

THE SIGNALS AND THE NOISE

WHAT is "good news"? The familiar truistic counsel to emphasize the *good* things that are happening, in contrast to a scene filled with discouraging indications, leads only to Pollyanna rituals unless the effort is mounted on a prior investigation of the somewhat mysterious origins of both good and evil, and of the distinctions that have to be made between good that is easy to perceive and the good that comes in deceptive wrappings. Pain, for example, is not generally regarded as the harbinger of good, but it is hard to imagine how the Book of Job could have been written without it. Was Job's suffering a recondite form of good news? Maybe the superficial level of communication which gives the word "news" its content spoils this question for useful discussion, but we ought to have a try. Suppose, then, that some unusually shrewd members of the Athenian jury (the Five Hundred) that had condemned Socrates to drink the hemlock got together a little before the fatal day and decided that executing him would turn out to be really bad for the Greek Image, and that there *must* be a better way to handle the situation. And that, having reached this conclusion, they then offered him a deal which would smooth things over and let him off—to continue his Good Work elsewhere, as Crito suggested. Question: Would that have seemed like good news about Athens to Socrates? Or would it have sort of turned his stomach?

It follows that reporters with some respect for the Socratic scale of values are going to have a terrible time in deciding what is good news. They don't write for the next generation, or for people who live two thousand years later. Finding good news to report is practically the same as the problem of writing contemporary history, which, as Louis Halle has shown, requires the historian to tell the actual signals from the noise in what is

going on all about him. Again, this is not easy. For example, a rather important moment for contemporary history came in June of 1893, when a slight, brown-skinned attorney enroute from Durban, Africa, to try a case in Pretoria was forcibly ejected by a railroad official from the accommodations of a first-class carriage on a racially segregated train. Left on the station platform, Gandhi spent the night in a frigid waiting room, debating what to do. One might say that his decision began the making of a lot of good news for the twentieth century. As Pyarelal relates in *Mahatma Gandhi—The Early Phase* (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1965):

By the time the grey of the morning had begun to spread over the surrounding hills his mind was made up. He would stay on and fight and face all hardships that might come in his way—fight not for the redress of personal wrongs, but against the deep-seated malady of which his own experience was but a superficial symptom. He was face to face with the canker of racialism and colour prejudice.

And a momentous decision it proved to be. Years afterwards, being asked once by John Mott, the American missionary, what had been the "most creative experience" of his life, he recalled his inner struggle on that winter night while he sat and shivered in the dark waiting room, as the one experience that had changed the course of his life. "My active nonviolence began from that date," he said.

The only "signals" of public record that contemporary historians of that time might have noticed were brief newspaper reports of cases brought before the South African courts by Gandhi in his first efforts to secure justice for Indians under the law, and later to get fairer laws. Except for the people he helped, very few noticed what Gandhi was accomplishing, little by little. Slowly, very slowly, what he did became "news." As the years went by, he hardly changed his objectives, but he took on more and more. After

fifty years had passed, many millions of people, not all of them in Asia, felt that Gandhi was the embodiment of good news. Another newsworthy individual, Albert Einstein, said of Gandhi: "Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this in flesh and blood walked the earth." Talking to people who had known Gandhi, Erik Erikson found that "the most universal answer to the question as to what one felt about him was: 'In his presence *one could not tell a lie*'."

What, then, should we look for, in the present, if the object is to find justification for encouraging words? Plainly, the uniqueness and majesty of a criterion such as Gandhi have a discouraging effect. And we have no way of telling what that sort of "good news" might look like in its genesis. Perhaps this is really a futile enterprise and we should look, not at the obscure and ambiguous evidences of what may be the beginning of such good news, but rather at the forms in which people obviously like to have their good news come to them. This is much less difficult.

People want good news in veritably mythic simplicity. Fathers and mothers want to know that their children are securely married and will live happily ever after. People want news showing that their good intentions are thoroughly understood, and appreciated. They want independent evidence that the public men they admire are indeed admirable. They want to hear that things are working out in ways that they expect or hope they will work out—the way they ought to. Good news, in short, is seldom recognized except in the form of *confirmation*.

This takes us no further than some melancholy truths about "human nature," to which we can add what is equally obvious, that "good news" as an economic commodity—actually, bad news, too—is packaged by commercial journalism to satisfy the popular demand for confirmation. The *market* very largely settles the question of how to distinguish the signals from the noise.

This practice is more or less openly defended on principled "democratic" grounds. The argument is that in a self-governing, free society the choices made by "the people" are the highest authority concerning the general good and that a publisher fulfills his highest public duty in giving the people what they want. How does the publisher find out what they want? By competing, by watching what makes his circulation go up. This argument usually has a modest footnote to the effect that the publisher's survival in a competitive society depends upon offering a product that people show a willingness to buy. So any policy other than vending "news" in the form of mythic simplicities would not only negate democracy but be suicidal as well. Anybody can see that the publisher is simply obeying Natural Law.

