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THE INTERLUDE OF THINKING

BY thinking humans make themselves miserable, but then, sometimes, they are able to think their way out of the misery. Thinking is easy enough to define. It is our way of finding meaning. To understand the meaning of something is to incorporate it in our being. This understanding or knowing remains a part of us, a structure we use for the understanding of other things.

Yet we seem to know a great deal without thinking at all. In fact, thinking sometimes gets in the way of doing what we know perfectly well how to do. Thinking interrupts the flow of memory. And thinking about what we do may somehow dull the enjoyment of doing it. Yet we are obliged to think, and there are sensible counsels urging us to learn to think well.

But our delights as well as many of our efficiencies or skills are spontaneous. Goethe was once warned by a bluff Italian sea captain to stop thinking so much. The German genius would often withdraw into a grim silence, and the Italian warned him that such thinking would make him *sick!* Is it better to be an ailing thinker than a healthy moron? Fortunately, or unfortunately, we have little choice in the matter. Thinking is a part of the being—perhaps the essential part—of humans.

This would present no puzzles or questions if we did nothing but think. The thinking part of us, however, is compounded with unthinking elements which we could not do without. And even our thoughts, if we examine them, have roots that are difficult to inspect. "No human achievement," Ortega remarked, "can be rightly understood without an analysis of unquestioned beliefs that silently, invisibly, operate at the back of the human mind." There are indeed thoughts we cannot get behind. When we start to think, it is as though we climbed on a street car that is already in motion, going in a certain direction and with other passengers bound for the same destination. We have so many "givens" when we begin to think. The topics for consideration are not invented, they are simply there, in experience. We may, of course, invent a way of looking at experience, and since there are so many ways of looking, having very different consequences, we conclude that some ways are good and some ways are bad. But not to look at all—not to think—seems almost impossible. And the claim that there is no use in looking invites to the suicide of intelligence.

Thinking seems to occupy the long middle interlude in human life. Children do not think (deliberately) until they become conscious of the power of thought in themselves. Nor do the very old—if they are wise—have much use for thought. Sages who know what they know are no longer obliged to figure things out. They are like mathematical geniuses who intuit the answers to problems without having to go through a lot of computations. Children, too, seem to know at least some things in this way, although they can't tell you how to figure them out. The sage can. That is the chief difference between the two. The sage knows how to think, whether he needs to or not.

Thinking, then, seems to be an ordeal we have to go through. We are likely to feel worthless and useless unless we attempt it. So long as we have a project to work on, involving some thinking, there is at least the possibility of happiness and health. Most people recognize several levels of fulfillment in human life, just as there are grades or levels of knowing. An occupied man is a healthy man, but a man between levels—after using up one level but not yet engaged on the next—is a bewildered and uncertain individual. He needs to get to work but he doesn't know how.

In a concluding passage in *The Illusion of Technique*, William Barrett makes this comment on modern man:

> A secular-minded psychoanalysis now encounters everywhere among its patients a sense of meaninglessness against which it is helpless. Religion may very well be an illusion, as Freud said, but then man himself is that illusion. It is the human animal, no one else, who is displayed in the history of his religions. Their evils and excesses are his, as much as what is poignant and sublime in that history. The frenzies of asceticism, which may seem mere aberration and abnormality to our secular minds, are in fact the inevitable means to which the human animal is driven to give meaning to his existence. Rather than be meaningless, we shall find ourselves seeking out devices of our own that are equally extreme. We create by denying ourselves. So long as we drive ourselves in the toils of some discipline, we cannot believe that our life is meaningless. In the tensions of the will—the simultaneous striving and surrender—the ghost of nihilism departs.

This we are likely to say to ourselves, is good thinking. Mr. Barrett hasn't answered any of the great religious questions, and he hasn't settled any philosophical dilemmas, but he has told us something about ourselves, obliging us to agree. His book is a Socratic book. Socrates as readers will recall, did not pretend to teach anyone anything. And yet he did. The Athenians who listened to him and Plato's readers in the thousands of years since—were helped by Socrates to discover that they were thinking beings. To think is to make decisions in what you believe about the world and yourself. The thinker is a human with *options.* Philosophy is an attempt to answer the question: What are the options? Ethics, a department in philosophy, deals with the question: What are the right options?

Socrates began his questioning to get at "the unquestioned beliefs that silently, invisibly, operate at the back of the human mind." What are your first principles? he asked. Let's get them out in the open. Where do your assumptions come from? What determines the good of what you think is good?

