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THE LANGUAGE OF VALUE

WHAT can be done by historical essays? An historical essay, we might say, is an attempt to extricate meaning from some order of facts or events—an effort to reach a conclusion involving value, as distinguished from the technical practice of social science. The essay, then, is a humanistic enterprise.

Conventional science gives lip service to the humanistic ideal by claiming that when all the facts are in, and have been properly related, *then* truths of value to man may be disclosed. But we have to wait. We must not jump to conclusions. After the technical tasks are completed the high humanitarian purpose of science will become plain to all, but meanwhile its practitioners must be satisfied with gathering data. The essay, which is both more and less than a contribution to science, is eyed with suspicion.

Another, perhaps more legitimate discouragement comes from the educated man's natural distaste for the grandiloquence of the traditional "moral" vocabulary. The high honorifics of human hope have gained a bad reputation from partisan and shallow rhetorical use in religion. A discourse adorned with value-charged superlatives soon loses its audience. The great classical words fall flat unless, as sometimes happens, they are used sparingly and have been framed by a context of serious investigation. More often, the humanistic writer will use modest synonyms to indicate his goal of value. He prefers to seem pedestrian if the alternative is to seem pretentious. He wants to restore the quest for meaning, and using language so long identified with over-simplifications and bad faith is no help in this.

So Ortega y Gasset, master of the philosophic essay, when he turns to the question of what can be learned from history, does not speak of the Brotherhood of Man, but finds other words. In *Concord and Liberty* (Norton paperback), in the section entitled, "Prologue to a History of Philosophy," he says:

> It is the mission of history to make our fellow beings acceptable to us. To understand other people, I have nothing else to resort to than the stuff that is my life. Only my life has of itself "meaning" and is therefore intelligible. The situation seems ambiguous, and so it is in a way. With my own life I must understand precisely what it is in alien life that makes it distinct and strange to mine. My life is the universal interpreter. And history as an intellectual discipline is the systematic endeavor to make of any other human being an *alter ego,* in which expression both terms—the *alter* and the *ego*—must be taken at their full value. Here lies the ambiguity, and this is why the situation presents a problem to reason.

Besides calling attention to this ambiguity, Ortega says in effect that the understanding of other men, of history, is dependent on self-knowledge—an expression which has only lately been restored to respectable usage in our society. Continuing, he distinguishes between past and contemporary history. Contemporary history means seeking ground for unity with one's neighbors:

> I strive to construe my neighbor as an I who is another I—an *alter ego,* something at once near and distant. . . . Or, put differently, my neighbor, though being the *other,* does not seem to be irremediably bound to be *other* than I. I continue to feel that, in principle, he could be I. Love and friendship live on this belief and this hope, they are extreme forms of assimilation between the I and the you. But people of bygone times are not simply different from me as are my contemporaries; they have no possible way of not being different. . . . whereas of my contemporary I always hope that he may at last become like me, I have in my intercourse with ancient man no other way of understanding him than to assimilate myself imaginatively to him—that is, to become that other man. The technique of such intellectual unselfishness is called history.

Again, for Ortega, self-knowledge is both the means and the goal:

> "Historical sense" is a sense indeed—a function and an organ to perceive the bygone as such. It is this organ that grants to man the farthest distance he can travel away from himself, while at the same time it presents him, as by rebound with the clearest understanding an individual can gain of himself. For when, in his effort to understand former generations, he comes upon the suppositions under which they lived and that means upon their limitations, he will, by the same token, realize what are the implied conditions under which he lives himself and which circumscribe his existence. By the detour called history he will become aware of his own bounds, and that is the one and only way open to man by which to transcend them.

This, for Ortega, is the *raison d'être* of history, a conception which pervades everything he writes on the subject. We plan attention, here, to Ortega's most famous book, *The Revolt of the Masses*, which is essentially contemporary history. And in writing contemporary history the problem, as Louis Halle has pointed out, is to separate what is important from what is unimportant—from mere "noise." The canon by which the contemporary historian performs this sifting operation is crucial. As Mr. Halle says:

> The closer the historian comes to the period with which he is dealing, the harder it is for him to hear the signals for the noise. If he tries to abstract what has historic significance from the reams of stuff he reads in the newspaper every day, he will be unable to do so, because, at such close range, the noise drowns out the signals. The noise, however, does not carry far, so that if he can only back away from his material he will find it fading out rather rapidly, until at last he gets himself to such a distance that only the signals reach him.

