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MAZE OF OPPOSITES

WE live in a world where only half-truths are convincing. This is not really remarkable since our world—probably any world, universe, or external environment—cannot possibly exhibit more than a part of itself to any single observer at any given time. Half-truths, in short, have the confirmation of experience, while whole truths, should we somehow come upon them, and be able to recognize them, might dissolve most or all of what we know. Accordingly, we live by half-truths, argue by using them, win with them, and, inevitably, are defeated by them. Yet the world of half-truths is the world of action. An intelligence absorbed in whole truths alone may feel no call to do anything. Men of action, therefore, quite naturally jeer at would-be philosophers, calling them armchair thinkers, ivory towerists; and use other epithets that will come to mind. Yet the glancing insight of a philosopher will sometimes give a man of action balance in choosing and working toward goals.

A rather revealing half-truth coming from some philosopher or historian is that revolution always devours its own children. Is it true? It was certainly true for Robespierre. Did this occur to him on the way to the guillotine? It may have, since he was an exceptionally bright man. It was true, also, for Bukharin, and one wonders what he thought when he came to die at Stalin's hands. Michael Polanyi's attempt to put some half-truths together in *The Tacit Dimension* is of interest here:

> Marxism embodies the boundless moral aspirations of modern man in a theory which protects his ideas from skeptical doubt by denying the reality of moral motives in public life. The power of Marxism lies in uniting the two contradictory forces of the modern mind into a single political doctrine. Thus originated a world-embracing idea, in which moral doubt is frenzied by moral fury and moral fury is armed by scientific nihilism.
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> Bukharin, explaining urbanely, in the spring of 1935, that scientific truth would no longer be pursued for its own sake under socialism, completed the wheel full circle. Embodied in a scientifically sanctioned political power, moral perfectionalism had no place left for truth. Bukharin confirmed this three years later when, facing death, he bore false witness against himself. For to tell the truth would have been to condemn the Revolution, which was unthinkable.

This sort of criticism of Communism, while the most valuable, since it explains by understanding the moral forces involved, is of no interest at the political level of the shaping of "public opinion," because the politically useful is *always* at best a half-truth. Politics, which is the struggle for power, lives entirely by half-truths. Most politicians survive and win by denunciation of "enemies," whether at home or abroad. Only in a society which has given up the search for scapegoats shall we be able to get rid of such politicians. That would be a society able to listen to and profit by the thought and criticism of such writers as Michael Polanyi, Simone Weil, and Hannah Arendt, and, let us add, Louis Halle. These are minds eternally suspicious of half-truths, and very careful not to lay claim to the whole of it while examining and dissecting the succession of illusions that have made so much of the history of mankind.

William James was the brilliant critic of those who habitually take the part of something—or someone—for the whole. In his recent book, *A Stroll with William James* (*Harper* & Row), Jacques Barzun provides a great many passages of Jamesian criticism, in one of which he says:

> A very common example of this false division is the biographer's statement that the subject he is writing about was "a bundle of contradictions." The facts show, let us say, that though stingy toward his family, he was generous to strangers; open to new ideas of social reform but old-fashioned in his taste for clothing or art; trustworthy in love and business, but an unscrupulous gossip. These are made into contradictions by abstracting and dividing: "stinginess" contradicts "generosity." At that rate everybody is a "bundle" too, though there is no logical or psychological reason why a man's "generosity" should be total and invariable as the concept is—any

more than his horsemanship should keep him at all times in the saddle.

This thought-cliché is perhaps of small consequence. More damaging is the political use of privitive concepts by which a modern citizen thinks of himself as a liberal, a conservative or a socialist. Anyone living in the free world today is necessarily all three: he or she supports and appreciates the established freedoms—hence a liberal. Freedoms being guaranteed by constitutions and laws, that same voter wants these things kept inviolate, together with other established things—hence a conservative. Beyond the fixed and the free lies the socialism of institutions owned and run by governments from roads, schools, and national parks to public utilities food reserves, and armed forces, not to mention the use of the state's resources in social security, welfare, business and industry, the arts, scientific research, and what not else. Only total overthrowers want to abolish any of these three coexisting realms. And since the leeway left either for liberating or for wholly controlling activities is small, and nobody desires to keep everything just as it is, the three conceptual tags of politics that fitted the conditions of nineteenth-century Europe now only serve to obscure a complex reality, including the stubborn muddle in those who so label themselves.

