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A PIVOTAL INQUIRY

FOR the most part, people live as though death would never overtake them. Their way of life does not anticipate the natural conclusion of death. They may, of course, make wills, but usually regard this obligation as a rude intrusion on their everyday habits of thinking. Death has no natural *fit* with the plans they are making and no relation to their hopes and goals. It seems best to ignore it.

Similarly, the prospect of declining capacities and faculties in later years is given little attention, most notably by the young. Death and its antecedents are no part of their calculations. They live as though life would go on eternally, with little change except for the better. Accordingly, its closing years are for many a time of complaints, with a great business being done by the purveyors of cosmetics—balms for both the skin and the psyche. Death and its forerunning symptoms may be inevitable (something never mentioned in sales appeals, although hinted at by funeral directors), but they can at least be put off. The idea is that if you buy the right products you won't have to think about death.

Well, it might be argued, didn't the old philosophers counsel something like this? Live in the Eternal, they said. Don't be taken in by the illusions of existence. They won't last. But the old philosophers by no means advised us to ignore death, rather to reduce its importance by understanding its meaning, and that is exactly what, in our dislike of unpleasantness, we refuse to attempt.

Now it is true enough that a portion of our being—the material portion—does very well without thinking about death. Feelings of physical or psychical enjoyment ignore deductions from experience; you just *feel*. The experience is mindless and interrupted by thought. Animals, in general, seem to have a good time, and they do it by responding to impulse—not just any impulse, of course, but impulses expressive of the animal intelligence called instinct, which we might call unconscious wisdom for lack of a better term. At any rate, for the animal this works. And since humans are at least part animal, it works for them, too, after a fashion. But humans, being not only animals—they are also minds, with powers of reflection—of memory and imagination and a sense of identity—are able to create philosophical credos justifying a life of material enjoyment. And we have cultural systems, such as the advertising business, to make sure we tend to our responsibilities as enjoyers.

But death interferes with material enjoyment systems, and the power to think insists on raising the question: What good is a system that does not last? The result of this question may be recognition that humans cannot really be animals and live entirely by the natural rules of animal life. That is, they cannot be *comfortable* animals, since the mind keeps calling attention to other possibilities, such as "life in the eternal," or a beinghood unaffected by death. Yet the champions of a pleasurable animal life—the champions in ourselves and in our culture—fight back, and they have many allies. Mostly these champions are successful, if you measure the outcome of the contest in terms of average human behavior and the monuments of material civilization. The evidence of who has won and is winning is contained in many books, all the way from the second book of Plato's *Republic* to Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism.*

What is on the other side? Who points to other possibilities? The answers must be many, but it is possible to summarize by saying: the great myth-makers, the great religious teachers, and the great philosophers.

The myth-makers, you could say, didn't bother much with reason, which they knew to be weak. They designed a picture of the world in which the gods move from one heroic exploit to another, untouched by death. They hoped that in their heart of hearts humans would begin to think of themselves as gods in the making—what, indeed, the myth-makers intended. This was the reality which, in their way, they armed, leaving "argument" to much later generations.

These contrasting approaches are described by Ernst Cassirer in his last work, *An Essay on Man,* completed before his death in 1945:

> Many mythic tales are concerned with the origin of death. The conception that man is mortal, by his nature and essence, seems to be entirely alien to mythical and primitive religious thought. In this regard there is a striking difference between the mythical belief in immortality and all the later forms of a pure philosophical belief. If we read Plato's *Phaedo* we feel the whole effort of philosophical thought is to give clear and irrefutable proof of the immortality of the human soul. In mythical thought, the case is quite different. Here the burden of proof always lies on the opposite side. If anything is in need of proof it is not the fact of immortality but the fact of death. And myth and primitive religion never admit these proofs. They emphatically deny the possibility of death. In a certain sense the whole of mythical thought may be interpreted as a constant and obstinate negation of the phenomenon of death. By virtue of this conviction of the unbroken unity and continuity of life, myth has to clear away this phenomenon. Primitive religion is perhaps the strongest and most energetic affirmation of life that we find in human culture.

Why did Plato give so much attention to reasoned argument? Perhaps he foresaw the coming age of reason and science, both in his own time (as for example in Aristotle) and in the distant future. He certainly did not abandon myth, but resorted to his own mythic explanations whenever reason was manifestly inadequate. Along with the exercise of reason, which needed development, Plato sounded notes which might find resonance in human longing and aspiration. He accompanied his reasoned arguments with a "music" appealing to the soul.

