to modern logic) morally dependent on others, still inadequate to meet life standing alone. The cultivation of self-reliance under such conditions becomes constantly more necessary and more difficult.

Thomas Jefferson once said in a letter to a friend: "If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all." Beginning with the earliest schooling, the child who enjoys the learning process only when it takes place in the classroom—that is, when carried along by group-feeling—is unlikely to learn in any life-situation which does not involve group approval. If he delights in out-of-doors experience only when duly transported and herded by the Scouts, his rapport is not really with the out-of-doors, but with his Scout Troop. And here it is possible to make a disturbing observation: while the person who has achieved "privacy" in the Ten Hoor sense of "self-reliance" or of the sort which concerns Mrs. Fisher can easily pick and choose his organizational associations and endeavors, the person who begins with organizational involvement is seldom apt to pick and choose his own thoughts.

Human beings are ends in themselves and only fractionally means to other ends. As the population increases we have more than enough Americans, Catholics, Protestants, successful magnates and "productive workers," but we are still short of *people;* short, that is, of those who display individual continuity and autonomous motivation. A patterned life is no life, but a pattern. Individuals who conform to group thinking have by-passed the opportunity to discover their individual identity. But teachers in the school and parents in the home may at least endeavor to peel away some of the effects of group thinking from the minds of the young. One effective way of doing this is by insisting that all the important questions, whether ethical or social, will never be answered, save by the individual in his own time and in his own way.

FRONTIERS

Walt Whitman

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I HAVE never understood why he should be called "the good gray poet." The color of his language, his temperament, his whole being is electric blue. I hardly think of him as poet. Bard, yes. The bard of the future.

America has never really understood Whitman, or accepted him. America has exalted Lincoln, a lesser figure. Whitman did not address the masses. He was as far removed from the people as a saint is from the members of a church. He reviled the whole trend of American life, which he characterized as mean and vulgar. Yet only an American could have written what he did. He was not interested in culture, tradition, religion or Democracy. He was what Lawrence called "an aristocrat of the spirit."

I know of no writer whose vision is as inclusive, as all-embracing as Whitman's. It is precisely this cosmic view which has prevented Whitman's message from being accepted. He is all affirmation. He is completely outgoing. He recognizes no barriers of any kind, not even evil.

Everyone can quote from Whitman in justification of his own point of view. No one has arisen since Whitman who can include his thought and go beyond it. The "Song of the Open Road" remains an absolute. It transcends the human view, obliges man to include the universe in his own being.

The poet in Whitman interests me far less than the seer. Perhaps the only poet with whom he can be compared is Dante. More than any other single figure, Dante symbolizes the medieval world. Whitman is the incarnation of the modern man, of whom thus far we have only had intimations. Modern life has not yet begun. Here and there men have arisen who have given us glimpses of this world to come. Whitman not only voiced the keynote of this new life in process of creation but behaved as if it already existed. The wonder is that he was not crucified. But here we touch the mystery which shrouds his seemingly open life.

Whoever has studied Whitman's life must be amazed at the skill with which he steered his bark through troubled waters. He never relinquishes his grasp of the oar, never flinches, never wavers, never compromises. From the moment of his awakening—for it was truly an awakening and not a mere development of creative talent—he marches on, calm, steady, sure of himself, certain of ultimate victory. Without effort he enlists the aid of willing disciples who serve as buffers to the blows of fate. He concentrates entirely upon the deliverance of his message. He talks little, reads little, but speculates much. It is not, however, the life of a contemplative which he leads. He is very definitely in and of the world. He is worldly through and through, yet serene, detached, the enemy of no man, the friend of all. He possesses a magic armor against wanton intrusion, against violation of his being. In many ways he reminds one of the "resurrected" Christ.

I stress this aspect of the man deliberately because Whitman himself gave expression to it most eloquently—it is one of his most revelatory utterances—in a prose work. The passage runs as follows: "A fitly born and bred race, growing up in right conditions of outdoor as much as indoor harmony, activity and development, would probably, from and in those conditions, find it enough merely *to live*—and would, in their relations to the sky, air, water, trees, etc., and to the countless common shows, and in the fact of *life* itself, discover and achieve happiness—with Being suffused night and day by wholesome ecstasy, surpassing all the pleasures that wealth, amusement, and even gratified intellect, erudition, or the sense of art, can give." This view, so utterly alien to the so-called modern world, is

thoroughly Polynesian. And that is where Whitman belongs, out beyond the last frontiers of the Western world, neither of the West nor of the East but of an intermediary realm, a floating archipelago dedicated to the attainment of peace, happiness and well-being here and now.

I maintain most stoutly that Whitman's outlook is not American, any more than it is Chinese, Hindu or European. It is the unique view of an emancipated individual, expressed in the broadest American idiom, understandable to men of all languages. The flavor of his language, though altogether American, is a rare one. It has never been captured again. It probably never will. Its universality springs from its uniqueness. In this sense it has all tradition behind it. Yet, I repeat, Whitman has no respect for tradition; that he forged a new language is due entirely to the singularity of his vision, to the fact that he felt himself to be a new being. Between the early Whitman and the "awakened" Whitman there is no resemblance whatever. No one, scanning his early writings, could possibly detect the germ of the future genius. Whitman remade himself from head to foot.

I have used the word *message* several times in connection with his writings. Yes, the message is explicit as well as implicit in his work. It is the message which informs of his work. Remove the message and his poetry falls apart. Like Tolstoy, he may be said to have made of art, propaganda. But is this not merely to say that unless used for life, put at the service of life, art is meaningless? Whitman is never a moralist or a religionist. His concern is to open men's vision, to lead them to the center of nowhere in order that they may find their true orientation. He does not preach, he exhorts. He is not content merely to speak his view, he sings it, shouts it triumphantly. If he looks backward it is to show that past and future are one. He sees no evil anywhere. He sees through and beyond, always.

He has been called a pantheist. Many have referred to him as the great democrat. Some have asserted that he possessed a cosmic consciousness. All attempts to label and categorize him eventually break down. Why not accept him as a pure phenomenon? Why not admit that he is without a peer? I am not attempting to divinize him. How could I, since he was so strikingly human? If I insist on the uniqueness of his being, is it not to suggest the clue which will unravel the mysterious claims of democracy?

"Make Room for Man" is the title of a poem by his faithful friend and biographer, Horace Traubel. What is it that has stood in the way of man? *Only man.* Whitman demolishes every flimsy barrier behind which man has sought to take refuge. He expresses utter confidence in man. He is not a democrat, he is an anarchist. He has the faith born of love. He does not know the meaning of hate, fear, envy, jealousy, rivalry. Born on Long Island, moving to Brooklyn at the commencement of his career, serving first as a carpenter and builder, later as reporter, typesetter, editor, nursing the wounded during the bloody Civil War, he finally settles in Camden, a most inconspicuous spot. He journeyed over a good part of America and in his poems he records his impressions, hopes and dreams.

It is a grandiose dream indeed. In his prose works he issues warnings to his countrymen, unheeded, of course. What would he say if he could see America today? I think his utterances would be still more impassioned. I believe he would write a still greater *Leaves of Grass.* He would see potentialities "immenser far" than those he had originally visioned. He would see "the cradle endlessly rocking."

Since his departure we have had the "great poems of death" which he spoke of, and they have been living poems of death. The poem of life has still to be lived.

Meanwhile the cradle is endlessly rocking. . . .

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