Barzun, following James, turns to the familiar area of proverbs for further illustrations:

When therefore the pragmatist says that his truth fits his purpose and may not fit others he is not claiming the privilege of being "subjective" or eccentric, he is only pointing to a condition of human thought. . . . This same versatility—so to speak—is reflected wherever we turn. It occurs, for example, in the well-known conflict between pair after pair of proverbs: "Look before you leap," but "He who hesitates is lost." Both are experientially true, but which should one follow? "It depends" is the only possible answer, which is itself in the legal dictum "circumstances alter cases." The law is in fact a mass of distinctions based on the diverse perspectives embodied in human conduct. Moralists, poets, and novelists contradict each other in the same helpful way. They truthfully set down their wisdom in maxims that do not jibe. . . .

Pragmatism describes the way we think, but to think well is rare, precisely because it is not straight "reasoning" or straight intuition, but a weaving together of all the relevants—abstract and concrete, obvious or recalled, known or imagined.

Everybody understands more or less the need to complete thought by appropriate action, as proverbial wisdom shows. "Deeds, not words"; "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions"; "He means well"; "Handsome is as handsome does"; "The proof of the pudding is in the eating"—all state or imply the pragmatic test. But the failure of our schooling to teach it as a conscious habit lets "ideas" cloud even simple issues.

"Ideas" also obscure complex issues, such as the role of authority in government, which may be simplified to the point of horror, as in the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution. The Jacobins, Ortega points out (in *The Modern Theme*, Harper & Row, 1961), were faithful Cartesians:

Now, the Cartesian only admits one virtue: pure intellectual perfection. To all else he is deaf and blind. For him what is anterior and what is present are equally undeserving of the least respect. On the contrary, from the rational point of view, they assume a positively criminal aspect. He urges, therefore, the extermination of the offending growth and the immediate installation of his definitive social order. The ideal of the future, constructed by pure intellect, must supplant both past and present. This is the temper that produces revolutions. . . . The Constituent Assembly makes "solemn declaration of the rights of Man and of the Citizen" in order "that, it being possible to compare the acts of the legislative and executive powers, at any given moment, with the final aim of 'every' political institution, they may be the more respected, so that the demands of citizens, being founded henceforth in simple and unquestionable principles," etc., etc. We might be reading a geometrical treatise. . . . It is illogical to guillotine a prince and replace him by a principle. The latter, no less than the former, places life under an absolute autocracy. And this is, precisely, an impossibility. Neither rationalist absolutism, which keeps reason but annihilates life, nor relativism, which keeps life but dissolves reason, are possibilities.

James, we feel sure, would have cheered if he could have read this. While James, for similar reasons, distrusted Plato, he is not a writer that Platonists should ignore, since he wants only that they put their ideas to continual testing. He is champion of neglected relativities, which are, after all, the only provocatives we have to action. As Barzun says:

> With all his limitations of temperament and circumstance, James knew what he was about. He gauged accurately the difference between his qualified affirmations and the imposing certitudes he was attacking. "I am no lover of disorder, but fear to lose truth by the pretension to possess it wholly." He distrusted bigness in most of the philosophical models available, because—as an English writer put it—"in philosophy and the arts a spacious display creates an illusion of substance." James could have cited as proof the many systems he had studied in the course of acquiring his vast erudition. Superior intellectual honesty (the twin of modesty) explains his long refusal to build a system of his own.

Yet one could say that James really needed the big systems—true or false—for the exercise of his exceptional intellectual powers. He was, after all, above anything else a *teacher,* which made him hypersensitive to whatever stands in the way of clear communication. The world of knowledge is a world of generalizations about the world, yet since nearly all the *useful* generalizations have contradicting opposites, one must always recognize the limit of their usefulness. When still in his twenties, while on an expedition sponsored by Agassiz to study the animal life of the Amazon basin, he wrote home, "No one sees farther into a generalization than his own knowledge of details extends." Barzun comments:

> The statement prefigures one of the seminal principles of his later philosophy—the passion for concreteness and the ridding not merely of the false but of misused generality. In the same message, William also shows that appreciation of others, regardless of their faults, which struck so many observers of his behavior throughout his life: Agassiz talks a great deal of nonsense, thinks James, and at once corrects that impression: "I saw only his defects at first, but his wonderful qualities throw them quite in the background. He had great personal tact too, and I see that in all his talks with me he is pitching into my loose and superficial way of thinking."
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> One finds also in these letters from Brazil the early-matured style, strong in picturesque exaggeration that was a family trait. . . . Then it may go on to self-searching tenderness about one or other members of the family or even a public figure: "I can't tell why, but albeit unused to the melting mood, I can hardly think of Abraham Lincoln without feeling on the point of blubber. Is it that he seems the representation of pure simple human nature against all conventional additions?"