But he isn't, really. It's Gresham's law applied to the news. A steady diet of reports selected according to marketing criteria unfits the great mass of readers for telling good news from bad. It never makes a beginning at preparing the next generation to be able to tell the real signals from the noise.

Similarly, the exercise of discriminating recognition of the good and the bad in contemporary history is left to stubbornly independent and perceptive minds. Take for example the most terrible news that was reported during the twentieth century—the rise to power of two pitiless and enormously destructive totalitarian regimes. When was this news *really* made? Did anybody see it coming? To call up the horror of the first half of the twentieth century, we need now only say the words: Concentration Camps, Death Camps. The demonic forces they represent—reaching far beyond politics as most people conceive it—made unbelievable evils an everyday experience for millions, and the coarsening effect on all mankind of the wars which they precipitated cannot be measured because our yardsticks have been corrupted by them, too. It is not too much to say that the moral sense of peoples everywhere has been

benumbed, although there is also evidence that it has been in some sense heightened as well.

Yet these overwhelming disasters of the twentieth century were actually foreseen far in advance by an intelligent few, in principle if not in grim and bloodstained detail. As Hannah Arendt observes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, "Eminent European scholars and statesmen had predicted, from the early nineteenth century onward, the rise of the mass man and the coming of a mass age." And Ortega y Gasset, as we know, put this prediction into precise and unequivocal language on the very eve of the emergence of the Nazi movement, basing his anticipations on a grasp of human attitudes and their consequences in behavior.

Such men's opinions, however, are not acceptable as "news," even though there is a sense in which their prophecies often work out in history with the inevitability of a proposition in Euclid. What then is "good news"? We can think of no way to define good news save in terms of evidence that this sort of comprehension of the realities of human behavior, of the *causal role of human attitudes*, is beginning to increase, that such men are being *listened to*, and that the hunger for mere "confirmation" is beginning to decrease.

Why is *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt such a good book? It is good because it lays a basis for identifying the human attitudes which can be expected to generate genuinely good news. This is accomplished mainly by clear recognition of other attitudes which have an opposite effect. In what may be her most important chapter, Miss Arendt discusses the psychological matrix which supported the rise to power of the Nazi movement. The crucial factors were the existence of a rootless, structureless mob and a cynical intellectual élite. The virtually value-free nihilism of the intellectuals matched the disorder and hopelessness of the mob, and the alliance of these two groups, while temporary, began a disintegrating chain reaction

which made it possible for Hitler and his followers to complete the destruction of all independent social formations in Germany. Miss Arendt's account is lucid:

The attraction which the totalitarian movements exert on the élite, so long as and wherever they have not seized power, has been perplexing because the patently vulgar and arbitrary, positive doctrines of totalitarianism are more conspicuous to the outsider and mere observer than the general mood which pervades the pretotalitarian atmosphere. These doctrines were so much at variance with generally accepted intellectual, cultural, and moral standards that one could conclude that only an inherent fundamental shortcoming of character in the intellectual, "*la trahison des clercs*" (J. Benda) or a perverse self-hatred of the spirit, accounted for the delight with which the élite accepted the "ideas" of the mob. What the spokesmen of humanism and liberalism usually overlook, in their bitter disappointment and their unfamiliarity with the more general experiences of the time, is that an atmosphere in which all traditional values and propositions had evaporated (after the nineteenth-century ideologists had refuted each other and exhausted their vital appeal) in a sense made it easier to accept patently absurd propositions than the old truths which had become pious banalities, precisely because nobody could be expected to take the absurdities seriously. Vulgarity with its cynical dismissal of respected standards and accepted theories carried with it a frank admission of the worst and a disregard for all pretenses which were easily mistaken for courage and a new style of life. In the growing prevalence of mob attitudes and convictions—which were actually the attitudes and convictions of the bourgeoisie cleansed of hypocrisy—those who traditionally hated the bourgeoisie and had voluntarily left respectable society saw only the lack of hypocrisy and respectability, not the content itself.

Since the bourgeoisie claimed to be the guardian of Western traditions and confounded all moral issues by parading publicly virtues which it not only did not possess in private and business life, but actually held in contempt, it seemed revolutionary to admit cruelty, disregard of human values and general amorality, because this at least destroyed the duplicity upon which the existing society seemed to rest. What a temptation to flaunt extreme attitudes in the hypocritical twilight of double moral standards, to wear publicly the mask of cruelty if everybody was patently inconsiderate and pretended to be gentle, to

parade wickedness in a world, not of wickedness but of meanness! The intellectual élite of the twenties who knew little of the earlier connections between mob and bourgeoisie was certain that the old game of *épater le bourgeois* could be played to perfection if one started to shock society with an ironically exaggerated picture of its own behavior.