The materials for this analysis are supplied by the Platonic psychology—the make-up of man. Plato held that the essential human being is twofold—there is the *nous*, or high intellectual and moral intelligence, and the *psyche*, which is linked with the animal spirits but sometimes aspires to unite with the *nous. A* struggle ensues, making the drama of life. Plato used this struggle as material for the Dialectic, the philosophical dialogue. We are men with minds, the Greek sophists said, and we can devise means for getting what we want. Yes, said Socrates, but be sure that what you want is good—good for you and other members of the community. The Dialectic is the rational examination of the path to the Good.

The means for getting what we want is Technique, and most Greeks—and most of the men since—were content to stipulate that what they wanted was good simply because they wanted it. Learning how to get it—teaching how to get it—became the whole business of life. This makes the subject of Mr. Barrett's book—*The Illusion of Technique.* He concludes from a study of Western history—the development of and reliance upon technique for getting what we want—that the apparent promise of technique is never kept. The technique of logical analysis has not enabled us to nail down the truth about human life. The evolution of an elaborate technology has not brought human fulfillment. It has produced a great many things we thought we needed, or could not do without and be happy, but having all those things has not turned the world into a happy place. As Mr. Barrett says:

> To tell the truth, the idea of utopia in any of its versions hardly inspires us any more. The prospect of life without any frictions or imperfections, either to be overcome or courageously borne, must strike us as an empty and insipid ideal. Spared the struggle against evils, we are also denied the zest of battle and the satisfaction of our partial victories. Utopia would bring such a rupture with the whole human past that we would lose the inheritance of history, particularly in the arts. Tolstoi remarks at the beginning of Anna Karenina that happy families are all alike, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. The rub

> of imperfection brings out the singular and individual. How could you write a story about two people whose life together was an uninterrupted happiness? They were happy happy happy. . . . Their private utopia would in fact be the empty monotony of oblivion. Condemned to utopia, mankind would have to go through the spiritual agony of recreating a religion to give itself meaning.

William Barrett writes in full maturity. He is a man who has absorbed the essentials of Western culture, played an active part as a writer and editor in the life of his time, and has now set down his reflections as a thinker. He has no case to prove, no beliefs to defend or advocate, but a story to tell—the story of Western man. He seems to write easily, using the materials of Western thought as a composer would draw on the resources of all music to develop his theme. Reading his book is like having a conversation about the modern world, raising the questions which lie before us all. He speaks for many when he says:

> Two centuries ago, a century ago, men thought of themselves as the masters of history; today we are more likely to think of ourselves as its victims. The literature of the twentieth century is largely a lamentation for ourselves as victims. And in nothing are we more victims than in this: that we have to cope with the same life as humankind in the past but without its most potent means of doing so. We cannot will back a faith that has been lost. We shall have to live back into that way of being in whose ambience the religious once drew breath.

This book has a quality which is something like the mood of Martin Green's *The Challenge of the Mahatmas.* In the presence of Tolstoy and Gandhi, Green was moved to alter certain of his ways of life. As he wrote *The Illusion of Technique*, which records the breakdown and failure of the methods on which the West has relied for so long, a similar feeling overtook William Barrett:

> I myself have given up drinking while writing this book. The motives were various. There was the sheer practical one of finding out how much more energy was available when even "moderate social drinking"—which, as everyone knows, is sometimes not moderate at all—was given up. There was too a kind of experimental curiosity, since I was dealing with the question of freedom, and this motive may have been abetted considerably by a sense of rebellion against Skinner and the behaviorists. We can never be sure how much our freedom may be fueled by the sense of rebellion. Dostoevski made the point so powerfully and unpleasantly in his *Notes from the Underground* that one would think the behaviorist, if he had ever read him, would not have forgotten it. Thrown into the determinists' community, where our conditioning has all been preprogrammed, some of us might set about breaking laws simply out of a sense of rebellion. Very shortly, too, I found that the motive of sheer self-denial became attractive. The ascetic impulse is a much stronger impulse than we think, and forms a not inconsiderable part of our sense of discipline, without which life would cease to have very much meaning. Yet almost everything in our culture, except perhaps the example of a few of our athletes, seems to conspire to discredit and weaken this impulse, and give us back the image of ourselves as passive consumers.
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> For a moment I am almost tempted to write a manual *How To Give Up Drinking*, but I am immediately checked from such a brash undertaking by the realization that there is no automatic technique that would be valid for everyone. What works for one person may not work for another. In the business of changing ourselves, each of us is ultimately on our own; and that can be one of the attractions in striking out on a new path. We touch again on our old question of the relation of technique to the individual and problematic situations with which experience confronts us. Skinner and his fellow behaviorists would be practicing a great deceit on those who submitted to their "technology of behavior," expecting that it would equip them for all exigencies of life. The poor subject steps out of the conditioning box into a world where he is at a loss when he finds out he must often improvise as he goes along.