It is of some interest to show, here, that one who was perhaps the greatest of all philosophers, and who interpreted the world in terms of a comparatively few all-inclusive generalizations (the Fourth Truths), namely, Gautama Buddha, was quite aware of the trap of the generalizations which are accepted in ignorance or rejection of contrasting meanings. The well-known Diamond Sutra is a treatise on this comprehensive paradox, applying to all thought. Perhaps the best or simplest account of the Buddha's wisdom in this respect is found in Edmond Holmes's *The Creed of the Buddha* (1919), in which he said:

> The more closely I study the stories in which Buddha answers the over-curious with silence and gives his reason for doing so, and the more freely I surrender myself to the subtle influence of their atmosphere, the stronger does my conviction become that Buddha kept silence, when metaphysical questions were discussed, not because he had nothing to say about great matters, but because he had far too much,—because he was overwhelmed by the flood of his own mighty thoughts, and because the channels of expression which the riddle-mongers of his day invited him to use were both too narrow and too shallow to give his soul relief.

To illustrate Holmes repeats (after Oldenberg) one of the stories told of the Buddha:

> Then the wandering monk Vacchagotta went to where the Exalted One was staying. When he had come near him, he saluted him. When saluting him, he had interchanged friendly words with him, he sat down beside him. Sitting beside him the wandering monk Vacchagotta spake to the Exalted One, saying: "How does the matter stand, venerable Gotama, is there the Ego?"
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> When he said this, the Exalted One was silent.
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> "How, then, venerable Gotama, is there not the Ego?"
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> And still the Exalted One maintained silence. Then the wandering monk Vacchagotta rose from his seat and went away.
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> But the venerable Ananda, when the wandering monk Vacchagotta had gone to a distance, soon said to the Exalted One:

"Wherefore, sire, has the Exalted One not given an answer to the questions put by the wandering monk Vacchagotta?"

"If I, Ananda, when the wandering monk Vacchagotta asked me: 'Is there the Ego?' had answered: 'The Ego is,' then that, Ananda, would have confirmed the doctrine of the Samanas and Brahmanas who believe in permanence. If I, Ananda, when the wandering monk Vacchagotta asked me: 'Is there not the Ego?' had answered: 'The Ego is not,' then that, Ananda, would have confirmed the doctrine of the Samanas and Brahmanas who believe in annihilation. If I Ananda, when the wandering monk Vacchagotta asked me 'Is there the Ego?' had answered: 'The Ego is,' would that have served my end, Ananda, by producing in him the knowledge: all existences are non-Ego?"

"That it would not, sire."

But if I, Ananda, when the wandering monk Vacchagotta asked me: 'Is there not the Ego?' had answered: "The Ego is not,' then that, Ananda, would only have caused the wandering monk Vacchagotta to be thrown from one bewilderment into another: "My ego, did it not exist before? but now it exists no longer!' "

Holmes comments:

In this story Buddha gives two reasons for refusing to answer Vacchagotta's question. He is asked to answer Yes or No. Whichever answer he may give, some school of metaphysicians is sure to claim him as its own. And whichever answer he may give, he is sure to bewilder Vacchagotta.

James, the pluralist and skeptical pragmatist, would certainly have approved the "psychology" of the Buddha's silence. Barzun gives his view:

Philosophy, in short, was not to him a profession or any sort of specialism. It was "man thinking," and "a man with no philosophy in him is the most inauspicious and unprofitable of all possible social mates." Whoever thinks about man's destiny and conduct in a detached way philosophizes. . . . Philosophy has "no method peculiar to itself: it observes, discriminates, generalizes, classifies, looks for causes, traces analogies, and makes hypotheses." In these last three words James implies the hope that philosophy will present views as hypotheses and "end by forswearing all dogmatism whatever," in which event "philosophers may get into as close contact as realistic novelists with the facts of life." . . .

Nor can science add a single helpful word. It ignores purpose and first cause; as the Nobel physicist Steven Weinberg has said: "The more the universe becomes comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless." He meant: comprehensible scientifically. What science leaves for philosophy to do is to examine "the extreme diversity of aspects under which reality undoubtedly exists", to "see the familiar as if it were strange and the strange as if it were familiar" and thus "rouse us from our native dogmatic slumber and break up our caked prejudices."