At that time nobody anticipated that the true victims of this irony would be the elite rather than the bourgeoisie. The avant-garde did not know they were running their heads not against walls but against open doors, that a unanimous success would belie their claim to being a revolutionary minority, and would prove that they were about to express a new mass spirit of the time. Particularly significant in this respect was the reception given Brecht's *Dreigoschenoper* in pre-Hitler Germany. The play presented gangsters as respectable businessmen and respectable businessmen as gangsters. The irony was somewhat lost when respectable businessmen in the audience considered this a deep insight into the ways of the world and when the mob welcomed it as an artistic sanction of gangsterism. . . .

The mob applauded because it took the statement literally; the bourgeoisie applauded because it had been fooled by its own hypocrisy for so long that it had grown tired of the tension and found deep wisdom in the expression of the banality by which it lived; the élite applauded because the unveiling of hypocrisy was such superior and wonderful fun. The effect of the work was exactly the opposite of what Brecht had sought by it. The bourgeoisie could no longer be shocked; it welcomed the exposure of its hidden philosophy, whose popularity proved they had been right all along, so that the only political result of Brecht's "revolution" was to encourage everyone to discard the uncomfortable mask of hypocrisy and to accept openly the standards of the mob.

Canons for identifying "good news" could be developed from the import of this analysis. It would be good news, for example, to find contemporary writers moved to critical rejection of their own alienation and feelings of defeat, through seeing the terrible historical consequences of indulging "all-or-nothing" desperations—of turning their own disappointments, discouragements, and frustrations into articulate justification and approval of mob simplicities and mob "solutions." Subjected to the multipliers of glibly despairing intellectual formulas, a

downward tendency in history soon becomes a source of emotional infection which proliferates in all directions. Meanwhile, the parallels between the atmosphere of Berlin in the 1920's and the present urban scene in the United States are too obvious to need pointing up. Writers and artists who see this and change their ways make good news for the future.

What sort of writers were "different" among the Germans? One thinks immediately of Hermann Hesse, but Hesse had emigrated to Switzerland in disgust at World War I during this period. He represented a counter-current. Perhaps there were others, but they do not easily come to mind. Ernst Barlach, the sculptor, is one suggestion. But you have to search for these people. It is good news, then, to find that in America today there are many voices raised in behalf of rebuilding without ruthless destruction; that there is refusal to participate in cultural lies without withering contempt; that there is disenchantment without self-destructive alienation and rejection of blindness without hatred of the blind; and that there is at least some preservation of what George Orwell called the "common decencies."

There are even beginnings in the formulation of a theory of social change which does not depend upon outlawing vast numbers of people from the moral order conceived as an ideal. There is a readiness to work and to reason with people whose hopes are still bound up in the function of institutions which have become in many ways barriers to human growth, and this readiness is joined with recognition that the personification of the weaknesses and even the outright evil of these institutions in the persons of their emotionally frozen defenders is not a means to social progress. George Benello put these conceptions well in a recent paper:

Revolution tends to personalize the enemy and define it in terms of those with the most stake in the existing system. Corruption of course exists, and venality and self-serving is the rule, but these failures flow from the conjunction of human frailty with

institutional structures holding an excess of power with no corresponding accountability. Moreover, the corruption is exacerbated by the critical gap between the myth system of democratic values and the coercive and elitist realities of the major institutions. When an ideology of participation is invoked, and used to build self-administering institutions, the gap is narrowed and the myth system taken seriously rather than cynically. . . . When people do this in such a way as to humanize the existing technology, rather than to renounce it, then the strategy of change operates maximally within social and cultural realities. The specter of the unknown, of a post-revolutionary order in unknown hands serving unknown purposes is put to rest.

Change sought in this spirit reduces fear of change to the lowest possible minimum, and since fear is an emotion which shuts out reason, avoiding unnecessary provocation of fear is basic to the pursuit of change by rational means. Gandhi's successes in actually accomplishing change were partly the result of following this rule.