The Buddha, who came a few hundred years earlier in the East, while a masterly reasoner—as present intellectual inclinations to Buddhism make clear—spoke in ringing declaration of a life beyond the senses. Not a logical dissertation but a pæon of liberation came at the end of his Enlightenment. This was his utterance, as expressed by the poet, Edwin Arnold, in *The Light of Asia:*

> MANY A HOUSE OF LIFE
> HATH HELD ME—SEEKING EVER HIM WHO WROUGHT
> THESE PRISONS OF THE SENSES, SORROW-FRAUGHT;
> SORE WAS MY CEASELESS STRIFE!
>
> BUT NOW,
> THOU BUILDER OF THIS TABERNACLE—THOU!
> I KNOW THEE! NEVER SHALT THOU BUILD AGAIN
> THESE WALLS OF PAIN,
> NOR RAISE THE ROOF-TREE OF DECEITS, NOR LAY
> FRESH RAFTERS ON THE CLAY:
> BROKEN THY HOUSE IS, AND THE RIDGE-POLE SPLIT!
> DELUSION FASHIONED IT!
> SAFE PASS I THENCE—DELIVERANCE TO OBTAIN.

For the Buddha, and for some others, death was only an event in life, many times repeated in the cycle of human existence. In short, he understood death—or that was his understanding of it. Is there a life apart from the body? The Buddha thought and taught that there is.

In our own time, the best discussions of death seem to be those which combine affirmation with reasoned appeal. Back in the 1940s, John Haynes Holmes asked in his Ingersoll Lecture, *The Affirmation of Immortality* (Macmillan), how the greatness of Helen Keller could be explained, if humans are no more than animals. Here was a body, muted, deaf, and blind, yet the spirit within somehow found a way to speak, to hear, to understand—which is considerably more than just "seeing." What animal so hedged by physical disaster has ever revealed such indomitable intelligence and will? This argument, it is true, depends somewhat on human distinction for its persuasiveness, but what's wrong with that? If we are inquiring into human nature, why not choose for study the best specimens? Dr. Holmes's argument from human greatness might be widely applied:

> What are we to think, for example, when a great and potent personality is suddenly cut off by an automobile accident, a disease germ, or a bit of poisoned food? Must it not be what George Herbert Palmer thought as he looked upon the dead body of his wife, one of the outstanding women of her time—"Though no regrets are proper for the manner of her death, who can contemplate the fact of it, and not call the world irrational if out of deference to a few particles of disordered matter, it excludes so fair a spirit?"

Why does this argument have force? The answer must be, we *feel* that the excellences of "so fair a spirit" ought not suddenly to dissipate to nothing. It does not make sense for that to happen. What sort of sense? We have, it seems, a higher "instinct" about the fitness of things in such matters. It seems *right* for the good, the true, and the beautiful to surmount the death of a form which does not depend on these qualities, but only on the passing coherence of material particles.

When, in 1944, Wendell Willkie died, and the *New York Times* published his obituary, Mr. Holmes found fault with the journalistic tendency to refer to a dead body as though it were the man himself. After quoting the *Times* report of the funeral, Holmes said in a letter to the editor:

> May I respectfully contend that Mr. Willkie played no such part as described in these quotations. . . . Mr. Willkie was not taken to the church from the undertaking establishment, nor to the Pennsylvania station after the service, nor was he "placed in a crypt." Mr. Willkie did not lie in state, nor rest "in an open bronze coffin," nor did he speed west "toward his final resting place." It was Mr. Willkie's body that did all these things. . .
>
> This apparently trivial matter of newspaper style and usage is, in its ultimate implications, momentous. It opens up vast metaphysical questions of personal reality, and touches the whole substance of religious faith. To him who believes in immortality and is convinced that, while we *have* a body, we are a *soul*, there can be no compromise on this issue. It is the body that is raved, and laid in state, and borne to the grave, and at last buried. The man lives on untouched, unharmed, unended.

Now it is true that in order for such persuasions to have an effect, they must catch us in a certain mood. We need to be thinking and feeling somewhat apart from the body, isolated from its urgent concerns. We need, that is, to be in a philosophic state of mind, susceptible to sublime suggestion. But does this need tell us anything about ourselves? Well, it may indicate that there are various grains or currents in our psychic life, so that certain feelings and ideas glow with the light of inspiration during some days or hours, while at other times they appeal not at all. Reflection on these changes may be a way of asking: Are we body, or body and soul, or body, soul, and spirit, and, among these alternatives, which endowment fits with the entire array of "facts," subjective and objective, that we encounter during life?