What is Mr. Barrett saying here? He is saying—or showing—that the purpose of thinking is to have a self-generated effect on our lives.

Before men begin to think, they act on impulse, on "desire and aversion," as Diderot (and Skinner) put it. But when they think, they modify their actions. If they become fascinated by this way of making changes, then the mastery of the technique of thinking becomes paramount—along

with the many other techniques of getting what we want. But all these devotees of technique leave out the host of such capacities and activities: the *human being* is the host, and is more, much more, than a thinking machine. The human being has all the "givers" of his nature, which include godlike as well as earthly inclinations.

The driving energy of human life, prior to thought, including all the longings which color our thoughts, may be evidence that we have a work to do on earth—something more and far better than the satisfaction of our appetites. This might be named the religious impulse, which is continually being misdefined and shamefully interpreted. What if we are half-gods, or gods in the making? What if we are members of a spiritual tribe of Prometheans, now held down by the chains which misdirected thinking has wrought?

What if thinking is the necessary means of finding release from those chains, and thus to become the kind of beings who eventually will no longer need to pursue laborious intellectual tacking, first one way, then the other, in order to reach solid land? And what if those wonderful computers which inspire such awe are only materialized versions of inherent human capacities, cognitive faculties to be developed into mighty intuitions of the meanings and truths we long to know?

The modern world seems now to be reaching the end of the line in the applications of technique. There has been a great sufficiency of exposes of the inadequacy of the "technological fix." The fixes don't work when what is called for is an act of self-reference. For this, as Jacob Bronowski pointed out, is what is required of us when the assumptions of the system we have been relying upon break down. The system is man-made, and needs to be re-made. All technical systems are man-made. And they are all fallible. Mr. Barrett says of self-reference:

> Yet this absence of rigid technique is not a sign of the poverty of consciousness but of its richness. Consciousness is much richer and more fecund . . . than any of the techniques it devises. For every computer that the mind creates it can devise a problem that this computer cannot solve. One has thus to throw oneself on the resources of consciousness and let it invent all manner of associations to strengthen your self-denial and make it more attractive. Soon the absence of the habit may become more interesting than the habit you have discarded.

Herbert Spencer, critically anticipating the modern reliance on techniques, proposed a basic question for planners: "What type of social structure am I tending to produce?" The same question ought to be asked by all others, although in another form: What sort of human being am I tending to produce? Will I become a prisoner of technique, or a free improviser who is able to drop a method that no longer works, and devise one that will?

Mr. Barrett gives a warning we should attend to:

> . . . technology, when it becomes total, lifts mankind to a level where it confronts problems with which technical thinking is not prepared to cope. Suppose the experimentation has been done successfully, and we have arrived safely at the point where we have in our hands the powers of genetic manipulation. What then do we do with them? What kind of life do we foster? What human traits do we seek to engender? . . . technique by itself cannot determine a philosophy; accordingly, the powers of genetic manipulation, were they all at our disposal, would not provide the wisdom for using them. That must come from another kind of thinking for which a technical civilization might have become incompetent through sheer lack of practice.

It must be simple courtesy which constrains Mr. Barrett to put this possibility in the future, and speak of it as only a possibility. For surely he knows that the incompetence he refers to is a present fact in a great many areas. As for genetic manipulations, some molecular biologists' when asked, several years ago, how they would redesign human beings—after the skills of changing the genetic heritage are perfected—spoke casually of devising two stomachs, such as cows have, for better digestion of our food, and of developing

eyes on the end of antennae, as some insects do, so that we'll be able to look around corners. Should such men be allowed to plan our evolutionary future?

Mr. Barrett's diagnosis is relentless. Speaking of the society created by continuous developments of technique, he says:

> To a casual glance it might seem that human subjectivity has become so inconspicuous that it has virtually disappeared. Our lifestyles—a horrible term, which is itself a part of the general objectifying phenomenon—go in the direction of extroversion, of the most mindless and aimless sort. The television talk show replaces conversation; the information bulletin supplants serious and detailed journalism; and the weekly news digest crowds out the older reflective periodical. One could go on almost endlessly merely on these prevailing modes of communication that tend to rivet us more and more to the quick, casual, efficient, but also thoroughly external snapshot of reality. Subjectivity of any kind seems to have become a fugitive and alien thing.
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> Fugitive and alien! These words point to where the subject in the subject-object pair has gone: It has not vanished, it is present in its overwhelming alienation. . . .
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> Metaphysically speaking, humankind has become "the lonely crowd" adrift in a cosmos from which its traditional ties have been severed. This is the ghost that haunts all science fiction. Comb through the pages of this bleak genre and you will be hard put to find anywhere a reassuring picture of the human future.