It is clear from Hannah Arendt's study that the final breakdown of the weakening moral structure of German society was accomplished by arousing the "total" emotion of contempt for hypocrisy. A similar emotion finds multiple channels of expression in America, today. Yet at the beginnings of the student movement, at least, there was no suggestion of resorting to the methods of the mob. Mario Savio said to an interviewer (Calvin Trillin, of the *New Yorker*) in 1964:

I don't have a Utopia in mind. I know it has to be a good deal more egalitarian than it is now. Maybe the classic Marxist models and the classic Adam Smith models don't apply any more. There are a lot of people who have enough to eat who are incredibly resentful, because their lives are meaningless. They're psychologically dispossessed. There's a feeling that they have nothing to do, the bureaucracy runs itself. Why are we so alienated? I would say for three reasons: depersonalization, hypocrisy, and unearned privilege that comes with great wealth. The country's forms aren't so bad, if we would take them seriously, if someone were willing to say the emperor had no clothes. The worst thing about the society is that it lies to itself.

This, for all its rejections, is not an appeal to barbarism, and it does not rely on hate. The student Free Speech Movement at Berkeley had a distinctly moral tone which was neither nihilistic nor destructive in its implications or direction. Mr. Trillin, who talked to many of the active members, said in his *New Yorker* article:

Suzanne Goldberg, a graduate student in philosophy from New York, who is a member of the FSM Steering Committee has explained this moral tone by saying, "It's really a strange kind of naïveté. What we learned in grammar school about democracy and freedom nobody takes seriously, but we do. We really believe it. It's impossible to grapple with the problem of the structure of the whole world, but you try to do something about the immediate things you see that bother you and are within your reach.

This is a spirit which now seems pretty much covered up, but books like James Kunen's *The Strawberry Statement* (on the uprising at Columbia) show that it still exists. For those who care about the non-totalitarian future of America and the world, evidences of the survival and strengthening of this spirit are indeed good news. We have gathered here only one or two "samples" of such news, and from sources that are fairly easy to locate. Good news about other levels and quarters of life in our time might be of much greater importance. The idea is to develop means of recognizing it, and of illustrating the human health and growth-processes to which it refers.

REVIEW

TWO CURRENT NOVELS

IT is not easy to say exactly why Chaim Potok's new novel, *The Promise* (Knopf, 1969, \$6.95), fails to bring the reader the same pleasure and satisfactions that came from reading *The Chosen*. *The Promise* continues the story of the two extremely intelligent Jewish boys who grew up together in Brooklyn. In *The Chosen*, the triumph of the demands of a naturally universalizing intelligence over the confinements of tradition is dramatic and even thrilling. The sacrifices and the growth which most of the main characters contribute to the story seem to have the right measure within the various limits of the potentialities of the people involved. One does not feel impelled to ask more of them.

But in *The Promise*, the two boys are growing into *men*. The form of this novel is unable to make the limits which circumscribe development acceptable in the same way. The true hero of both books—the drive of universalizing intelligence—which in *The Chosen* had the twofold symbolism of (1) insistence on the need or the right to apply a rational sort of criticism to religious texts, and (2) the study of secular psychology, as a portal to service to all human beings—must now be given a much larger theater of action. The two young men are each in their way again victorious. Reuven repeats his vindication of the method of textual criticism he has learned from his liberal father—when a text is obviously flawed, he dares to show that emendation is necessary. Against the strong emotional disapproval of his teachers, he demonstrates the justice of this method in an oral examination which precedes his ordination as a rabbi. Again, he excites both anxiety and respect, but now haunting the reader is the question of the larger importance of Reuven's achievement. He may win against the force of restraining tradition the right to be a rabbi; but what then?

Daniel is the bearer of the other flame. In *The Chosen* he is the boy who is compelled by his searching mind to break out of the customary succession from father to son of being *tzaddik* (teacher) to the small Hasidic community in which he was born. In *The Promise* he is a graduate student working part-time in a research center for mental illness, and because of his brilliance is put in charge of the case of a willful and destructive boy. Here Daniel, too, has his triumph. He vindicates *his* father by finding in psychiatric literature a treatment for this boy that parallels the stern discipline he had himself endured at the hands of the Hasidic patriarch, his father. A therapeutic application of this discipline proves its worth by finally bringing the boy out of his catatonic withdrawal. The point? The traditional wisdom needed only translating into the terms of experimental, scientific psychology, and Danny had the daring to attempt it. His daring was like his father's, yet different, wider, and joined with the independence of a new generation. His father, noticing Danny's early brilliance, his sharp, intellectual penetration when he was only a little boy, had feared that these attributes would dwarf the qualities of *soul*. So he imposed a grim limitation on his relations with his son. He would converse with him only during their Talmudic studies. He suppressed all show of fatherly affection. He deliberately isolated the boy from his heart, so that he would know suffering intimately, and daily. This more than Spartan denial of natural feeling went on for years, and when, finally, in emotional extremity, he explained to the two boys why he had done this cruel thing to his son, the *tzaddik* still insisted that it had been necessary and had borne good fruit. Speaking of Danny, he said:

". . . he learned to find answers for himself. He suffered and learned to listen to the sufferings of others. In the silence between us, he began to hear the world crying. . . ."