James was a man of his time, thus able to speak to the best minds of his and following generations. He discovered the limitations of half-truths and time-bound viewpoints, and developed a method of always looking beyond them. He became, in short, an expert in revealing the play of relativities and in measuring the reliabilities of their definition. Humans, he believed, were in the world to *act;* therefore he has been called an American philosopher *par excellence,* but he was never the endorser of mere self-interest, which is also said to be the American Way. He was the philosopher of the open mind, its opportunities and its dangers. He looked into everything became the classifier of illusions with truth in them, of appearances which deceive, but not altogether. He was an expert, an Eastern thinker might say of him, in discovering the ways of Samvritti-Satya, by which we know what it is possible to know with our finite minds. But *never,* he cautioned, let yourself be deluded into thinking that you can know it all in this way. Some small measure of the man is found in the things he said. In his last days he remarked that his death "had come to seem a very trifling incident." When asked what good a college education was, he said: "A certain amount of meditation has brought me to this as the pithiest reply which I myself can give: The best claim that a college education can possibly make on your respect is this: that it should help you to know a good man when you see him."

REVIEW
METAPHORS AND MONADS

THERE are various ways of getting into a book intended for review. One, which we commonly practice, is to open it at random, preferably toward the back, and read a paragraph or two carefully. Mostly, you reach a verdict that is likely to be fair, although not always. This may determine whether you put the book aside or go to the front and start in.

We applied this test to *Psychological Life—From Science to Metaphor* (University of Texas Press, 1982), by Robert D. Romanyshyn, read what we saw and then found that the foreword is by J. H. van den Berg, a Dutch psychiatrist whom we have admired and enjoyed for years—a promising sign. There are, we think, two sorts of psychologists and psychiatrists, the ones that study other people as objects and the ones that study themselves. Those in the second class, starting, say, with William James, are the only ones worth reading. They are the ones who believe that human beings are engaged in a passage from what is to what might and ought to be. For them, life is a pilgrimage of some sort, at least a project of greater importance than merely staying alive. There may not be any preaching, but rather a lift, in what they write. Prof. Romanyshyn is one of this group.

Following is the passage which led to beginning his book. The subject is Courtesy.

> Before going to work one morning I stopped to have a cup of coffee in a small restaurant and to read a brief article. The article was by Hannah Arendt, a summary of her book, *Thinking.* I remember that I was struck by her thought particularly by her observations about evil. She had written *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* and what had impressed her about this man was the great disparity between the monstrosity of the crimes and the doer of those deeds. This man, Eichmann, was not maliciously cunning. Nor was he stupidly ignorant. On the contrary, he was simply thoughtless and it was this figure of thoughtlessness who haunted the beginning of her article.
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> I began to think about thoughtfulness, and under the influence of Arendt's work I saw how thoughtlessness is the condition of modern humanity. We are an educated society. We are knowledgeable about many things and are taught many facts and taught how to think. But we are thoughtless and particularly thoughtless about what we have been taught and told.
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> It was time to leave. As I approached the door, an old man and his wife were about to enter the restaurant. He reached the door before I did, and he opened it for his wife. I stepped aside to let her enter, and as she passed me she smiled and said, "Thank you." I nodded my head in acknowledgement, and then an extraordinary thing happened. I had intended to let the old man enter after his wife and before I exited, but the old man waited at the door and held it open for me. He smiled, and with a broad, sweeping gesture of his arm he ushered me through the door.
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> An ordinary event which was however extraordinary because this gesture of courtesy was performed so thoughtfully. Only two words had been spoken and the entire incident lasted less than ten seconds, but in that time and space a world of manners, style, and grace had briefly appeared. This wave of an arm by an old man waiting at an open door was not an empty, formal ritual. Enacted with an eloquence and a carefulness which seemed for a moment to have come from an older world, his gesture gave visible expression to what I had been thinking about before my exit. That gesture threw the world of today into relief, and figured against that gesture the present world seemed poorer in many ways. Such thoughtful gestures of courtesy seemed to be absent today, or very rare, and I thought for a moment that perhaps this is why our world is in danger today. It is not for want of the great things. It is for want of such simple gestures performed with heart.

This is indeed an incident worth thinking about. Yet it is also a happening that might inspire dozens of editorial writers of the press around the country to make a nice little squib for tomorrow's paper. Happily, the psychologist author does much more with it than that. He writes at some length about the physical heart, Harvey's discovery, and the *courage* of Harvey in announcing it, and what dropped out of our thinking by recognizing the heart as only a physical mechanism of the body. "In the same period in which Harvey sees an empty heart men are no longer certain of what they believe. This mutual occurrence is no accident. The empty heart belongs to a psychological age which doubts its most unquestioned beliefs."