Then, it is certainly the case that we are more "logical" on some days than on others. Consider the argument presented for immortality—or more strictly, the argument against the argument against immortality—by John Kiley in his recent volume, *Equilibrium* (Guild of Tutors Press). In a chapter jocularly titled "How To Be a Real Nobody," he contends that calling someone a "nobody" does not mean what it is meant to mean, which is that this nobody is nothing at all. A no-body, after all, is a person lacking a body, and to assume that without a body there can be no person is sheer prejudice. We may have no sensory evidence that there are persons—*beings* would be a better word, since "person" comes from the Latin word for mask—without bodies, but neither do we have evidence that there are not. As Kiley says:

> If it is a body loss we are talking about, there is a familiar and sure way to achieve it: by dying. A man is driving down the highway, alive and well. Suddenly a truck crashes into his car head-on and he suffers a fractured skull, dying in the ambulance which is rushing him to the hospital. Upon arrival the victim is pronounced dead and his body is removed to the morgue. We are apt to say that the man has lost his life but we would be on safer ground to say that the man has lost or shed his body. There is simply no evidence that the man has lost his life—this is a materialist assumption—but only that a body (a corpse) has been left behind. Thus it would make more sense in the light of a hard-nosed use of the

facts before us to say the victim has shed his body (becoming a nobody) than to say the victim has died. Of course one might accurately say that the man's *body* has lost its life; but that is a lot different from saying that the *man* has lost his life—unless one *assumes* that the living man and his body were identical. And what is the objection to saying that? Simply this: There is then no way to distinguish the man before the crash from his corpse after it. One is obliged to say they are equivalent states of reality—a statement too absurd to merit attention.

Dying is a way of leaving your body behind—of that we are absolutely certain. And language should express, if possible, that which our experience tells us is certain, rather than that which has no basis in experience at all and therefore lacks all certainty. Death is not an event which necessarily destroys a man's life, *as far as we know from the event itself,* but is a process in which a body is left behind by a dying human being, or in which a *body* loses its life.

Dr. Kiley, we should note, is not claiming any positive thing, but contending that "nobody" knows that life cannot exist or continue without a body. The possibility should be held open, he maintains, and this means abandoning the language which slams it shut. When a body dies, we should say and mean only that the *body* dies, leaving room for the continuity of an immortal soul or spirit. Our language, in short, reflects our prejudice, not our knowledge. Our knowledge, after all, is very slight, and we would have more knowledge if we recognized how slight it is.

His argument continues:

Who can point to any gain in using materialist prejudices about the act of dying? Neither truth nor compassion are served. That people lose their bodies in death is an empirical fact; that they also lose their lives is pure hypothesis, unverified and unverifiable. . . .

Now as to human experience. Just as the sight of a severed arm prompts the judgment that the arm is "dead," so may the sight of a stilled human body prompt an equivalent judgment about the death of the body. But how about the man whose body it was? Is he dead, as well? Perhaps, but *there is no evidence of it.* To say so is a pure unsupported assumption.

But, you object, a man's survival of the loss of his arm is proved by finding him existing. Where is the proof that a man who loses his whole body survives?

To which the answer is: Where is the proof that he doesn't? Indeed if a man who loses his arm never survives with his lost arm, all that can logically be said is that a man who loses his whole body never survives his body. This of course means that he will never be found on the earth since it is only his body that can be seen. But one cannot logically go from the obvious truths that a man never survives with his body if he sheds it, and that only the body can be seen, to the proposition that not being able to see a bodiless person proves absolutely that he does not exist.

Well, someone might say, this reasoning may be logically sound, but it points only to a possibility, and why haven't more of our learned men, our scholars and specialists in research, given attention to this possibility? Interestingly, a present-day psychiatrist, Dr. Robert Lifton, dealt with this question in an article in *Psychiatry* for August, 1964. He said:

There are many reasons why the study of death and death symbolism has been relatively neglected in psychiatry and psychoanalysis: Not only does it arouse emotional resistance in the investigator—all too familiar, though extraordinarily persistent nonetheless—but it confronts him with an issue of a magnitude far beyond his empathic and intellectual capacities.

It is a subject, in short, that professionals are afraid of, taking them beyond their training and depth. Dr. Lifton was drawn to it by reason of his study of the psychology of the survivors of the atom-bombing of a city in Japan. This was the conclusion of his paper in *Psychiatry:*

I am aware that I have painted something less than an optimistic picture, both concerning the Hiroshima disaster and our present relationship to the nuclear world. Indeed it would seem that we are caught in a vicious psychological and historical circle, in which the existence of nuclear weapons impairs our relationship to death and immortality, and this impairment to our symbolic processes in turn interferes with our ability to deal with these same nuclear weapons. But one way of breaking out of such a pattern is by gaining at least a dim understanding of our own involvement in it. And in

studying the Hiroshima experience and other extreme situations, I have found that man's capacity for elaborating and enclosing himself in this kind of ring of destructiveness is matched only by his equal capacity for renewal. Surely the mythological theme of death and rebirth takes on particular pertinence for us now, and every constructive effort we can make to grasp something more of our relationship to death becomes, in its own way, a small stimulus to rebirth.