"Daniel," he said brokenly, "forgive me . . . for everything . . . I have done. A—a wiser father . . . may have done differently. . . . I am not . . . wise."

This is the high and moving climax in *The Chosen*. There is nothing approaching it in *The Promise*. For comparable drama in a story of human struggle within the context of sectarian religion, one would have to go to Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*.

In *The Promise*, Daniel relies on the pain of isolation, the pressure of silence, to bring the catatonic boy out of withdrawal. It works, and the boy is released to flooding catharsis in a triggering scene with Reuven, whose friendship with him has always been a key to the boy's deeper feelings.

What is missing in this book? There is failure, perhaps, to hint at the psycho-social reality that today pounds on the door of every thinking man—the fact that sectarian religion, even when practiced by the almost impossibly good, such as these boys, is not enough to compose the dilemmas, bridge the abysses, heal the mutilations of the modern world. *The Chosen*, a story of children, did not require this recognition, but *The Promise*, lacking it, seems evasive or shallow. It becomes some kind of apology. This is not to accuse Mr. Potok of deliberate contrivance, but to contend that in order to make this story ring true, the narrow context which worked for *The Chosen* would have to give way. This is the price of genuine messianic mission. For a real messiah there can be no negotiated peace with the religious institution. Not in our world, the way it is. The hero of Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* pays the asking price of his inner integrity, which in his case was conscious acceptance of eternal damnation. There is just no way to have the best of both worlds. Not now. They're too far apart.

Well, this is criticism, and *The Promise* is still an enjoyable story. The repeats on the drama in *The Chosen* are nonetheless good reading, and those who delighted in the first book will want to find out what happened to those two boys. Yet the reader's capacity to identify with them is much reduced.

We turn now to a very different and probably better book—better because the tragedy of mental illness does not become one of the mythic elements in a tale which is really about something else. This book is *The Savage Sleep* by Millen Brand (Crown and Bantam), the story of a middle-aged physician, Dr Marks, whose conventional practice brings him slowly to the realization that the ills of many of his patients are simply inaccessible to him. He decides to undergo training as a psychiatrist, which means in this case becoming a Freudian psychoanalyst. Gradually, his life turns into a double crusade. There is first his driving intensity to learn to heal those who are sick in mind. Second, he finds he must also crusade against the rigid methods of the mental hospital where he is getting his training. He finds from conversations with the pathologist, from observation, and from study of slides of brain tissue, that shock treatments are in many if not all cases the enemy of the patient's recovery. It causes brain damage. He saves one young man in the final phase of acute catatonic excitement by entering into the patient's subjective life so completely that the patient responds. This is unheard-of in the hospital. Other doctors with "more experience" agree that the diagnosis must have been wrong. It is explained to him, patiently, that victims of catatonic excitement who reach exhaust status "just do not recover."

Well, they do, and Dr. Marks proves that they do, but not in that hospital. They won't permit it. This book is filled with the extreme ugliness and pain of mental disease, but these terrible things are seen through the eyes of a compassionate and absolutely determined doctor, a man who gives every bit of himself to the sick. This is the wonder of the book. The Freudian theory figures mainly as a handle for getting *at* human suffering and trying to help and heal. *The Savage Sleep* is worthy to stand on the shelf beside Hannah Green's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*.

COMMENTARY

EDDINGTON ON SCIENCE

A BOOK that lends itself to the purposes suggested in this week's "Children" is *The Life of Arthur Stanley Eddington* by A. Vibert Douglas (Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1957). Eddington was a great scientist who added substantially to modern understanding of the physical world, but he was also a man whose thinking reflects the Platonic idea of knowledge and who would not have quarreled with Thoreau's conception of the "true man of science." Again, he was the man to whom Albert Einstein wrote in 1926: "I would so much like to talk to you that for this alone it would be profitable for me to learn the English language."

In evidence of Eddington's Platonic spirit, there is this from *Philosophy of Physical Science*:

The problem of knowledge is an outer shell underneath which lies another philosophical problem—the problem of values. It cannot be pretended that the understanding and experience gained in the pursuit of scientific epistemology is of much avail here; but that is no reason for trying to persuade ourselves that the problem does not exist. A scientist should recognize in his philosophy—as he already recognizes in his propaganda—that for the ultimate justification of his activity it is necessary to look, away from the knowledge itself, to a striving in man's nature, not to be justified of science or reason, for it is itself the justification of science, of reason, of art, of conduct.