The ability to distinguish the signals from the noise, at close range, is what is required of those who write contemporary history. It is an aptitude that some historians have in greater degree than others. We may as well call this aptitude by its common name, "insight." It is essentially the same insight as we find in great poets and dramatists. To be a truly great historian, a man must have something of Shakespeare in him. Since "insight" is not yet a word spoiled by cant, it serves Mr. Halle as a good substitute for "wisdom," which is surely what he means. Too facile a reference to "wisdom" seems to promise a short-cut to goals that are only laboriously achieved, and in some contexts reverses its effect. So the quiet feeling-tone of "insight" is often more acceptable. And when you say "something of Shakespeare," you imply without bearing down that Shakespeare's unfailing love of human kind is a part of genuine insight. This way of writing may point to the generalizations of high meaning in words like wisdom, but asks you to reach that meaning, yourself. It is a meaning that cannot be merely passed along, but needs to be earned.

So love of mankind, intellectual unselfishness, and the search for self-knowledge turn out to be the principles used by Ortega in separating the signals from the noise in contemporary history. In *The Revolt of the Masses* (Norton paperback, $1.25), a work first published in Spain in 1930, he examines the shadow-side of the aftermath of the eighteenth-century revolution. He is concerned with its failures instead of its successes. He felt the sickness overtaking the Western world, for him primarily in Europe, and he diagnosed it as the ungoverned and complacent triumph of the mass mentality. Ideas of human excellence and individual responsibility had been dropped out of the scheme of universal "equality." To be "equal" was enough, it seemed. Ortega begins one chapter:

> What is he like, this mass-man who today dominates public life, political and non-political, and why is he like it, that is how has he been produced?
>
> It will be well to answer both questions together, for they throw light on one another. The man who today is attempting to take the lead in European existence is very different from the man who directed the XIXth Century, but he was produced and prepared by the XIXth Century. Any keen mind of the years 1820, 1850, and 1880 could by simple *a priori* reasoning, foresee the gravity of the present historical situation, and in fact nothing is happening now which was not foreseen a hundred years ago. "The masses are advancing," said Hegel in

apocalyptic fashion. "Without some new spiritual influence, our age, which is a revolutionary age, will produce a catastrophe," was the pronouncement of Comte. "I see the flood-tide of nihilism arising," shrieked Nietzsche from a crag of the Engadine. . . .

The world which surrounds the new man from his birth does not compel him to limit himself in any fashion, it sets up no veto in opposition to him; on the contrary, it incites his appetite, which in principle can increase indefinitely. Now it turns out—and this is most important—that this world of the XIXth and early XXth Centuries not only has the perfections and completeness which it actually possesses, but furthermore suggests to those who dwell in it the radical assurance that tomorrow it will be still richer, ampler, more perfect, as if it enjoyed a spontaneous, inexhaustible power of increase.

. . . it is illusory to imagine that the mass-man of today, however superior his vital level may be compared to other times, will be able to control, by himself, the process of civilization. I say process, not progress. The simple process of preserving our present civilization is supremely complex, and demands incalculably subtle powers. Ill-fitted to direct it is this average man who has learned to use much of the machinery of civilization, but who is characterized by root-ignorance of the very principles of that civilization.

Ortega has sometimes been called a "conservative" because he speaks so critically of the mass mentality. It is true enough that he longs for an aristocracy of character, but he sees in the decay of hereditary aristocracy precisely the same defects that appear in the mass mentality. The fundamental failure lies in acquiring riches without having earned them, in enjoying prerogatives of decision which have not come through experience of hard discipline. Ortega in this book writes of a crisis in attitudes. Attitudes are for him the stuff of history. Excellence, in men and in societies, has no reality except as *achievement:*

All life is the struggle, the effort to be itself. The difficulties I meet with in order to realize my existence are precisely what awaken and mobilize my activities, my capacities. If my body was not a weight to me, I should not be able to walk. If the atmosphere did not press upon me, I should feel my body as something vague, flabby, insubstantial. So in the "aristocratic" heir his whole individuality grows vague, for lack of use and vital effort. The result is that specific stupidity of "our old nobility" which is unlike anything else—a stupidity which, strictly speaking, has never yet been described in its intimate, tragic mechanism—that tragic mechanism which leads all hereditary aristocracy to irremediable degeneration.

The mass-man, afflicted by a vast "affluence" not of his own making, is subject to the same process:

So much merely to counteract our ingenuous tendency to believe that a superabundance of resources favours existence. Quite the contrary. A world superabundant in possibilities automatically produces deformities, vicious types of human life, which may be brought under the general class, the "heir-man," of which the aristocrat is only one particular case, the spoiled child another, and the mass-man of our time, more fully, more radically, a third.

And then, in a long parenthesis, Ortega elaborates on this third type:

It would, moreover, be possible to make more detailed use of this last allusion to the "aristocrat," by showing how many of his characteristic traits, in all times and among all peoples germinate in the mass man. For example: his propensity to make games and sports the central preoccupation of his life; the cult of the body—hygienic regime and attention to dress, lack of romance in his dealings with women; his amusing himself with the "intellectual," while at bottom despising him and at times ordering his flunkeys or his bravos to chastise him; his preference for living under an absolute authority rather than under a regime of free discussion, etc.