We end this brief inquiry with some passages from W. Macneile Dixon's *The Human Situation* (Galaxy), a book that was once well known, and deserves to be again:

> The thought of death as the only cure for human ills paralyses the mind, and puts reason to flight. Not so, you may say, only our beggarly reason's notion of rationality. Precisely, I answer, or will you out of your kindness inform me where I am to find another and better understanding, superior to our own? . . .
>
> Rational? What could be less rational than that his pen and paper should be more enduring than the saint, that we should have Shakespeare's handwriting but not himself? Raphael's pictures but not the mind that conceived them? . . . Beyond all peradventure it is the thought that death appears to proclaim, the thought of frustration and final unreason at the heart of things, that is itself the root of the pessimist's despair. The soul must sink when told that human life is mere buffoonery, that the story is without a point, that men must leave the theatre in which they played their sad, incomprehensible parts with their instincts mocked, their understandings unenlightened.
>
> Give them assurance that it is not so, and the scene is changed. The sky brightens, the door is left open for unimagined possibilities, things begin to fall into an intelligible pattern. . . . Immortality is a word which stands for the stability or permanence of that unique and precious quality we discern in the soul, which, if lost, leaves nothing worth preservation in the world. . . . If you have not here, among men who reflect . . . the pivot of the human situation, the question on which all turns, I know not where to look for it.

REVIEW
A SUBJECTIVE REVOLUTIONARY

RAIN for last May was subtitled "Arts Issue." It offered articles on a collective storefront theatre in Portland, Oregon (where *Rain is* put together); on something called "Open Publishing," which means offering photo-copies of manuscripts to order by readers, sometimes without the intrusion of any editorial taste (!); on street music, on mural paintings, and reviews of material about art in relation to government and culture. Quotation from a book (*The Esthetic Animal* by Robert Joyce) begins:

"The Esthetic revolution will be a subjective revolution in direct contradiction to the objective technological revolution, which ended in industrialization."

What would a "subjective revolution" be like? Various answers seem possible, but one meaning would be that given by Theodore Roszak to the romantic poets, who added ranges of inward reality to the everyday world—ranges which for them became *prior* to physical and mechanical things. It was this inwardness which made their explorations "revolutionary." After all, to be revolutionary you have to found your thinking and your life on a ground of reality which effects changes in everything else.

This recalls a chapter on "Imagination" in *The Candle of Vision* by George Russell, the Irish writer who was a poet and something more. Russell has a way of speaking of subjective experience and powers which shows that precision in such subtle matters is both possible and desirable. For example:

> Imagination is not a vision of something which already exists, and which in itself must be unchanged by the act of seeing, but by imagination what exists in latency or essence is out-realized and is given a form in thought, and we can contemplate with full consciousness that which hitherto had been unrevealed, or only intuitionally surmised. In imagination there is a revelation of the self to the self, and a definite change in being, as there is in a vapour when a spark ignites it and it becomes an inflammation in the air. Here images appear in consciousness which we refer definitely to an internal creator, with power to use or remould pre-existing forms, and endow them with life, motion and voice.

Russell gives an account of the wanderings of his imagination during boyhood and youth, bringing dreams or waking fantasies, and after telling about one of them he says:

> That is all I can remember. And I am forced by dreams like this to conclude there is a creator of such dreams within us, for I cannot suppose that anywhere in space or time a little ape sat on a cloud and tried to fashion it into planetary form. The creator of that vision was transcendent to the waking self and to the self which experienced the dream, for neither self took conscious part in the creation. The creator of that vision was seer into my consciousness in waking and in sleep, for what of the vision I remember was half a scorn of my effort and half a warning that my ambition was against natural law. The creator of that vision could combine forms and endow them with motion and life for the vision was intellectual and penetrated me with its meaning. . . .
>
> In this dream some self of me, higher in the tower of our being which reaches up to the heavens, made objective manifestations of its thought; but there were moments when it seemed itself to descend, wrapping its memories of heaven about it like a cloth, and to enter the body, and I knew it as more truly myself than that which began in my mother's womb, and that it was antecedent to anything which had body in the world.

Read a bit in Freud's brand of reductionism and you soon see that Russell—who signed this book A.E., short, by a printer's error, for Æon—was indeed a revolutionary, a subjective revolutionary. (One might also read a bit in L. L. Whyte's *The Unconscious Before Freud* to see something of what Russell wanted to recover for his readers, and for himself.) The poets can be depended upon for resistance to Freud's objectivism, and now and then a psychologist with poetic tendencies is heard from. Henry A. Murray wrote in 1940 (in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* for April of that year):

> Freud's theory, I submit, is an utterly analytic instrument which reduces a complex individual to a

> few primitive ingredients and leaves him so. . . . What is Mind today? Nothing but the butler and procurer of the body. The fallen angel theory has been put to rout by the starker theory of the soulless fallen man, as a result—as Adam, the father of philosophy, demonstrated for all time—of experiencing and viewing love as a mere cluster of sensations. Little man. what now?