We can't say, however, that we "understand" this book. The author is a phenomenologist and doubtless uses in some measure the vocabulary of Husserl and Heidegger, which might take all of a

year to get thoroughly familiar with. Yet even so, we feel able to say what is "happening" in the book. It is a declaration of independence from the structured network of abstractions in terms of which modern psychology is taught and understood. This network is called "the Metaphor of Science," founded on the historical or cultural results of two important scientific events, both of which occurred in 1543: publication of Copernicus' *De Revolutionibus* and Vesalius' book on the fabric of the human body, mainly the report of dissection of corpses. These events, so decisive for all subsequent thought (and science), set the problem for Prof. Romanyshyn. He says:

> In modern psychology psychological life appears in a world defined by physics and within a body defined by physiology. This particular reflection of psychological life was true at the beginning of modern psychology in the sixteenth century and remains true today. And the consequence of this reflection is that psychological life appears as an *interior event*. The interiorization and the literalization of psychological life as an event are two features to be explored.

We must, he goes on to say, free ourselves from the imprisonment these features have imposed on our thinking about ourselves, our minds, our thinking—in short, free ourselves from the scientific metaphor. While metaphors are not evil devices nor intrinsically wrong, no one metaphor will suffice for understanding of what the metaphor is intended to represent. We have a full spectrum of them in the library of experience—out in the world and within ourselves—and should not give exclusive attention to any one or set of metaphors. The author compounds a definition:

> A metaphor is a piece of make-believe which makes reality believable. A metaphor is a way of seeing something through something else. A metaphor is an intentional pretense in the original sense of that latter word as a profession of the way in which things appear. A metaphor is a way of likening one reality to another. . . . Focusing on the events of physiology as the facts of psychology, it (psychology) forgets that these events are primarily ways of seeing psychological life. Focusing on *what* it sees, it forgets *how* it sees. And in this forgetfulness what originally matters metaphorically is taken literally. . . .
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> The difference between a metaphorical and a literal understanding of the body for a psychological discipline matters. What is undoubtedly productive as a metaphor can be misleading when taken literally.

In another chapter the author says he will try to recover psychological experience for itself—as itself—by looking at the world of things, in terms of which our thinking is reflected. He quotes an essay by Heidegger to the effect that Thing is "a *gathering, the assembling of a world,"* going on:

> Although I do not adopt here the specific sense in which Heidegger means thing as gathering of the world—it is the gathering of the fourfold of gods and mortals, earth and sky—I do adopt this notion of the thing as the assembling of a world in order to recover a sense of how psychological experience is a world mirrored through things. Things do gather a world, and through things the world of experience which is gathered is reflected. "Man cannot plan the world without designing himself," the architect Rudolf Schwarz says, and Merleau-Ponty notes that "It is through my relation to 'things' that I know myself. . . ." The question of things involves, therefore, not only what poems are but also what we are.

Everything around us that we have made bears our signature, and so does the natural environment as we define or interpret it. Drawing on Ortega y Gasset, Romanyshyn says:

> The depth of a thing is "what there is in it of reflection of other things, allusion to other things. A thing matters in its co-existence with other things." Hence it is never sufficient "to have the material body of a thing." Besides this empirical materiality "I need, besides, to know its 'meaning,' that is to say, the mystic shadow which the rest of the universe casts on it." I need to know its existence through other things. To see the thing I have to see it through its reflection.

For the general reader, there is a strong atmosphere of freedom in psychology of this sort. There is more than just a breeze of passing Leibnizian monads in this passage about reflection. While the author speaks of freeing psychology of philosophy, he must mean by this a certain sort of philosophy, since he is himself philosophizing from the beginning. Anyone who dares to talk about the self is doing philosophy. Yet it is fair to add that without psychology our philosophical thinking is suspended in midair.

COMMENTARY
METAPHORS OF CHANGE

IN this week's Review, a sentence quoted from Prof. Romanyshan deserves indefinite expansion. He says: "In modern psychology psychological life appears in a world defined by physics and within a body defined by physiology." The result is that psychology is reduced to physical and physiological terms. Indeed, this was what William James warned against in his *Psychology: Briefer Course*, pointing out that psychologists, finding nothing which suggests the freedom of the will in physiology, have been prone to ignore the idea and to proceed as if human freedom were not possible and could not exist. This way of thinking reduces the human being to objective are nothing but objects, which serves us not at all in thinking about ourselves.