Ortega's positive advocacy is of the noble life—an idea which has disappeared from thought because of the worship of external progress. And the resulting condition of wealth, Ortega might have said, really separates the men from the boys, in terms of character:

The mass-man would never have accepted authority external to himself had not his surroundings violently forced him to do so. As today his surroundings do not so force him, the everlasting mass man, true to his character, ceases to appeal to other authority and feels himself lord of his own existence. On the contrary the select man, the excellent man, is urged, by interior necessity, to

> appeal from himself to some standard outside himself. . . . This is life lived as a discipline—the noble life. Nobility is defined by the demands it makes on us—by obligations, not rights. *Noblesse oblige.*

Lest Ortega's language in speaking of "authority" be misunderstood, we add his explanatory footnote, which says:

> That man is intellectually of the mass who, in the face of any problem, is satisfied with thinking the first thing he finds in his head. On the contrary, the excellent man is he who contemns what he finds in his mind without previous effort, and only accepts as worthy of him what is still far above him and what requires a further effort in order to be reached.

Or, as he says in another place:

> . . . the man we are now analyzing accustoms himself not to appeal from his own authority to any authority outside him. He is satisfied with himself exactly as he is. Ingenuously, without any need of being vain, as the most natural thing in the world, he will tend to consider and affirm as good everything he finds within himself: opinions, appetites, preferences, tastes.

The mass-man, Ortega points out, has had no instruction in anything but the righteousness of his desires. The very idea of individual excellence is known to him only in vulgarized forms of status and evidence of acquisition. During the years of the formation of his character, he hears little but flattery of his improved situation, which he did not make, but was merely born into. He is an *heir* to all this. How is he to learn that for the truly excellent man, "Life has no savour . . . unless he makes it consist in service to something transcendental"?

All this, it may be said, sets too high an ideal for the "common man." But what if nothing else works? The message of high religion, from which the modern world has turned away, is precisely that all men are capable of the transcendental quest, and do not really become men until they begin to take some steps in this direction. A great part of the human weakness in our times may be that popular doctrines have declared that most men cannot and need not seek truth and excellence. In Ortega's view, the mass-man is a product of these doctrines. If this is true, then the propaganda for the technological society is no more than an acting-out of the role of the Grand-Inquisitor—in modern dress, plus the amplifying facilities of the electronic media.

Another "contemporary historian" who lived a hundred years ago, Joseph Mazzini, found the key to the needs of the West in a conception which for ages served even the simplest of men as a quite understandable form of *noblesse oblige*. In a comment on Western society, of prophetic as well as current significance, he said:

> Right is the faith of the individual. Duty is the common collective faith. Right can but organize resistance: it may destroy, it cannot found. Duty builds up, associates, and unites; it is derived from a general law, whereas Right is derived only from human will. There is nothing therefore to forbid a struggle against Right: any individual may rebel against any right in another which is injurious to him; and the sole judge left between the adversaries is Force; and such, in fact, has frequently been the answer which societies based on right have given their opponents. . . .
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> Is this all we seek? Ought man, gifted with progressive activity, to remain quiescent like an emancipated slave, satisfied with his solitary liberty? . . . Because man, consecrated by the power of thought, king of the earth, has burst the bonds of a worn-out religious form that imprisoned and restrained his activity and independence, are we to have no new bond of universal fraternity? no religion? no recognized and accepted conception of a general and providential law?

All life, Ortega wrote, is the struggle to be itself. But in what sort of life does man find his true self? Only in a life which continually seeks to outdo itself, according to philosopher-historians such as Ortega, according to revolutionary leaders and visionaries such as Mazzini, and according to many later students of the *becoming* processes in human life. It is the becoming-process, and not some mythical final achievement, that produces good for human beings. The ideal may be transcendent, but the becoming-process is always here and now. And while a managed, supervised growth may work in the stockyards, it does not

work for man. Man is the being who recreates himself, and we may find that he needs only to be reminded of this Promethean mission in order to feel himself in character as participant in its dream. We cannot accomplish this mission for one another, but we can teach its glory and necessity to all. Part of this educational labor will lie in finding the right words—new, unspoiled words that have not been betrayed by the dogmatists or made cheap by the populists. And in cleaning up and renewing old words like "duty," so long corrupted in the slogans of men who had no hesitation in *using* other human beings. Even this evolution of a humanistic language of value promises to be a long task.