The mystic, Josiah Royce once remarked, is the only true empiricist, and Russell was of this view. He believed that there ought to be a science of subjective experience. Of inward visions, he said:

> People pass them by too easily saying, "It is imagination," as if imagination were as easily explained as a problem in Euclid, and was not a mystery, and as if every moving picture in the brain did not need such minute investigation as Darwin gave to earthworms. . . . I think few of our psychologists have had imagination themselves. They have busy brains, and, as an Eastern proverb says, "The broken water surface reflects only broken images." They see too feebly to make what they see a wonder to themselves. They discuss the mode of the imagination as people might discuss art, who had never seen painting or sculpture. One writer talks about light being a vibration, and the vibration affecting the eye and passing along the nerves until it is stored up in the brain cells. The vibration is, it appears, stayed or fixed there. Yet I know that every movement of mine, the words I speak, the circulation of my blood, cause every molecule in my body to vibrate. How is this vibration in the cells unaffected?. . .
>
> I know that my brain is a court where many living creatures throng, and I am never alone in it. You, too, can know that if you heighten the imagination and intensify the will. The darkness in you will begin to glow, and you will see clearly, and you will know that what you thought was but a mosaic of memories is rather the froth of a gigantic ocean of life, breaking on the shores of matter, casting up its own flotsam to mingle with the life of the shores it breaks on. If you will light your lamp you can gaze far over that ocean and even embark on it. Sitting in your chair you can travel farther than Columbus travelled and to lordlier worlds than his eyes had rested on.

Russell was a gentle revolutionary—you could use the unpoetic term "nonviolent" to describe him—but nonetheless revolutionary. He wanted to put our theory of knowledge right-side up. The inward certainties are nonetheless certainties, however much they differ from one person to another. The differences make the wonder and variety of life. Humans are not designed after atomic uniformities they are not "designed" at all, but create themselves—and we do not increase our understanding of either life or man by trying to make people "scientifically" all the same.

Russell had a rich inner life of his own, yet he gained conceptual dimensions from ancient religious philosophy. He read the Gnostic thinkers, and through the work of Charles Johnston, the Theosophist scholar who put Eastern scriptures into English, absorbed the Upanishads in his youth. The limpid beauty of the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* (as Johnston rendered it) must have contributed something to the charm of Russell's prose, written years later on the same subject—dream. From the Upanishad:

> What is the Soul?
>
> It is the consciousness in the life-powers. It is the Light within the heart. This Spirit of man wanders through both worlds, yet remains unchanged. He seems only to be wrapped in imaginings. He seems only to revel in delights.
>
> When he enters into rest, the Spirit of man rises above this world and all things subject to death. For when the Spirit of man comes to birth and enters a body, he goes forth entangled in evils. But rising up at death, he puts all evils away.
>
> The Spirit of man has two dwelling places: both this world and the other world. The borderland between them is the third, the land of dreams. While he lingers in the borderland, the Spirit of man beholds both his dwellings: both this world and the other world. And according as his advance is in the other world, gaining that advance the Spirit of man sees evils or delights.
>
> When the Spirit of man enters into rest, drawing his material from this all-containing world, felling the wood himself and himself building the dwelling, the Spirit of man enters into dream, through his own shining, through his own light. Thus does the Spirit

> of man become his own light. . . . For the Spirit of man is Creator.

And Russell in *The Candle of Vision* (Macmillan, 1918)

> Who is this who flashes on the inner eye landscapes as living as those we see in nature? The winds blow cool upon the body in dream: the dew is on the grass: the clouds fleet over the sky: we float in air and see all things from an angle of vision of which on waking we have no experience: we move in unknown cities and hurry on secret missions. It matters not whether our dream is a grotesque, the same marvelous faculty of swift creation is in it. . . .
>
> If I am wakened suddenly I surmise again that it is that enchanter who builds miraculously a bridge of incident to carry me from deep being to outward being. When thought or imagination is present in me, ideas or images appear on the surface of consciousness, and though I call them my thoughts, my imaginations, they are already formed when I become aware of them. . . .
>
> As an artist who has laboured slowly at the creation of pictures I assert that the forms of dream or vision if self-created require a conscious artist to arrange them, a magician to endow them with life, and that the process is intellectual, that is, it is conscious on some plane of being, though that self which sits in the gate of the body does not know what powers or dignitaries meet in the inner palace chambers of the soul. . . . For myself I think man is a protean being, within whose unity there is diversity, and there are creatures in the soul which can inform the images of our memory, or the eternal memory, aye, and speak through them to us in dream. . . .