Then, for parallel with Thoreau (from *Nature of the Physical World*):

I think everyone admits that it is good to have a spirit sensitive to the influence of Nature, good to exercise an appreciative imagination and not always to be remorsefully dissecting our environment after the manner of the mathematical physicists. And it is good not merely in a utilitarian sense, but in some purposive sense necessary to the fulfillment of the life that is given to us. It is not a dope which it is expedient to take from time to time so that we may return with greater vigour to the more legitimate employment of the mind in scientific investigations. . . . We try to express muck the same truth when we say that the physical entities are only an extract of pointer readings and beneath them is a nature

continuous with our own. But I do not willingly put it into words or subject it to introspection. We have seen how in the physical world the meaning is greatly changed when we contemplate it as surveyed from without instead of, as it essentially must be, from within. By introspection we drag out the truth for external survey; but in the mystical feelings the truth is apprehended from within and is, as it should be, a part of ourselves.

One other idea: The young should have frequent opportunity to see good photographs of distinguished scientists, for casual instruction in how sensibility and insight and generosity of spirit declare their presence in the human face.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

THE PLATONIC POSITION

How should "science" be taught? That is, in presenting so portentous an activity to students, what should be the underlying conception or the "stance" of the teacher?

Asking this question seems more difficult than "answering" it, probably because various decisions about the answer are implicit in practically any way of setting up the inquiry. Some of the meanings of science are too close to the indefinable realities in all human beings for any casual objectification of them to be wholly impartial. The problem is well illustrated by the difficulties which attend the effort to distinguish carefully between religion *per se* and what we mean by the *sociology* of religion. There is an obvious difference between an individual's attempt to find and live by a ground of ultimate meaning and value, and the historical and social profiles of the behavior of groups or large numbers of people who are believed to be pursuing this activity according to some agreed-upon or organized means. Yet describing this difference brings endless word-trouble or ambiguity. The reason is that most of the language available for considering religion seems to have been patented by groups. There is a certain necessity, then, for the continual invention of new language in order to try to make this distinction. Flashes of authentic meaning seem to come from the interplay of new language with old.

So also, in some measure, with the meaning of "science." Is science what a reasonably representative consensus of scientists say it is? In a sense, yes; but in another sense, no. Becoming or future science is not covered by the consensus. The resistance of the scientific community or institution to new discovery is a sometimes disgraceful pattern revealed by the history of science, so we must say that there is an area of doubt, or of *probation*, in science where no

certainty exists—only its remote or likely possibility.

Then there is the also historically verified situation that some scientific discoveries finally result in a vast rearranging of the order, priority, and presumed scope of the principles and facts of a given field. There is of course some cultural lag in the accomplishing of such great changes—or you could speak of it more kindly as involving some kind of growth-rate.

So what do you do in teaching science? Well, for children, forgetting all these intellectual problems, the best model might easily be Thoreau's paper on the Natural History of Massachusetts, which is a wonderful combination of report on first-hand observation of nature and critical attention, by no means unappreciative or snobbish, of the institution of biological and botanical science, to which in passing he makes several contributions. Then, toward the end, he says:

The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience. We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method; the Baconian is as false as any other, and with all the helps of machinery and the arts, the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom.

But on the question of basic stance, the teacher might broodingly ask himself: How does the teaching of supposedly scientific conclusions as certainties differ from teaching, say, mythic cosmologies as certainties? Or, again, what should be the affirmative and critical position for teaching the meaning of science?

This is something like asking whether there is any place to stand *outside* the common confidence placed in science as the only "reliable knowledge" we possess. The general practice is to admit that we know from history that revolutionary changes

come in scientific knowledge, but that we can only do our best and science is, after all, all we have to go on, so let us be cautious, prudent, humble, and slowly but bravely forge ahead. Yet a partial consequence of this tough-minded view is that it *tends* on pragmatic grounds to accept the final authority of the experts. They don't know all, but they know a lot more than *we* do.

This apparently reasonable mood of the science-dominated modern mind requires almost all fresh enterprises in epistemology to be pretty sneaky. That is, they have to be pursued with a distinctly empirical air. In physics, for example, you escape a mechanistic dead-end by citing the principle of indeterminacy, which has the effect of delegating "certainty" to the statisticians; and then, after a while, you claim freedom, again, by compiling an inventory of all the important realities that a smoothed curve is likely to leave out or hide from view. You quote Bridgman on the decisive subjective factor in all physical theory, resulting from the selective effect of the observer in *choosing* the data he thinks is relevant for research. You encourage medicine to admit that the patient is himself a grossly neglected *x* factor in the study of health and disease, and applaud when doctors begin to substitute limited known values for this *x*, watching to see what happens in therapy as a result. You try to spread recognition of the importance of "interdisciplinary" research in the sciences, the connecting hinge being the rational intelligence of the investigator. Little by little, you do everything you can to make *man* visibly more important, in contrast to the methodologies and techniques of research. You show that in psychotherapeutics, the indefinable feeling-relation between two human beings is crucial, the theoretical framework secondary.