REVIEW
MORE THAN SCIENTIFIC HUMANISM

FROM time to time books appear—and the intervals between them seem to be growing shorter and shorter—which restore to the scientific enterprise its original vision and promise. It is simply wrong to think of jettisoning the venturesome exploration of nature because so much of the power made available by science is being misused, and because the juggernaut of external progress has filled so many men with delusions of grandeur. All this is not science, but only its effect on a society animated by purposes quite different from the longing to know the truth.

In view of these developments, however, the books we speak of are intensely critical of conventional science, and the affirmative ground from which this criticism originates helps the reader to see how science may be regenerated. The most important example of this new spirit in scientific thought is probably Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge,* published by the University of Chicago Press in 1958. A later book in key with Polanyi's stance, *The Psychology of Science* (Harper & Row, 1966), by the Humanistic psychologist, A. H. Maslow, does in the area of psychological research what Polanyi does in relation to physics and chemistry, and both works lay the foundation for a new scientific epistemology, inclusive of the higher qualities of man.

We now have for review another such book, a collection of essays by a worker in the biological sciences—*The Scientific Conscience* (Braziller, 1967, paperback, $1.95), by Catherine Roberts. "The special value of Dr. Roberts' criticisms of science," Lewis Mumford says, "comes from the fact that she became aware of its inadequacies as a method and a world-view while in the midst of a successful career as a scientist." Dr. Roberts has a doctor's degree in botany from the University of California. Her career in science, however, has been mainly in Europe. In 1961, when she decided to devote her time to philosophical questions, she had completed fifteen years working as a microbiologist at the Carlsberg Laboratories in Copenhagen, and her publications had been chiefly professional.

The essays in *The Scientific Conscience* examine "the effects of continued scientific progress on human progress." It may come as a surprise to some readers to find that Dr. Roberts seems to regard the major preoccupations of present-day biological research as even more threatening to essential human welfare than the world-transforming and man-destroying discoveries of physics. She speaks in particular of the biochemical means, now becoming available, by which biologists hope to modify the genic constitution of human beings and thereby to produce the sort of men they suppose are "desirable." No biologists, Dr. Roberts is convinced, know enough to attempt this. Following is a general statement of the situation which caused her to write this book:

> For those who are intoxicated by the precipitate advance of modern biology, the possibility of man being able by artificial genetic means to shape his own destiny is nothing less than a promise of a better world to come. I do not share this optimism. To state the case in its simplest terms: biology, just as nuclear physics before it, has now for the first time come face to face with moral values without recognizing its predicament. According to the recent views of one of the world's leading geneticists, the prospect of directed human evolution through artificial selection carries with it such great hopes for the future of mankind that its mere contemplation excites jubilation. In the nearly complete absence of critical opposition to this viewpoint, it must be assumed that the modern biologist (1) shares this optimism, (2) is uninterested, or (3) has not time to reflect on the matter owing to his preoccupation with daily scientific problems.

Dr. Roberts distinguishes between the human improvement that may be possible through constructive environmental changes and the deliberate effort to modify the human species through "positive" eugenics. Biologists with positive eugenic programs, she says, are impatient

with the random methods of natural selection in the human species, and since they don't know enough to conduct breeding experiments they hope, she says, "that by employing sex cells selected from outstanding individuals, they can raise the general genetic level, and thereby ensure more rapid production of more outstanding individuals." She then comments:

> The crucial point here seems to be what criteria are to be used in evaluating the superior humanness of an outstanding individual. Since inheritance of human intelligence and physical traits has long been observed, positive eugenics might conceivably be able to raise the intelligence quotient of man and to alter his physical state; yet I cannot believe that these are the essential criteria of becoming more human. A mere increase in the proportion of the healthy super-intellectuals will not suffice for future human progress, for in the absence or neglect of love and virtue, such "outstanding" individuals will never be more human than we. After stating that their aim is to produce more and "better" scientists, artists, writers, statesmen, technologists, and engineers, Julian Huxley does, however, say that "for more and better saints and moral leaders, (we need the raising of the genetic level) of disciplined valuation, of devotion and duty, and of the capacity to love. . . ." And I would say that the positive eugenists, despite their earnest intentions, know nothing—absolutely nothing—about the genetic basis of love and virtue and it is misleading to the world at large even to include such traits in a prospectus of their policy.
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> Actually, such traits—the most significant of all for human evolution—may, for all we know, have no direct genetic basis at all. History records numerous instances of human beings who are remembered for their virtue and nobility of character but whose offspring (and/or parents) were either morally neutral or actually immoral and degenerate. As pointed out long ago by Socrates, that rare combination of extreme virtue, intelligence, and emotion, which is called human *arete* and which has ever distinguished the truly outstanding individual does not appear to be inherited. Twentieth-century geneticists would undoubtedly attribute *arete* to some rare combination of genes, but in the complete absence of proof of such a contention, one can with equal justification regard it, at least in part as non-genic. Therefore, while I agree wholeheartedly with Huxley in attaching so much importance to "outstanding, gifted individuals," and with his view that our future progress is partly dependent upon the psycho-social transmission of their creative efforts, I do not agree with him that individuals are outstanding primarily because of their genic complement provided by natural selection. The most outstanding ones appear to have in addition some sort of heightened awareness of their immortal spark and their spiritual heritage, and this attribute seems to be non-inherited and psychosocially activated.