What is "alienation"? It is the sense of not feeling anywhere at home. Alienation is overcome, as we saw earlier, by getting to work. Not just any work, but the work that belongs to us. What that work is will have to be found out by thinking.

REVIEW
JOHN McTAGGART

AN admirable custom among men of learning is the practice of writing down personal recollections of distinguished teachers to whom they feel indebted. A scholar's work is usually accessible, but his quality as teacher may be difficult to discern between the lines of the perfected product. A living dimension is added by the memory of one who went to school to him. A good example is provided by Sidney Hook (in the *American Scholar* for the Summer of 1976), who wrote in appreciation of Morris Raphael Cohen, a teacher of philosophy at City College of New York during the early years of this century. Recalling a speech in which Cohen had said that one of the services philosophy renders education is as a "logical disinfectant," Hook observed:

> It was a greater philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, who remarked in another connection, "One cannot live on a diet of disinfectants"—especially in philosophy. Cohen was well aware that philosophy was vision, and that, at best the purpose of logical techniques was to work out the details of the vision and to test its deliverances. The legacy of the great philosophers consists not in what they deny or reject but in what they see or affirm. . . . Wisdom was apparent in his writing and moral courage in his stance on various controversial issues.

Morris Cohen knew the obligations we have to the past. Toward the end of his life he wrote:

> None of us are self-made men and those who think they are, are generally no credit to their makers. The language in which our thinking moves, the ideals to which we are attuned in the formative years of our childhood, our habits, occupations, and pastimes, even our gestures, facial expressions and intonations, are so largely social products of generations of teaching, that no man can understand himself and his limitations unless he understands his heritage; and it is very difficult to understand one's heritage, or anything else, unless he approaches it with a certain amount of sympathy.

A more complete recollection of the career and thought of a teacher of philosophy, John McTaggart, is that by G. Lowes Dickinson, in a book titled simply *McTaggart*, which we found tucked away on an obscure shelf in the MANAS library. Both McTaggart and Dickinson taught at Cambridge University in England. Both represent a quality of thought seldom encountered in the United States. Call it an English sort of "maturity," combining what seems innate generosity with intellectual rigor. Dickinson, who had been a Platonic scholar in his youth, was fascinated by the Orient and wrote of Chinese civilization with rare understanding. He was the anonymous author of *Letters from a Chinese Official* (1903), in which he made an effective case against any attempt by the British to change or "improve" Chinese customs or culture. He devoted himself to bringing an understanding of the East to Western readers. Always an acute observer, he said after a visit to the United States (in 1909):

> The impression America makes on me is that the windows are blocked up. It has become incredible that this continent was colonized by the Pilgrim Fathers. That intense, narrow, unlovely, but genuine spiritual life has been transformed into industrial energy; and this energy, in its new form, the churches, oddly enough, are endeavoring to recapture and use to drive their machines. Religion is becoming a department of practical business. . . .
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> It does not concern itself with a life beyond; it gives you here and now what you want. . . . The only part of the Gospels one would suppose that interests the modern American is the miracles; for the miracles really did do something. As for the Sermon on the Mount well, no Westerner ever took that seriously.
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> This conversion of religion into business is interesting enough. But even more striking is the conversion of business into religion. Business is so serious that it sometimes assumes the shrill tone of revivalist propaganda.

Dickinson and McTaggart read philosophy together at Cambridge and it was with pleasure that Dickinson composed his memoir concerning a man who took the issues of religion seriously, but as a philosopher. The mood of those days at Cambridge University comes through clearly. The most eminent thinkers of the time (1899-1925) were there. McTaggart was the principal inspiration of a club that met for philosophical discussions, which Whitehead, and later Bertrand Russell, attended.

McTaggart, Dickinson says, set for himself the task "of demonstrating by reason the truth which he already believed." The instrument of this demonstration was metaphysics. Hardly anyone in

the modern age has devoted himself so completely and arduously to metaphysical thinking, and since the world now seems on the brink of another great cycle of philosophizing, McTaggart's works assume primary importance for those about to take part in this intellectual adventure. His *Some Dogmas of Religion* and his *Studies in the Hegelian Cosmology* are texts of basic metaphysical analysis, of inestimable value to those who wonder what sort of "certainty" is possible for idealistic rationalism.