James went on to point out that this confinement should not be permitted. Thought, he suggested, is a metaphysical reality, and there will be no real psychology until it is recognized to be a metaphysical science. Elsewhere he considered the relation of thought to the brain, declaring that we have no reason to assume that thought is *produced* by the brain. We are entitled to say, he proposed, that the brain is the *transmitter*, not the originator, of thought. Mind, in short, is an independent, not a dependent reality. The import of this conclusion is that we may consider it possible that a cosmos of mind-stuff exists behind the world of objective matter, and which it penetrates through particular organs such as the human brain.

How can we be sure of anything like that? One might ask in return, how could Thoreau be sure of what he said in *Walden:*

> However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but a spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you.

We can tell from the mood of his writing that this was a certainty for Thoreau, but obviously an untransferable certainty. This is the sort of thing that can only be known for oneself. Yet as an order of experience it has undeniable subjective reality.

There may be a similar difficulty in seeing any validity in utopian vision. In this week's Frontiers a world without advertising is suggested as a goal. Can we even imagine such a world?

Can we imagine a city as a human community where no business is transacted, but where are focused—brought together—the country's highest intellectual and moral intelligences to give instruction in learning and the arts of civilization?

Can we imagine the relations of peoples without any multinational corporations, without either exploitation of labor or the enticements of sales promotion?

Could there be a republic founded on Taoist principles and dreams?

The question is an exercise for the imagination. But here and there, around the world, are individuals and small groups who are trying to bring such communities into being. They are trying to establish a web of living relationships which are *not impossible*, but hard to imagine.

Why are they so hard to imagine? Because our present circumstances, the physical and psychic environment in which we live, seems to deny such a possibility. We know that we cannot define a changed future in the terms of an unchanged present, yet to imagine in detail how the present needs changing is an exhausting task. That, we might say, is the reason why the Cartesian Jacobins attempted to wipe out their status quo with the engine of the guillotine. They suffered from weakness of the imagination.

Are we able to think about the present in all the varied metaphors of change?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

WHAT CAN IMPROVE OUR LIVES?

SINCE Emerson and Thoreau are among the really distinguished educators of America, we use this space to speak of the paperback edition of Stanley Cavell's *The Senses of Walden,* made available by North Point Press, with two essays on Emerson added to the Viking edition published in 1972.

The value of this essay by Mr. Cavell—who teaches at Harvard—is not so much in the writer's opinions as in the kind of reading he did to reach them. The book is *his* Walden, but his point is that each reader of Thoreau needs to do the same—generate his own *Walden.* This is of course the need in reading any book that is seminal, so *The Senses of Walden* is really a lesson in how to read. Here is one of Mr. Cavell's musings:

> We started thinking along one line about what the writer of *Walden* calls "heroic books"; and while I take him there to be claiming an epic ambition, the terms in which he might project such an enterprise could not be those of Milton or Blake or Wordsworth. His talent for making a poem could not withstand such terms, and the nation as a whole to which he must speak had yet to acquire it. . . . In Thoreau's adolescence, the call for the creation of an American literature was still at a height: it was to be the final proof of the nation's maturity, proof that its errand among nations had been accomplished, proof that its specialness had permitted and in turn been proved by an original intelligence. In these circumstances, an epic ambition would be the ambition to compose the nation's *first* epic, so it must represent the bringing of language to the nation, words of its own in which to receive instruction, to assess its faithfulness to its ideal.

We agree with Mr. Cavell: *Walden is* a heroic book. But how, or in what sense? What then is the content?

Walden, whatever else we say about it, is essentially introspection. It is an example of man thinking. Thoreau is engaged in answering the question: What shall I think about, and why? Where, we may wonder, does what is in Walden come from?

A vast literature—the entirety of science—has been made of the deliveries of the senses. This is the literature of the external world in all its variety.

What else is there to write about? The deliveries of the psyche, which are as voluminous as the reports of the senses, but not so easy to understand and interpret. Walden is a work of introspection. The reader is allowed to enter at least the vestibule of Thoreau's mind. What he did at Walden had little to do with material things, which became only starting points for reflection. He is concerned with the deliveries of his psyche, not as a collection of curiosities, but as an expression of an inner voice—he regarded, Cavell notes, the book as a "scripture." One may think that Thoreau believed that the authentic voice of human beings speaks in scriptural accents: the truth is in us, if we are able to get at it. Again, the book is a testing of his own inner voice.