We needed this long quotation to show Dr. Roberts' basic position. In identifying human good with the Greek conception of *arete*—meaning, as she says, a man's "supreme excellence," which "cannot be translated by a single word"—she takes, you could say, the higher ground of classical Greek and Renaissance Humanism. This is both the strength and the weakness of her book. Her insistence on the prior importance of self-knowledge, in respect to all efforts at human improvement, gives these essays an uncompromising idealism and an unfailing balance. The weakness lies in the fact that no serious Humanist will attempt to make precise (mechanistic) statement of the Good, but can only intimate, through a constellation of suggestions, what wise and self-sacrificing men have sought after throughout history. So the weakness, therefore, is not a weakness at all, but only seems so to those who imagine that human progress consists in turning the goal of the philosophic quest into some kind of "sure thing."

This book should be owned. It goes over the same ground, makes the same points, again and again, but always as a fugue with new notes and comparisons, never in mere repetition. There is a kind of Apollonian completeness in these discussions. One has the feeling that the essays come as the fruit of long and even anguished reflection, and that their serenity and certainty have been honestly forged.

To fill out the idea of the Humanist position, Dr. Roberts goes back to Petrarch. In this chapter she shows that the *fundamental* tone of Humanism is concerned with man's re-creation of himself, through search for the Good. It is "man's

preoccupation with the record of the limits of the human potential in order to become more god-like and surpass himself." This is indeed the keynote of the Platonic inquiry, and of its revival in fifteenth-century Florence by Pico della Mirandola, as the latter's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* makes clear. The greatest humanist scholars of the Renaissance, Dr. Roberts says, saturated themselves with Humanism's "fundamental tone." How, then, did the Renaissance lose its way?

Too many of the other Renaissance men, she says, listened only to the "overtones," and lost the fundamental theme:

> These overtones, stressing the developmental, transitory, and inconstant aspects of human existence, are based on an indiscriminate interest in human affairs rather than upon a definitive and meaningful idea. For they proclaim that human life directs itself, and so long as it moves, all is well; our glorious intellectual capacities, unchecked, unquestioned, and unguided, will somehow ensure the realization of the human potential.

They borrowed and exploited the glow, but rejected the substance, the fundamental tone, of the quest. And, Dr. Roberts says, the "humanists of our Scientific Age not only hear the overtones—they are deafened by them." This is restorative criticism. It speaks from a scientific conscience that is wide awake.

COMMENTARY
TIDES OF BECOMING

THE big generalizations leap to conclusions in which the mind delights, but at the cost of leaving behind our bodies, and nearly everything that is of concern to bodies; and they achieve these heights without seeming to need the labors of practical men who spend their lives accomplishing the work of the world.

Take the statement by Ortega: *All life is the struggle, the effort to be itself.* This resonates with the transcendent meaning sought by great philosophy, from the Upanishads to Hegel, from the Delphic injunction, Know Thyself, to the modern "quest for identity." Brimming with intuitive meaning, verbally it says nothing. Fill in "life" and "itself" with suggestive elements, and hostile critics have a field day with the resulting paradoxes and contradictions. The splendor of the idea seems to lie in its untouchability, and it is on this that all the tired and sophisticated rejections of philosophy depend.

Yet leave this *self-becoming* out of your calculations and, sooner or later, the world turns ugly and hateful, with men everywhere crying out for "revolution." Make a settlement with destiny in controllable, finite terms, and the infinite swells with an awful pregnancy, finally bursting free in wild celebrations of the irrational. Then we have our sober, order-making work to do all over again.

The only really useful way to study the history of medieval thought is to make a list of the heretics and search out the ground of their longing. What confined them? It is always the same: the last settlement arranged by men who believed it possible to substitute finite values for "life" and "itself," in order to achieve a definable system of progress from one term to the other, and so to establish regulation and guidance for mankind. One such system was described with appalling confidence by Adam of St. Victor:

> Of the Trinity to reason
> Leads to licence or to treason
> Punishment deserving.
> What is birth and what procession
> Is not mine to make profession,
> Save with faith unswerving.
>
> Thus professing, thus believing,
> Never insolently leaving
> The highway of our faith,
> Duty weighing, law obeying,
> Never shall we wander straying,
> Where heresy is death.