A contributor to Dickinson's memoir, S. V. Keeling, says of McTaggart's lifelong calling:

> It is from a passionate interest in the great traditional problems of human nature and human destiny that McTaggart approaches the technical study of metaphysics. Its inspiration with him is emphatically a religious one. This, however, does not mean that its source lay in Christianity nor in any other of what he calls "the traditional national religions." It is religious in the sense in which the inspiration of Plato, Spinoza, and Hegel—who accepted no such national religion—was religious; and again, in the meaning he defines as "an emotion resting on a conviction of a harmony between ourselves and the universe at large." Not that McTaggart affirmed, antecedently to investigation and proof, that there was such a harmony, but he was convinced that a denial of it no less than an affirmation was an issue of supreme importance to humanity, and one that could not be decided except by metaphysics.
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> He conceived it, then, as a momentous matter, for his own sake and for the sake of his fellows, to discover whether a God exists; whether our will is free; whether we survive bodily death, and if so, to what end; whether the universe is more good than bad, and whether it becomes better or worse with the passage of time; whether what exists—the universe and ourselves in particular—has any purpose and value.

McTaggart developed firm convictions on all these questions, using metaphysics as the tool in his reflections. He asked:

> Are there any questions which affect our welfare more than these? Is it true that what primarily affects our welfare is the truth on these matters and not our knowledge of the truth? But a belief that things are well with the world brings happiness, a belief that things are ill with the world brings misery. And this involves the intense practical importance of our belief on the problems of religion.

In a conversation with McTaggart concerning the supreme importance of metaphysics, a student remarked that vision is all-important, and that "to most people metaphysical analysis can nourish no vision without something else to take the place of outworn religious dogma." McTaggart replied, "Yes, I know: it's the tragedy of metaphysics." In *Nature of Existence* McTaggart expressed a hope for the future:

> The study of metaphysics will perhaps never be very common, but it may be more common in the future than it is at present. The world's leisure is increasing, and much of it may be devoted to study. And if study at present is rarely study of metaphysics, that is largely because metaphysics seems unpractical. If, however, people find that they cannot have religion without it, then it will become of all studies the most practical.

McTaggart put the results of some of his thinking in a letter to Sir Francis Younghusband:

> I should agree that God (if you think it best to call it God) stands to the selves as the regiment does to the soldiers. But I should not call either God or the regiment a personality. And I should not hold that God has any intrinsic value—the only intrinsic value is in the selves, though they only have it because they are united in the Divine Unity.

He added:

> I conceive the self as like a jet of water. All the more so because fountains spread out as they reach the top. I think of us as a fountain the culmination of whose efforts is to reach the heights at which they will directly touch one another.

The heart of McTaggart's philosophy was his belief in immortality. Dickinson says in summary:

> . . . he believed that the world of appearance was moving, on the whole, towards the world of Reality, and that all souls would in the end arrive there. It was a very long, and might be a very terrible, journey. Souls would pass through innumerable incarnations and the most varied destinies before they arrived; and McTaggart himself anticipated very bad fumes for himself.

The test of his convictions, Dickinson suggests, came in 1925 when death by a heart attack overtook him unexpectedly at fifty-eight. "I am grieved that we must part," he said to his wife, "but you know I am not afraid of death." The doctor in attendance asked, "What is this man. . . . A philosopher?" . . . "I never knew a philosopher was so serene."

COMMENTARY
PROPHETIC VOICES

ON page 2 William Barrett is quoted as saying that Dostoevski wrote effectively on the tendency of human beings to resist manipulation. It seems almost certain that Mr. Barrett had in mind the following in *Notes from the Underground:*

> You gentlemen have taken your whole register of human advantages from the averages of statistical figures and politico-economic formulas. . . . Shower upon man every earthly blessing, drown him in a sea of happiness, so that nothing but bubbles of bliss can be seen on the surface, give him *economic prosperity* such that he should have nothing else to do but sleep, eat cakes and busy himself with the continuation of his species; and even then, out of sheer ingratitude, sheer spite, man would play you some nasty trick. He would even risk his cakes and would desire the most fatal rubbish, the most *uneconomical* absurdity, simply to introduce into all this positive good sense his final fantastic element . . . simply to prove to himself—as though that were necessary—that men are still men and not the keys of a piano. . . .

The whole work of man really seems to consist in nothing but proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not a piano key.