Here was a man respectful of the wonder and responsive to the high invitation of inner human experience. Is not that revolutionary?

COMMENTARY
AN INTERESTING CONVERGENCE

THE material in this week's lead—especially the philosophic logic of Kiley—suggests that after several centuries of materialist and agnostic rejection of the idea of a life after death, this idea is gaining serious attention. Also quoted are a cultural historian (Cassirer) and a psychiatrist (Robert Lifton), giving weight to the decision to examine the limitations of a thoughtless skepticism. John Haynes Holmes's observations add sublime common sense and W. Macneile Dixon combines reason with lyrical flights in behalf of the immortality of the soul.

It seems of particular interest that we should have, at this time, rather impressive evidence of a phenomenalistic character—the reports of people who have nearly died, as recorded by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and Raymond Moody in *Life after Life*. A new book by a psychologist, *Life at Death* (Coward McCann & Geoghegan), undertakes to review and evaluate more than a hundred cases of such recollections as a "scientific investigation." In giving his own conclusion, the author, Kenneth Ring, says:

> . . . it is at this point an unanswerable question whether the mysteries of the near-death experience can ever be fully understood through scientific investigation alone. Such experiences may well have an infrangible or nonphysical quality that will prevent us from providing a truly comprehensive scientific accounting of them. Try as we may (and I believe, should) to articulate such an understanding, it may finally prove to be the case that science can take us only so far in shaping that understanding.
>
> These observations bring us, finally, to the role of religious and spiritual concepts in the interpretive matrix of the near-death experience. It is obvious that my own interpretation, though I tried to keep it grounded in scientific theory and research, occasionally was forced to stray into the spiritual realm. I confess that I did so with considerable intellectual reluctance, but also with a sense that it would have been intellectually cowardly to *avoid* doing so. In my opinion—and I could be wrong—there is simply no way to deal with the interpretive problems raised by these experiences without confronting the spiritual realm.

What, one might ask, did Macneile Dixon do about this challenge? As readers of his book, *The Human Situation,* know, Dixon found intellectual support in the theory of the Monads proposed by Leibniz. But the conviction he expresses has a deeper ground. His book is really a triumph of austere metaphysical reason. Might this be a method appropriate to inquiry into immortality?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
QUESTIONS AND CONNECTIONS

IN their issue for Aug. 29, the editors of the *Nation* explain why, in that pre-election time of the year, they offer an article called "Empire as a Way of Life" by William Appleman Williams, instead of a critical discussion of the Democratic contenders for nomination as candidate for President. This essay, they say,—later to be expanded into a book—deals with a matter ignored by all the would-be candidates: the question of whether we want to continue as people belonging to the American Empire.

> Professor Williams, President of the Organization of American Historians, presumes, in his essay on the meaning and imperatives of our national life as an empire, not merely to redefine our past but to force us to imagine our future—and to begin, not on some distant day, but *now*, unless we are prepared to risk empire's fate, to "sizzle or suffocate." For if Williams is right, only *after* we come to terms with our life as an empire can we begin the vital work of internal reconstruction and forge domestic and foreign policies consistent with our needs as a democracy.

What does Prof. Williams say? Since he takes fifteen pages to say it, we won't attempt to summarize an analysis filled with detail, but quote an opening paragraph:

> Our intellectual, political and psychological confusion is the result of our *a*historical faith that we are not now and never have been an empire. Yet there is no way to understand the nature of our predicament except by confronting our history as an empire. That is the only way to comprehend the Iranian demand that we acknowledge our long-term interference in their affairs, the widespread anger about our acquiescence in the progression of Israel's settlements on the West Bank, the Russian charge that we apply one standard to them and another to ourselves and the deep resentment of us among the peoples of the poor countries. The only way we can come to terms with those matters is to look our imperial history in the eye without blinking, flinching or walking away into the wonderland of Woodrow Wilson's saving the world for democracy.

At the end the writer asks what he calls "the question raised by our history":

> *Is the idea and reality of America possible without empire?*
>
> *Can you even imagine America as not an empire?*
>
> I think often these days about the relationship between those two words—imagination and empire—and wonder if they are incompatible.
>
> The truth of it is that I think they are incompatible.
>
> So there we are.
>
> Do you want to imagine a new America or do you want to preserve the empire?

The *Nation* editors, it seems to us, were right in suggesting that such questions are more important than finely drawn comparisons between quite commonplace candidates for the presidency.