Adam was a tame mystic, and while these injunctions, reinforced with wrack and faggot, exercised authority for long centuries, Peter Abelard's disturbing questions triumphed in the end. Other settlements, however, were on the way. In *Fields and Methods of Sociology*, published in 1934, Dr. L. L. Barnard had this to say:

> The old theological assumption of personal control through spirit direction . . . has given way, under the influence of an analysis of neurons, cortexes, and endocrines, to the behavioristic theory of the conditioned response and stimulus response or behavior patterns. The spiritualists and the theologians and the metaphysicians have not welcomed this growth of a science of personality and they have not hesitated to reveal their intellectual character by their strenuous efforts to sweep back the oncoming tide of behavioristic science with their witch brooms on which they have been accustomed to ride in the clouds of spiritistic fantasy. . . .

Truly a righteous man! Yet we have here only more pious substitutions of finite, controllable factors, offered with equal certainty. And these, too, have failed. Today, "Life" has once again announced its independent reality, and with redoubled energy seeks new ways of learning how to become "itself." And, as in similar struggles in the past, the search is pursued under auspices of utter confusion.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
WHAT MYSTICISM IS NOT

MYSTICISM is not a word to be discussed with any certainty. There are those who say it should be dropped from the literary vocabulary, since its meaning is almost impossible to fix. Yet whatever scholars decide about this, the word will continue to be used, because of the deep human longing it so vaguely represents. This is clear from an article in the March *Redbook*, titled "A Report on Mysticism Today." The writer tried to inform himself by "talking with swamis, astrologers, mediums, Pentecostal ministers and lay people." He reached only one really firm conclusion: "More and more Americans appear to be questioning our traditionally materialist values." Meanwhile, what is now named "mysticism" has this summary:

> Groups involved with the mystical and the occult all are buzzing with activity. Not only are teen-agers wearing Indian religious symbols, chanting Hindu mantras and (in a recent antiwar demonstration) attempting to cast spells that would levitate the Pentagon, but also—more astonishing—middle-class housewives are practicing yoga and businessmen, college students and ministers of traditional American churches have been experimenting with such ancient Christian mystical rites as healing through the laying on of hands and praying "in tongues."
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> Books dealing with clairvoyance, reincarnation and prophecy are selling over a half-million copies. Astrology has won so many adherents that one company is now preparing to cast horoscopes by digital computer. Spiritualist séances, the investigation of haunted houses and the interviewing of witches have become staple television fare. And the Marines, a tough-minded bunch, have taken to using metal coat hangers as divining rods to detect Vietcong mines—and they claim that the thing works.

This article may have a use in describing the mix of genuine wondering, hunger for euphoria, and pursuit of the bizarre that is now called "mystic," but it will help no one to find out what mysticism once meant, or what men who have been accounted great "mystics" thought and taught. Such confusion is by no means limited to popular discussions of the subject. In the London *Times Literary Supplement* for Feb. 29, Martin Turnell shows in a review-essay that the world of literature is filled with similar contradiction and loose allusion in respect to mysticism. One writer finds in Surrealism a form of mysticism based on a "refusal of all transcendence," another thinks that mystical experience is all hallucination, while Rimbaud finally decided that the experiences he described in his *Illuminations* brought him: "to look upon the disorder of my mind as sacred." And, in contrast to Aldous Huxley, nothing is said by Mr. Turnell about Eastern mysticism, which would vastly increase the area considered.

Why is there so much shallow nonsense circulating on the subject of mysticism? Mainly because only a very few recognize that there was once high discipline connected with this idea, as in Platonic philosophy, and in the teachings of Plotinus—from whom the main doctrines of very nearly all Western mysticism have been derived. With the rise of science and the decline of philosophical inquiry, serious concern with mysticism died away, until, like other profound undertakings, it had no standing among men of education and presumed intelligence.

In its earliest origins, "mystic" applied to those newly initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries of Greece, meaning that their eyes were veiled. Aristotle, speaking of the Mysteries, said that they were not intended so much to instruct as to induce certain states of feeling such as reverence and awe. We don't know very much about what lay behind the mystery dramas save that they were concerned with meanings the Greeks held to be sacred. This reading of "mystic," however, is now archaic, and the present understanding of the term is well put in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics:*

> Mystical experience is marked by the emergence of a type of consciousness which is not sharply focalized, or clearly differentiated into a subject-object state. The "subject" and "object" are fused into an undivided *one*. Deep-lying powers, not ordinarily put into play, seem suddenly liberated. The usual insulations, which sunder our inner life into something like compartments, seem shot through.

> The whole being—in an integral and undivided experience—*finds* itself.