Another of Mr. Barrett's remarks has confirmation from an almost forgotten nineteenth-century thinker, the Swiss diarist Amiel. Barrett says that everything in our culture conspires against response to the impulse to self-control, self-discipline, and self-denial. Amiel wrote in 1852:

> Every despotism has a specially keen and hostile instinct for whatever keeps up human dignity, and independence. And it is curious to see scientific and realist teaching used everywhere as a means of stifling all freedom of investigation as addressed to moral questions under a dead weight of facts. Materialism is the auxiliary doctrine of every tyranny, whether of the one or the masses. To crush what is spiritual moral, human so to speak, in man, by specializing him: to form mere wheels of the great social machine, instead of perfect individuals; to make society and not conscience the center of life, to enslave the soul to things, to depersonalize man, this is the dominant drift of our epoch. Everywhere you may see a tendency to substitute the laws of dead matter (number, mass) for the laws of moral nature (persuasion, adhesion, faith); equality, the principle of mediocrity, becoming a dogma; unity aimed at through uniformity; numbers doing duty for argument; negative liberty, which has no law *in itself,* and recognizes no limit except in force, everywhere taking the place of positive liberty, which means action guided by an inner law and curbed by a moral authority. . . .
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> Materialism coarsens and petrifies everything; makes everything vulgar and every truth false. And there is a religious and political materialism which spoils all that it touches, liberty, equality, individuality. So that there are two ways of understanding democracy.

Thinkers of the caliber of Amiel saw more than a hundred years ago the needs which are at last being recognized today. What sort of thinking is this? What protection does it afford against self-deception? Is there any "science" in it? Even Amiel's guesses seem threaded with prophetic insight. He said in 1871:

> I suspect that the communism of the *Internationale* is merely the pioneer of Russian nihilism, which will be the common grave of the old races. . . . If so, the salvation of humanity will depend upon individualism of the brutal American sort.

Then he added:

> Surely the remedy consists in everywhere insisting upon the truth which democracy systematically forgets, . . . on the inequalities of talent, of virtue and merit, and on the respect due to age, to capacity, to services rendered. Juvenile arrogance and jealous ingratitude must be resisted *all the more strenuously because social forms are in their favor;* and when the institutions of a country lay stress only on the rights of the individual, it is the business of the citizen to lay all the more stress on duty. There must be a constant effort to correct the prevailing tendency of things.

We don't use language like that now, but the same ideas are coming to the surface in other dress.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
VERBAL FANTASY

HAVING been introduced by a ten-year-old to *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster (with illustrations by Jules Feiffer)—a book that everyone else seems to know about—we began wondering if this is an example of unintentional myth-making in the age of technology. The ten-year-old likes the Greek myths, likes hearing them again and again, but the story of Theseus or even the labors of Heracles don't come close to gaining the avid attention claimed by Milo and his adventures in places like Digitopolis and Dictionopolis and the Mountains of Ignorance. Things are delightfully backwards in this story. Words determine identities and meanings. For example, Milo, a boy about nine or ten, has a companion in his wanderings, a bulky dog named Tock with an enormous watch embedded in his middle, which of course ticks. Because he is a *watch*dog.

Why do children like these verbal fantasies? An adult reading them aloud is likely to feel that *he* knows the meaning behind allusions far over the child's head, but then come those wonderful chortles from the listener. Why does he think it's so funny?

Early in their adventures Milo asks Tock how he became a watchdog, obtaining this explanation:

> "My family have always been watchdogs—from father to son, almost since time began.
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> "You see," he continued, beginning to feel better, "once there was no time at all, and people found it very inconvenient. They never knew whether they were eating lunch or dinner, and they were always missing trains. So time was invented to help them keep track of the day and get places when they should. When they began to count all the time that was available, what with 60 seconds in a minute and 60 minutes in an hour and 24 hours in a day and 365 days in a year, it seemed as if there was much more than could ever be used. 'If there's so much of it, it couldn't be very valuable,' was the general opinion, and it soon fell into disrepute. People wasted it and even gave it away. Then we were given the job of seeing that no one wasted time again," he said, sitting up proudly. "It's hard work but a noble calling. For you see"—and now he was standing on the seat, one foot on the windshield, shouting with his arms outstretched—"it is our most valuable possession, more precious than diamonds. It marches on, it and tide wait for no man, and . . . "
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> At that point in the speech the car hit a bump in the road and the watchdog collapsed in a heap on the front seat with his alarm ringing again furiously.
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> "Are you all right?" shouted Milo.
>
> "Umphh," grunted Tock. "Sorry to get carried away, but I think you get the point."

Maybe children like this story because Milo drives his own car, which just sort of appears. The book uses a lot of big words children aren't supposed to understand, but they make a zany sort of sense in the story. How does it all start, and what does the title mean? Well, a bored Milo gets in the mail the makings of a cardboard turnpike tollbooth, life-size, complete with window and a slot for coins, and the coins. He puts it together, studies the map supplied, and drops a coin in the box. In the next moment he is rolling along, on his way to Dictionopolis.