In short and on the whole, you gradually make the practice of science redefine its own first principles, with the language of the new definitions growing more and more intuitive among those who work deliberately to bring about this change. One of these days, perhaps soon, this

intuitive language will begin to be translated into philosophical language, and then the great Epistemological Debate will openly begin. So, in preparation for this it may be useful to look at an old version of the Debate. A brief note in *Etc.* for December, 1969, by Robert J. Epstein, of the Department of Speech, University of California in Berkeley, is of help in this:

Students of classical philosophy are aware of the famous dispute between Plato and Aristotle concerning the value and morality of teaching rhetoric. Plato's philosophy as expressed in the *Gorgias* was that rhetoric taught belief without knowledge, . . . Anyone who thought that truth could in any way be determined by observation and appearance was surely a Sophist, depending for his enlightenment upon the inaccuracies and prejudices of his senses.

The very existence of the *Rhetoric* in Aristotle's works, however, demonstrates the latter's divergent philosophy on this matter. "Rhetoric is useful," Aristotle wrote, "because things that are true and things that are just [true in terms of law] have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites." This direct reply to the allegations found in the *Gorgias* is the only justification for rhetoric to be found in Aristotle's works and is, in fact, the *raison d'être* of our contemporary legislative and judicial systems. Yet I have never encountered a logical explanation of this statement or any exposition of the assumptions that must be made in order to reach its conclusion, . . .

Mr. Epstein's intention is to show that Aristotle was in fact a champion of the relativist idea of truth, and not an "absolutist" at all, as often claimed. But what was Plato's epistemology? If we change the terms a bit, we could say that it involved three levels of apprehension: Opinion, Science, Illumination. The scorn of the empiricists for the idea of "Illumination" is well known. What protection, then, did Plato offer against their criticism? There were two. First, real knowledge is for Plato essentially ethical, not descriptive; second, he consistently avoided any attempt to express the truths of illumination in a form that could be converted into dogma. His proposition was: The truth of illumination exists; but it is the kind of

truth that is known only through being; therefore, it cannot be set down in the language of correspondence—the truth "about" something. Yet to ignore its reality because it resists verbal description is the greatest mistake human beings can make. He condemned rhetoric because, in practice, rhetoric becomes the art of justifying this neglect. The plausibilities of rhetoric give pseudo-satisfaction to the longing for knowledge, and become widely mistaken for "truth." Plato's criticism of rhetoric is essential for teaching about science.

FRONTIERS Social Work in India

IN 1945 Gandhi completed a pamphlet of twenty-nine pages entitled *Constructive Programme* in which he set forth what he conceived to be the requirements for the regeneration of India. It was entirely devoted to reconstruction of the villages. It is apparent that he felt that other needs of the national life could easily be met, if enough effort was given to the essential task. The constructive program was embodied in some thirteen goals or objectives, all having to do with the attitudes and circumstances of village life. First is the friendly unity of all members of the community, without the distinction of religion, and the reduction or abolition of customs and manners which emphasize religious differences and separateness. Next is the complete elimination of untouchability, not merely as a political obligation, but through an absolute change of heart which would lead every Hindu to make common cause with the Harijans and "befriend them in their awful isolation—such isolation as perhaps the world has never seen in the monstrous immensity one witnesses in India." The third objective is national prohibition, to be facilitated as a legal reform by widespread voluntary abstention and medical and social services to relieve addiction. Fourth is universal spinning and weaving—the *khadi* program, as the foundation of a self-sustaining village economy. The fifth objective is the development of other village industries sufficient to supply all major wants and to contribute "a true national taste in keeping with the vision of a new India in which pauperism, starvation and idleness will be unknown." Next comes village sanitation. The seventh goal is "New or Basic Education," elaborated in another pamphlet by Gandhi. (These conceptions of teaching and schools in the villages have been summarized in MANAS in three "Children" articles, Nov. 29, Dec. 6, and Dec. 13, 1967.) Eighth is adult education which goes beyond merely overcoming illiteracy, one of its objects being to cure the villagers of an unjustified awe of foreigners. Liberation of and equal rights for women is ninth. Tenth is education in health and hygiene. Next is the revival of provincial languages, and twelfth is the

establishment of a national language through its popularization and use by all in behalf of a vigorous Indian culture. Finally, Economic Equality is thirteenth—"the master key," Gandhi says, "to non-violent Independence." In concluding this pamphlet, Gandhi tells his readers that if they reject these objectives as irrelevant to the goal of national independence, they might as well reject him also. "For," he said, "my handling of Civil Disobedience without the constructive programme will be like a paralyzed hand attempting to lift a spoon."