The American philosopher, Josiah Royce, one of the few modern thinkers who took mysticism seriously, said in his Gifford Lectures, *The World and the Individual:*

> That the mystic is dealing with experience, and trying to get experience quite pure, and then to make it the means of defining the real, is what we need to observe. That meanwhile the mystic is a very abstract sort of person, I will admit. But he is usually a keen thinker. Only he uses his thinking skeptically, to make naught of other thinkers. He gets his reality not by thinking, but by consulting the data of experience. He is not stupid. And he is trying, very skilfully, to be a pure empiricist. Indeed, I should maintain that the mystics are the only thorough-going empiricists in the history of philosophy.

It is often surprising to learn, when great mystics are studied, that scientific theory has gained fundamental advances from by-products of mystical discovery. Isaac Newton was such a beneficiary. William Law, the eighteenth-century follower of Jacob Behmen—perhaps the greatest of the European mystics—wrote in a letter to his friend, Dr. Cheyne:

> When Sir Isaac Newton died, there were found amongst his papers large abstracts out of J. Behmen's works, written with his own hand. . . . It is evidently plain that all that Sir I. has said of the universality, nature and effects of attraction, of the three first laws of nature, was not only said, but proved in its true and deepest ground, by J. B. in his Three first properties of Eternal Nature. . . . Sir Isaac did but reduce to a mathematical form the central principles of nature revealed in Behmen.

The *Cambridge History of English Literature* confirms this view, remarking that "it is almost certain that the idea of the three laws of motion first reached Newton through his eager study of Boehme (Behmen)."

For an account of the far-reaching fruits of mystical insight in European thought and even its influence on history, one might turn to *Milton and Jakob Boehme* (Oxford University Press, 1914) by Margaret Bailey. This sort of investigation is almost a necessity, in view of what is passing for "mysticism," today. But best of all would be to go direct to Plotinus himself. For if one is to speak of mysticism, to form judgments of what is now said and done in the name of mysticism, he ought to know something of its pure and original form in Neoplatonic thought. At the end of the *Enneads*, in the MacKenna translation, in the section titled "On the Good, or the One," Plotinus wrote:

> In our self-seeing there, the self is seen as belonging to that order, or rather we are merged into that self in us which has the quality of that order. It is a knowing of the self restored to its purity. No doubt we should not speak of seeing; but we cannot help talking in dualities, seen and seer, instead of, boldly, the achievement of unity. In this seeing, we neither hold an object nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into it, one with it; center coincides with center, for centers of circles, even here below, are one when they unite, and two when they separate; and it is in this sense that we now (after the vision) speak of the Supreme as separate. That is why the vision baffles telling; we cannot detach the Supreme to state it; if we have seen something thus detached we have failed of the Supreme which is to be known only as one with ourselves. . . .
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> The man formed by this mingling with the Supreme . . . is become the Unity, nothing within him or without inducing any diversity; no movement now, no passion no outlooking desire, once this ascent is achieved. . . . He belongs no longer to the order of the beautiful; he has risen beyond beauty; he has overpassed even the choir of the virtues; he is like one who, having penetrated the inner sanctuary, leaves the temple images behind him—though these become once more first objects of regard when he leaves the holies; for There his converse was not with the image, not with trace, but with the very Truth in the view of which all the rest is but of secondary concern. . . .
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> This is the life of the gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of solitary to solitary.

Or, in a more familiar rendering—"the flight of the lone to the Alone."

FRONTIERS

"Wisecracking Saint`'

AMMON HENNACY is now seventy-five years old. He has this year issued a revised edition of *The Book of Ammon* (paper, $3.00) from Joe Hill House of Hospitality, which he conducts at 3462 South 4th St., W., Salt Lake City, Utah. Hennacy's life spans the most tumultuous years of American history. It embodies themes of social struggle and qualities of radical camaraderie which are very nearly forgotten, today. His book is a chain of fascinating anecdotes, of personal experiences personally reported, from his days in prison with Alexander Berkman in 1917 to his adventures in 1968 in feeding the drunks and frustrating the panhandlers who are his guests in the Joe Hill House.

Ammon is a colorful man, and he enjoys being colorful—it helps in the theatres of action where he has chosen to conduct his "one-man revolution." A reviewer in the San Francisco *Chronicle* called him "the last of the great, old-time nonconformists," and added: "He is a fast-talking, wisecracking saint of non-violence who has written this autobiography with glorious naïveté in a kind of Grandma Moses prose." For a thumbnail sketch, no one could do better.