After reading this story to a child for the second or third time, you wonder about its appeal. There are no sly attempts to be didactic. It's just rollicking ridicule of pedantic learning. The characters are verbal monstrosities—a nice old witch is a *which*—but maybe the children don't notice the satirical use of learned terms, although they are likely to suspect that grownup pedagogues are the targets. Maybe they like it because it's a rattling good story.

In the final pursuit scene, when Tock and Milo and Rhyme and Reason, two princesses they have freed from captivity in the Mountains of Ignorance, are in desperate flight, the enraged demons begin to overtake them:

> From off on the right, his heavy bulbous body lurching dangerously on the spindly legs which barely supported him, came the overbearing Know-it-all,

talking continuously. A dismal demon who was mostly mouth, he was ready at a moment's notice to offer misinformation on any subject. And, while he often tumbled heavily, it was never he who was hurt, but, rather, the unfortunate person on whom he fell.

Next to him, but just a little behind, came the Gross Exaggeration, whose grotesque features and thoroughly unpleasant manners were hideous to see, and whose rows of wicked teeth were made only to mangle the truth. They hunted together, and were bad luck to anyone they caught.

Riding along on the back of anyone who'd carry him was the Threadbare Excuse, a small pathetic figure whose clothes were worn and tattered and who mumbled the same things again and again, in a low but piercing voice: "Well, I've been sick—but the page was torn out—I missed the bus—but no one *else* did it—well, I've been sick—but the page was torn out—I missed the bus—but no one *else* did it." He looked quite harmless and friendly but, once he grabbed on, he almost never let go.

In the end, Milo restores Rhyme and Reason to their lovely estate in the land of Wisdom, and Pedantry loses power, ungraciously receding. After being feted as a Hero of the Realm, Milo climbs into his little car, drives to the tollbooth, drops a coin, and is suddenly once more at home. It is a story as old as time, which never ceases to be fascinating. You don't mind the technological props; in fact, they fit in perfectly.

We haven't said anything about the drawings by Feiffer, which are just right. His idea of a Dodecahedron that talks may prove unforgettable, rivalled only by the Spelling Bee, a formidably boring insect.

The Phantom Tollbooth is a fairly recent book—it came out in 1961 and is now in paperback in a Random House edition. Another children's book we have enjoyed through the years is much older, but doesn't seem to suffer from age. *Green Magic* (D. Appleton) by Julie Closson Kenly was published in 1930 and still seems one of the best books about nature for use with small children. The second chapter is on leaves and starts out by saying that the idea that trees don't have any in the winter is a big mistake.

The bare trees of winter have as many leaves on them as they ever had! They are packed up carefully, but they are there. . . .

Long before the trees shake of their beautiful scarlet and yellow autumn foliage they begin to busy themselves over their next year's clothes. They make tiny brown clothes boxes that are so small they can be packed away in the most minute space. These queer little boxes the tree makes for its new leaves are called *leaf buds*. You can see them on any bare twig. They look like thick, pointed bumps, and are either on the tips of the branches or just above the scars left by the dead leaves. . . .

The leaf buds are small at first, but they begin to swell when March comes, and by April the tree is awake and getting ready to unpack. If you watch the leaf buds then, you will see them getting larger and larger until finally the scales which cover them split apart, and out come the new leaves looking very very damp and limp and shiny and so wrinkled you wonder how in the name of goodness they will ever get unkinked. . . .

You have often heard people exclaim: "See how the trees have come out almost in a single night!" meaning of course, that the tree made all those leaves in twenty-four hours! All the trees really do in May is merely to—unpack.

FRONTIERS

The New Economics

THE first part of *Stepping Stones* ("Appropriate Technology and Beyond"), edited by Lane de Moll and Gigi Coe, and published by Schocken at $7.95 (paperback), contains some of the best. thinking available about the individual and community changes on the way in the United States. Thinking about personal change usually has spontaneous origins. The mysteries of psychology are involved. But after there are enough individual changes to become evident in a changing community life, orderly thinking about the meaning and importance of change for the larger society makes itself felt. This is the content of *Stepping Stones*. Early in the volume are extracts from a now famous paper by Howard T. Odum, "Energy, Ecology, Economics." He has this to say about how people habitually think concerning the common economic welfare:

> Our system of man and nature will soon be shifting from a rapid growth criterion of economic survival to steady state non-growth as the criterion for maximizing one's work for economic survival. . . .
>
> Ecologists are familiar with both growth states and steady state and observe both in natural systems in their work routinely, but economists were all trained in their subject during rapid growth, and most don't even know there is such a thing as steady state. Only the last two centuries have seen a burst of temporary growth because of temporary use of special energy supplies that accumulated over long periods of geologic time.
>
> High quality of life and equitable economic distribution are more closely approximated in steady state than in growth periods. During growth, emphasis is on competition, and large differences in economic and energetic welfare develop competitive exclusion, instability, poverty and unequal wealth are characteristic. During steady state, competition is controlled and eliminated, being replaced with regulatory systems, high division and diversity of labor, uniform energy distributions, little change, and growth only for replacement purposes. Love of stable system quality replaces love of net gain. Religious ethics adopt something closer to that of those primitive peoples that were formerly dominant in zones of the world with cultures based on the steady energy flows from the sun. Socialistic ideals about distribution are more consistent with steady state than growth.