Well, there are various forms of imperialism. In *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far from Home* (Continuum, 1980, $5.95), Jonathan Kozol presents an indictment of the U.S. Public Schools as a form of domestic imperialism. Kozol is an angry man and his anger never seems to let up. Recalling the book that gave him fame—*Death at an Early Age*—helps to explain why. But whether his anger can help us to change conditions in the schools is an open question. Yet his anger is a fact, it is real, and what he has to say needs to be known, because it is so largely true.

The level of his argument—and indictment—is shown by the closing paragraphs of his preface:

> Parents continue to cry, teachers to cringe, because of the purported "disaster" of a drop in reading-scores. If they must cry and cringe at all, at least it would be a blessing in our times if they were able to cry about the *real* disaster.
>
> There was no lack of basic skills among the scientists who built and who now operate the plant at Three Mile Island but there was an almost total lack of effort, competence, or will to stop and think about the ethical implications of the work at hand. It is this, not basic skills but basic competence for ethical

> inquiry and indignation, which is most dangerously absent in our schools and in our society today.
>
> It is this, too, which we must do our best somehow to repossess as we step, with no small doubt and trepidation, out of the present tense and move, with measured pace, into the 1980s.

Yet "this," as Jonathan Kozol certainly knows, is a matter larger than the conduct of the schools. How large it is becomes explicitly evident in an article by Amory Lovins and Hunter Lovins and Leonard Ross in *Not Man Apart* for August, "Nuclear Power and Nuclear Bombs"—which also appeared, appropriately, in *Foreign Affairs* for June. Involved is not just education of the young, but of the human race. The point of the article is that nuclear power and genocidal nuclear weapons will prove inseparable, no matter what we do to prevent their association. And the moral is that we ought to get rid of both. But what do you say or do to get this across to enough people, in a way that helps them to understand and not just "believe"? Lovins and company have done their best.

In what way are the public schools examples of domestic imperialism? Jonathan Kozol calls the schools a "twelve-year exercise in psychological and moral disconnection."

> Little by little, year by year, a wall of separation is constructed in the child's mind to offer self-protection in the face of realistic guilt at unearned privilege and inherited excess. Poor people exist—so also do the rich—but there are no identifiable connections. One side does not live well *because* another side must live in pain and fear. It is a matter, rather, of two things that happen to occur at the same time: and side by side. The slumlord's daughter, therefore, is not forced to be unsettled, and still less tormented, by the fact that there are black and Puerto Rican families two miles distant who must pay the rent to make her luxuries conceivable. The general's children do not need to know their father's hands are steeped within the blood of innocent people in far distant lands. The bank-director's child, the foreign-investment analyst's son, do not need to know the price in pain their privilege, their peace and their unprecedented economic strength are built upon.
>
> In most instances in Northern cities now, the line between two sides is virtually impossible to find.

Jonathan Kozol finds his best spokesman in Tolstoy, who, in 1905, in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You,* "speaks about the way we train ourselves not to believe in causative connections, not to believe that our advancement rests on the soil of someone else's deprivation."

> It would seem impossible to deny that which is so obvious yet it is precisely what is being done.
>
> The men of the ruling classes—the honest, good, clever men among them—cannot help but suffer from the internal contradictions. . . . We cannot pretend that we do not see the policeman who walks in front of the windows with a loaded revolver, defending us, while we eat our savoury dinner or view a new performance. . . . We certainly know that if we shall finish eating our dinner, or seeing the latest drama, or having our fun at the ball, at the Christmas tree, at the skating, at the races, or at the chase, we do so only thanks to the bullet in the policeman's revolver and in the soldier's gun.

Thus Tolstoy, and Kozol after him, are outraged by the "willed oblivion of the rich," of the comfortable people who ignore the connection between widespread want and their own affluence. "Men who own large tracts of land or have large capitals, or who receive large salaries, which are collected from the working people, who are in need of the simplest necessities," Tolstoy wrote, "are fond of believing that these prerogatives which they enjoy are not due to violence, but to an absolutely free and regular exchange for services." They like to think that "these prerogatives are not only not the result of assault upon people, and the murder of them . . . but even have *no connection whatsoever with these cases.* . . ."

Showing the connection, Kozol declares, has become a primary business of education.