In one of the chapters about Ammon's life as an agricultural worker in Arizona—which was usually at some kind of casual labor, since he wouldn't work for a man who took out withholding tax—there is this passage, set down in 1948, which reveals Ammon's loyalties and affections:

> I have tramped in all of these United States. As I write I look on the fields of waving grain, the huge cottonwoods that line the *laterals*, and the jutted stretch of seeming cardboard-like mountains at whose feet live the Pima and Maricopa Indians. In and out of prison I have refused to honor the jingoistic Star Spangled Banner. Truly America the Beautiful means much to me. I refuse to desert this country to those who would bring it to atomic ruin. It is my country as much as it is theirs. Despite Bilbo I think of Jefferson, despite Edgar Guest, Bruce Barton and Dale Carnegie, I think of Walt Whitman, Vachel Lindsay and Edwin Markham. Despite the two warmongering Roosevelts and Wilson, I think of Altgeld, old Bob LaFollette and Debs. Despite the Klan and Legion vigilantes I think of the old-time Wobblies, of Sacco and Vanzetti, and of Berkman and Emma Goldman. Despite the warmongering churches I think of the old-time Quakers who paid no taxes for war and who hid escaped slaves; I think of Jim Connolly and Ben Salmon. Despite the warmongering Lowells and Cabots, I think of William Lloyd Garrison and Henry David Thoreau.
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> It was hard work which built this country. Despite the bourgeois philosophy of the go-getter we worship the machine which now enslaves us. Our military training will not corrupt *every* youth; a few will appreciate the path of manual labor, economic uncertainty, an absolutist stand against war and against the state whose main business is war.

These are fairly simple polarities of right and wrong, and they have given Ammon Hennacy's life a moral clarity which anyone can understand, and is very difficult to dispute. By the time he was seventeen he had exchanged his "lost Baptist Heaven for the new Socialist Heaven on earth." A farm boy in Ohio, he came to manhood in the golden age of American socialism, before World War I. He read Jack London, reported for the *Call,* went to Emma Goldman's meetings, and absorbed Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist.* "The next year," he says, "I was to be in Atlanta prison with him." He was given two years for posting anti-draft notices, and another nine months for refusing to register. On his first day in prison the grapevine brought him a note of practical advice from Berkman—who was serving a twenty-two-year sentence for attempting to kill Henry C. Frick in protest against the mistreatment of the Carnegie Steel workers. After a few weeks, when the editor of the prison paper asked for some copy, Ammon offered him a quotation from Thoreau which later appeared in a box: *A prison is the only house in a slave state where a free man can abide with honor.*

It was in the punishment "hole" of Atlanta Penitentiary that Ammon Hennacy read the Sermon on the Mount over and over again, and

forged the views that were to guide him the rest of his life. "I saw that if I held this philosophy for myself I could not engage in violence for a revolution—a good war, as some might call it—but would have to renounce violence even in my thought." Some time later he was able to read Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and decided that "the only revolution worth while was the one-man revolution within the heart." This meant:

> Each one would make this by himself and need not wait on a majority. I had already started this revolution in solitary by becoming a Christian. Now I had completed it by becoming an anarchist.

Ammon thereafter called himself a Tolstoyan anarchist, until, in 1952, he joined the Catholic Church, a course which embarrassed a great deal of his anarchist logic. In his last chapter, he explains that his admiration and affection for Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement led him into the Church, and that he would have become a Quaker or a Mormon for the same reason. When he left the Church, fifteen years later, one reason he gave was that "A Christian anarchist has no business belonging to such a reactionary organization." It is necessary to read this book to see how Ammon is able to move from one position to another with such extraordinary aplomb. But this, in one sense, is a small matter. You could say that he adopted the Catholic Church for an interval, then severed connections when he saw things differently.

The book is chronological, telling of his early days after prison when he lived on the land with his wife and two daughters, of his "social worker" period, of his long and continuing association, as salesman extraordinary and contributor, with the *Catholic Worker*, of his fasts against war and capital punishment, his friendship with the Hopis in Arizona, his endless speaking dates and various encounters with the "tax man" and other authorities. Ammon lists his principles in an early chapter:

(1) *Courage* is the most important virtue, for, as Johnson said to Boswell, if you do not have it you cannot practice the other virtues.

(2) *Voluntary Poverty*, the fundamental means of the *Catholic Worker* and Tolstoy, keeps the radical from becoming bourgeois and selling out.

(3) *Pacifism and the Sermon on the Mount* I had learned in solitary and they provided a basis for a worthwhile personal life and for a philosophy upon which to meet all other social problems.

(4) *Anarchism* is the negative side, but necessary to keep one from the treadmill of politics.

(5) *Decentralization* is needed, of course, so that the above principles might work to best advantage.

(6) *Vegetarianism*, which includes no drinking, smoking, gambling or medicine, is necessary to live healthily and to be efficient, otherwise with one hand you are pulling one way and with the other hand you are pulling the other way. Keep well.

(7) *Reincarnation* seems a more reasonable theory than the heaven and hell of orthodoxy, although it may be just a deferred heaven that we have to earn.

Ammon continues to be a frustration to neat planners, a prick of conscience to those who put off moral decisions, and an inspiration to all men who are trying to live their own lives—no matter what.