Can such works be conceived as epics? Of course. What is the *Bhagavad-Gita* but a magnificent joint introspection—two sides of human nature listening to each other, the one wondering and sometimes complaining, the other instructing, using the accidents of the hour as means of both invitation and warning, and speaking to the condition of Arjuna during the ordeal of awakening, as an experienced explorer might describe the vistas that may some day be seen by a beginning climber, and speaking of the lonely and hazardous path to the mountain's top.

The adventures of introspection constitute for Thoreau a little of what we mean when we say "really living." Can we follow him with anything like his excitement, or feel his sense of engagement with life?

Is his hoeing of beans actually a hoeing of beans? Of course, since he ate them. But Cavell finds much more:

In the first part of "The Bean Field" the sun is lighting him to hoe his beans, and it comes back at the end ("We are wont to forget that the sun looks on our cultivated fields and on the prairies and forests without distinction.") But at the center of the chapter the light of nature had gone bad: ". . . I have sometimes had a vague sense all day of some sort of itching and disease in the horizon." This happens "when there was a military turnout of which I was ignorant"; American militarism's conception of patriotism infects even the sky; its present manifestation is the Mexican War. This is not the only time he associates despair with a corrupted idea of patriotism: "I sometimes despair of getting anything quite simple and honest done in this world by the help of men. They would have to be passed through a powerful press first, to squeeze their old notions out of them."

Then comes some unrelieved irony:

"I felt proud to know that the liberties of Massachusetts and of our fatherland were in such safekeeping; and as I turned to my hoeing again I was filled with an inexpressible confidence, and pursued my labor cheerfully with a calm trust in the future." His mood of mock vain-glory persists, and it produces perhaps the most revolting image in the book: "But sometimes it was a really noble and inspiring strain that reached these woods, and the trumpet that sings of fame, and I felt as if I could spit a Mexican with a good relish." That is, our bayonets in Mexico are the utensils of Cannibals.

Thoreau is mournful in a way that does not leave us limply sad. Even his pessimism has leverage in it. And he has no inhibition against speaking of his vision directly:

I said to myself, I will not plant beans and corn with so much industry another summer, but such seeds, if the seed is not lost, as sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like, and see if they will not grow in this soil, even with less toil and manurance, and sustain me, for surely it has not been exhausted for these crops. Alas! I said this to myself; but now another summer is gone, and another, and I am obliged to say to you, Reader, that the seeds which I planted, if indeed they *were* seeds of those virtues, were wormeaten or had lost their vitality, and so did not come up.

Is this part of a "sacred text"? Well, think of all the bad literary habits Thoreau avoids, while saying what he believes needs saying. His skills are not born of his time, but seem timeless in origin. *Walden* might be called a very personal book, yet there is nothing sticky or confining about its idea, making it magnificently impersonal.

The book is a three-cornered dialogue—Thoreau with Thoreau, and with the reader. Yet "Thoreau with Thoreau" diminishes its meaning, since there is not quite equality in his communion with—with whom or what, that is the question.

He says:

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences. . . . We are not wholly involved in Nature. . . . I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but a spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you.

Obviously, Thoreau enjoyed companions we lack. He thought much about these things, until the moral sense became for him almost a tangible entity—a Socratic *daimon* with whom converse of a sort was possible.

Was this what certain wise Christians have called a guardian angel? Is this a part of the human endowment given to each one, along with the Promethean fire of mind? Can each one find the "spectator" in himself, and is this the essential task of being human—to make that inner dialogue continuous? Is there anything else which in the long run, can improve our lives?

FRONTIERS

Sloburbia, et al

CLOSE to half a century ago—in January, 1935—Albert Jay Nock, a scholar and writer of prickly brilliance, made this entry in his journal:

> In New York again, living largely by electric light in these dark foggy days, and reflecting on the amount of harm done by Edison's infernal idle curiosity about a lot of things that were none of his business, and how miserably he complicated human life, under the ignorant notion that he was making it easier. Those three cronies, Edison, Ford, and Firestone, who used to hobknob together in Florida every year, would be regarded by a true civilization as public enemies far more dangerous than Capone and Dillinger. These latter were in a sense localized; they could not be in two places at once, while the other three are everywhere at once.

The point here, no doubt, is that while we *could* use electricity for only intelligent purposes, its main employment has been to illuminate or operate a great many wasteful and humanly profitless undertakings. Don't forget. someone will say, that the young are now able to read and study at night, and improve their minds. An answer would be that Lincoln managed to get a far better education than most students of the present, with only a dull gleam from the fireplace to light the pages of his books.