He meant that India's freedom, while it might be achieved politically, would remain only nominal: without restoration of self-reliant and self-respecting life for the villagers who constitute the bulk of the population.

We have provided this outline of Gandhi's Constructive Program as introduction to notice of the July-August, 1969, issue of *People's Action* (formerly *Sarva Seva Sangh Monthly News Letter*), a special number entirely devoted to the problems, practice, and progress in village development in India. The importance of this issue is that its contents convert the generalizations of the constructive program into vivid realizations of what is now happening to fulfill the Gandhian dream in the Gramdan villages of India, under the general leadership of Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. There is no evidence of exaggerated claims of "achievement" in these detailed accounts of how the planks of the constructive program are working out, but rather painful awareness of how much remains to be done. On the other hand, so little attention is paid by the commercial press to the workers of the Sanodaya movement that the rest of the world knows little or nothing of their accomplishments, and this is probably true, also, of a great many of the Indian people. In any event, the 78 pages of this magazine convey a sense of reality concerning actual village reconstruction that cannot be obtained by any other means. The subject is presented under the three general headings: The Goal, The Problems, and Action.

The first article traces the conceptions and projections of the Constructive Program "From Gandhi to Jayaprakash," repeating the thirteen

points. Other discussions develop the realities of village reconstruction in terms of the experience of workers in the field—the primary need being rebirth of the feeling of common interests on the part of the villagers. Without this, nothing can be accomplished, and it becomes evident that constructive workers must learn above all the arts of activating initiative, stirring imagination, and fostering self-confidence. There are delicate rhythms in this process, for which appropriate balances between outside help and individual effort are essential. The living processes of human awakening and growth gain a noticeable objectivity from reviews and evaluations of this sort, along with clear definition of practical necessities—do's and don'ts which can be unequivocally listed. What seems in birth in these pages is a new kind of sociology—a discipline in which the inward nature of a slowly reanimating village has opportunity to declare its being-needs in its own terms. The deficiency-needs are obvious. What is not obvious is the subtle interplay between the two sorts of needs.

Most important in such considerations is continuous awareness on the part of the field workers of the variety of practical encouragements the villagers need in order not to lose heart.: This need changes, of course, with the level of achievement, since foresight and patience in respect to "results" develops along with competence and partial success. One article draws an interesting comparison between the Sarvodaya villages in India and the People's Communes in China—interesting in both their close similarities and their radical differences. The contrast is made without political animus. There is also a suggestive comparison between the Indiana Government's official Community Development Program and the Sarvodaya program, showing how different normative assumptions about the role of the villages in the national life produce very different results in reconstructive work. A long article by Sugata Dasgupta, a director of the Gandhian Institute of Studies, combines the conceptual tools of Western social science with Gandhian thinking. He uses these conceptions to heighten recognition of the psychological needs of the villagers. The major

facts, in this approach, are always *growth*-facts. Articles in the section on "Problems" also illustrate the usefulness of the behavioral science approach for increasing awareness of the complexity of social reconstruction. The section on "Action" presents a number of reports (illustrated with photographs) on actual projects in the villages, giving details of obstacles encountered and solutions attempted.

What eventually seeps through for the reader is the relevance for the West of this sort of analysis and reportage. Only the external forms of the problems considered are different. The fundamental considerations, the psychological values, the needs, are the same all over the world. The basic requirement or objective is always *human* reconstruction, and the conception of the village as the all-purpose, normative unit, or natural whole, of community life seems indispensable to any grasp of the factors of *manageable* change for the better. We have a lot of acute sociological thinking in the Western journals (see *Transaction*), but it almost never applies to *controllable* situations, to limited frameworks in which even one individual can actually try to do what he thinks will work, and test his theories and himself in the process. In short, the sociology in this issue of *People's Action* is filled with evidences of practical reality-testing. It is also a sociology which can actually achieve some measurable success. In the words of Dr. Dasgupta:

A state thus comes in the life of every community when it is no longer the worker who stimulates, but the table is turned and the villagers assume the dominant role. They now select their projects, call for supply, lubricate the developmental system and then, at its peak, need no longer to wait for the outside worker but may even leave him behind on their onward journey. Since the end of all social work is to end "Social Work," the day when the client is no longer in need of continuous catalyzation is really the day of the worker's success.

The address of *People's Action* is 223 Rouse Avenue, New Delhi, India. A dollar should cover cost and mailing.