Other articles in this section deal with the changes in thinking which will come either naturally or from the compulsion of events, as we move toward a stable, steady-state mode of economic life. At the end of his analysis, Steve Baer says:

> When small children first start paying close attention to money and to their allowances, they briefly commit their whole minds to their few coins and what chores they did to earn them—without even considering the budget of the family's household. We can't allow our entire civilization to be similarly ignorant for long. We must ask who's keeping score and why they have such peculiar methods.

What does he mean? Do we really have a childlike accounting system? The answer is yes.

> If you take down your clothesline and buy an electric clothes dryer, the electric consumption of the nation rises slightly. If you go in the other direction and remove the electric clothes dryer and install a clothesline, the consumption of electricity drops slightly, but there is no credit given anywhere on the charts and graphs to solar energy, which is now drying the clothes. . . .
>
> If you drive a motorcycle, the gasoline you consume appears in the nation's energy budget. If you get a horse to ride and graze on range nearby, the horse's energy which you use does not appear in anyone's energy accounting.
>
> If you install interior greenhouse lights, the electricity you use is faithfully recorded. If you grow plants outside, no attempt is made at an accounting.
>
> If you drive your car to the corner to buy a newspaper the gasoline consumption appears. If you walk—using food energy—the event has disappeared from sight, for the budget of solar energy consumed by people in food is seldom mentioned.

Our ideas about our economic lives, in short, are basically distorted in behalf of "growth." If we want to change our lives, a better accounting system will disclose the urgency of the change:

> It should be pointed out to the people promoting the use of solar energy in the place of fossil fuels that

> the accounting systems used by the experts are rigged against them. As I understand it, we are being prepared to accept that there are legitimate and illegitimate ways of using the sun. If you purchase certain kinds of hardware to exploit solar energy it will be accounted for and a credit given to the sun. If you depend on more customary old-fashioned uses of solar energy—growing food, drying clothes, sun bathing, warming a house with south windows, the sun credit is totally ignored.
>
> Our present accounting system, with its promise of a credit to the sun after the right hardware has been installed, can only discourage good house design.

Childlike bookkeeping occurs in other ways, as Scott Burns makes clear:

> In the past, when the productive activity of the household was being drawn into the market economy by the industrial revolution, the rate and amount of true economic growth was overstated. Economic activity was not created, it was merely *transferred* from the household (where it was not counted) to the market economy (where it was). The labor of the woman who "put up" fruits and vegetables for the winter by home canning was not included in the national income. When she took a job in a canning factory and purchased canned fruit and vegetables in a store, both her work and that of the clerk who sold her the goods became part of the national income. Its growth was applauded irrespective of its illusory nature.

Underlying such quite practical changes in the way we are beginning to think about our economic lives is a more basic reform, well described by E. F. Schumacher:

> Ephemeral goods are subject to the economic calculus. Their only value lies in being used up, and it is necessary to ensure that their *cost of production* does not exceed the *benefit* derived from destroying them. But eternal goods are not intended for destruction: so there is no occasion for an economic calculus, because the benefit—the product of annual value and time—is infinite and therefore incalculable.
>
> Once we recognize the validity of the distinction between the ephemeral and the eternal, we are able to distinguish in principle, between two different types of "standard of living." Two societies may have the same volume of production and the same *income per head of population*, but the *quality of life* or lifestyle may show fundamental and incomparable differences: the one placing its main emphasis on ephemeral satisfactions and the other devoting itself primarily to the creation of eternal values. In the former there may be opulent living in terms of ephemeral goods and starvation in terms of eternal goods—eating, drinking and wallowing in entertainment, in sordid, ugly, mean and unhealthy surroundings—while in the latter, there may be frugal living in terms of ephemeral goods and opulence in terms of eternal goods—modest, simple, and healthy consumption in a noble setting. In terms of conventional economic accounting, they are both equally rich, equally developed—which merely goes to show that the purely quantitative approach misses the point.

This is the sort of thinking which leads to individual change. The other reforms follow naturally, their logic developing on a sound foundation.