FRONTIERS

An Uneven Mix

THE Association for Humanistic Psychology *Newsletter* for August-September has an article by Lawrence LeShan which calls attention to the neglect of the "basic nature" of human beings. The explanation may be that humans behave in so many different ways—sometimes like gods and sometimes like automata—it seems better to say nothing at all! Yet theorists have made proposals. Mr. LeShan writes:

> Although the problem of the basic nature of a human being has been largely ignored, it will not go away. One group of psychologists has ignored it to the degree that they claim it does not exist, that there is no such thing as a basic nature, but everything depends on cultural training. Where the culture came from is, of course, ignored by these holders on to a belief in a complete tabula rasa, one so blank that it does not, in their view, respond more easily to one type of experience than another. (Curiously, these tend to be the same people who prefer to act, in their scientific work, as if consciousness does not exist and who are resolute in their attempts to convince us—of their own scientific, objective knowledge and free will—that they have determined that objectivity and free will do not exist.)
>
> The problem is a very old one. In ancient China, Mencius believed that humanity is innately good, Hsun Tzu that it is innately evil.

Going back to old Chinese sources seems a good idea, but the Confucians were not so flatly polarized in their interpretation as here suggested. In the thirteenth century Tai Chih said (as quoted by Joseph Needham in *Science and Civilization in China*)*:*

> People talk about human nature—some say it is good, others that it is bad. Generally they prefer Meng Tzu's [Mencius's] view and reject Hsun Tzu's. After studying both books I realised that Meng Tzu is talking about the heaven-nature and what he calls the goodness of human nature referred to its (innate) uprightness and greatness. He wished to encourage it. This is what the *Ta Hsueh* (Great Learning) calls (developing) sincerity.
>
> But Hsun Tzu is talking about the matter-nature, and what he called the badness of human nature referred to its (innate) wrongness and roughness. He wished to repair and control it. That is what the Chung Yung (Doctrine of the Mean) calls "forceful checking". . . .
>
> Thus Meng Tzu's teaching is to strengthen what is already pure, so that defilement tends to disappear of itself. While Hsun Tzu's teaching is to remove defilement actively. Both are equally helpful to later students.

Man's nature, in short, is *dual*, according to the Chinese, and Needham calls this "a more scientific approach" than the ones modern psychology has adopted. Mr. LeShan continues:

> We have today in psychology three basic groups (with a variety of schismatic subgroups), each with its own approach to the basic nature of a human being. First there are those who follow the lines of Hsun Tzu, Hobbes and Freud. Humans, in their natural state, are hostile and feral predators concerned only with the satisfaction of their own wishes. Society trains the beasts and teaches them to behave in a socially acceptable manner. The second group, following the lines of the French Encyclopaedists, Sartre, and the Behaviorists, believes that there is no basic nature at all and that all behavior is the result of experience. The wide divergence of behavior among individuals is seen as due to differences in conditioning, reinforcement and training. The third group follows the line of Mencius, Rousseau, Maslow and Rogers. Mankind in the "natural state" is noble and loving. These basically positive characteristics of feeling and behaving are warped, deformed, and often buried completely by their society and upbringing.

This seems roughly accurate, save for the fact that Maslow was thoroughly aware of the potential for "evil" in human beings, as various passages in his works make clear. He didn't ignore these tendencies in human nature but urged that if the study of psychology is meant to be a way of improving ourselves, then the focus should be not on dull averages, but on the best of human beings—the best we can find. If you want to find out how to develop champion runners, you don't inspect the methods of a random group, but study the gold medalists, the people who run the fastest. Maslow's research, you could say, was mission-oriented. He wanted to discover how to improve the human race.

However, Mr. LeShan has some evidence to present. He describes an "experiment" involving twenty cruise liners which passed each other at the entrance to the Grand Canal in Venice on an August day in 1978. There were about five thousand passengers in all, some 250 on each liner. As an incoming liner passes one that is outgoing, the passengers can either express hostility or behave in a warm and friendly fashion. If they jeer and sneer, then Hobbes and Freud were right, proposes this writer. But in fact—

> There was a great deal of waving and smiling. In the over 5000 individuals observed in this experiment, there was not one single hostile or derogatory expression of feeling noted. The intensity of the positive gestures varied widely, with a sizeable minority . . . ignoring the passing liner or gazing at it with no discernible emotion expressed. However, all expressions observed—and these were made by a large majority . . . were of a positive nature. . . . the experiment indicates strongly in favor of the Rousseau-Maslow-Rogers hypothesis.

Well, this suggests that humans are basically friendly, and since people who go on cruises are likely to be in a good mood, having deliberately set out to have a good time, perhaps the results obtained were to be expected.

One recalls that the Caribbean Indians warmly welcomed Columbus, the Aztecs trusted Cortez, and the North American Indians received the Pilgrim Fathers with open arms—only, all of them, to be cruelly betrayed, so that Hsun Tzu's claim that there is a "matter-nature" in humans needs consideration. It does seem as though the thinkers willing to go out on a dualistic metaphysical limb are the only ones whose explanation makes consistent sense.

But what shall we understand by the "heaven-nature" spoken of Mencius? Are humans an uneven mix of the stuff of the gods with the clay of earthly life? This may be the question that needs answering.