Nock also wrote in his diary in the same month:

> The liquor-sellers are on a protracted spree of advertising. One resents the booming of alcohol as much as one did the booming of Prohibition. Why not give orangeade and grape juice just a chance? There is a natural competition among food products that will bring about a just balance if let alone. One of the greatest evils of advertising is that it upsets this.

In a few words, Nock explodes the claim of the free enterprisers that the market embodies the operation of natural law. It could do this, perhaps, on a scale small enough to preserve from distortion the offerings of merchants and others with services to provide, but mass marketing, as anyone can see, is, for good or ill—mostly ill, as we can also see—the encouragement and exploitation of human impulse and weakness. In this way the resource of electricity is turned into a bad thing.

The abolition of advertising is surely a cause worth fighting for. Yet trying to do it by law would be as bad as Prohibition. Where could one find allies for this campaign? No "true civilization" can possibly exist without its victory.

Real teachers, who must compete with the glamorous suggestions of advertising, are obvious allies. They do what they can, but find that students are not what you'd call responsive. As Clara Claiborne Park related in the Summer *American Scholar:*

> . . . I recall with shame John Wild, then in what must have been his early years of teaching, trying, not to start a discussion—there would have been no chance of that—but to elicit from his class on the *Gorgias* the obvious parallel between rhetoric, as Plato excoriated it, and modern advertising. He had breached Harvard etiquette; he must have studied elsewhere. We sat silent, sourly complacent at withholding the answer we knew he wanted, and after a sickening interval he had to supply it himself.

But not all students have this slack disdain for taking a civilized position. What, after all, is advertising? It is bragging; it is claiming: Our products are better than others. We need people who will boycott such pretensions as outside the pale of civilized life.

There have been, or are, such people. In *The Hopi Way* (University of Chicago Press, 1947), Laura Thompson and Alice Joseph say:

> . . . there are certain things which rank high in the minds of Midwestern boys and girls but receive scant attention from the Hopi, and vice versa. In this regard happiness deriving from one's personal achievement is one of the most significant differences. While an appreciable number of White children seem happy about being outstanding, we know that the Hopi child is taught to avoid any demonstration of this kind as much as possible, but to praise the achievements of others and to belittle his own. Accordingly, self-achievement is mentioned

> rarely. On the other hand, twice as many Hopi as White children see happiness in work, which means chiefly work for the household group and not work for pay. . . . To be a worker for the household, to help the mother, to raise the crops and to do whatever else concerns social activities without stressing the personal outstanding achievement, is much more often a motivating desire for the Hopi children than it is for White children.

It seems worth while to add that when given intelligence tests believed to be without cultural bias, "Hopi children made very high scores, which were in fact by far the highest among all those of the Indian tribes studied, and also remarkably higher than those of the White school children on whom the test was standardized." It should be noted that according to the results of a similar test: "Though the Hopi are still among the highest, the difference between them and children from other tribes is relatively small, and Sioux and Zuni children score even slightly higher than Hopi do." The chapter on how the Hopi parents bring up their children has much to teach; and there is more in John Collier's *The Gleaming Way* (Sage Books, 1962) on the Pueblo Indians in general. Obviously, the Indians, if left alone, would not allow advertising to affect their lives.

Architects, of course, and community planners are natural allies. And a high point of criticism of the culture created by advertising was reached by Joseph Wood Krutch in his essay in the *American Scholar* for the spring of 1965, which tells of a bus ride from Los Angeles to San Francisco:

> I got the most extensive view I ever had of what is now called Sloburbs. Also the fullest realization of their horror. Nowhere are they worse than in the Los Angeles area, and nowhere are they more extensive. For several hours the same dismal scenes change so little that it is hard to believe that one is moving at all. Gas station, motel, car lot, bar, and hamburger stand all over again, all bathed in the hellish glow of neon.

A point in support of Nock's attack on electricity, you could say. Krutch goes on:

> Tucson, where I now live, is no exception. . . . As I drove home the other day through spreading ugliness I was amazed again that this sort of anti-city could be so characterless. Everything looks impoverished, random, unrelated to anything else, as though it had no memory of yesterday and no expectation of tomorrow. . . . Poverty, I reminded myself, creates slums and slums can be even uglier. But I wondered if ever before in history a prosperous people had consented to live in communities so devoid of every grace and dignity, so slum-like in everything except the money they represent.

The prosecution rests.