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OUR ESSENTIAL CALLING

IN some epochs—not in ours—humans are born into the warm security of family and a community of people who are confident of their knowledge, who believe that their ways are the right ways, and that their goals are well-chosen and good. To say that these happy times sooner or later depart—that disillusion and uncertainty prove as inevitable as the setting of the sun—is only a way of noting that history has lessons, although with meaning largely undisclosed. Is such a declining time—as in the present—a *better* time than the mellow years when things went well, when we knew—or thought we knew—what to tell our children to help them become happy and useful people?

Obviously, there will be no uniform answer to this question. An impartial reply would require an objectivity we scarcely possess. The disillusionment is seldom complete and those who cling to the past as to life itself are angered by the expressions of others who find change not only acceptable, but welcome and necessary. But the "public philosophy" inevitably breaks down. The gods of the market place and the idols of the tribe are toppled in the dark. Will the society or culture so overtaken rise from all this inevitable confusion, or will it gradually, then suddenly, collapse? History records both destinies and historians have theories to explain why. But this helps only a little those in the middle of the confusion, people such as ourselves.

Fortunately, we are not a supine race. We now live in a roar of controversy about such matters. One great argument is about where to look, to whom to apply, for instruction. Again, there will be no unanimity. People seeking instruction are usually looking for confirmation of their hopes, not what we call "the truth." We know this about ourselves, and the knowing leads to the conclusion that a great deal of what is being said today is special pleading. How do you distinguish between such "reasoning" and honest search? Some would say that the distinction is not possible, that to live in the world is to be oriented by bias, that the impartial inquirer is an abstraction, the uncommitted observer does not exist.

There is justice in the claim, yet it is also given in experience that there have been those who with heroic effort sought to know the truth. *That* was their commitment, their allegiance, their "bias," if you will. Such humans have seldom been popular. That we return to them again and again is nonetheless evidence of something in ourselves—a natural fact—that shares their purpose, their longing, their hope. If, having acknowledged this, we resort to history, we find that periodic loss of certainty is a cyclic reality in the life of mankind. At any rate, what we have called "progress" has been a consequence of such apparent dissolutions of meaning. The human race cannot *stand* to live in a world without meaning. And so the struggle goes on; preconceptions color the views of the contestants, but the struggle goes on. Our being requires it.

This may be taken as first-hand evidence—not theory, not hypothesis—that humans are essentially meaning-seeking beings. The great question before us today is: Where and how shall we seek for meaning? The question has a stage-setting. Our "public philosophy" has been that certainty about the world is to be obtained by study of the world. We—in the persons of a distinguished few—have been studying the world in a particular way for centuries. The fruits of this investigation have given us a lot to do, kept us busy making "progress," and this seemed to provide a feeling of meaning: we *believed* in our activity. But the belief is now fading. Our furious

activity is making us miserable and afraid. But what *else* is there to believe in?

That is another form of the central question. Do we want an answer or do we want to be distracted from having to ask it? Well, for those who decide to think impartially, however painful it proves, there is the encouragement from history that those who do are eventually honored as the architects of a great epoch of civilization. Believing also seems to be a requirement of action. (A reading of Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Beacon, 1955, would demonstrate how this works.) What, then, are the options of belief, or rather of underlying conviction strong enough to be a guide in life.

There are at least two alternatives: We can believe in the findings of science about the world where we live, or we can believe in ourselves. Both choices are vigorously disputed. First, perhaps, should be considered the claim of most scientific inquirers that what we learn from ourselves is unreliable—subjective, speculative, not grounded in repeatable experiment. Nothing less than objective certainty, they say, is acceptable as knowledge. There is a reply to this. It may be said—and it is true—that science is able to verify only a limited kind of knowledge that has nothing to say about human meaning, and knowledge of meanings, after all, is what we want.

Science came into being during the centuries when knowledge of human nature and destiny was claimed as monopoly by the major religious institution of the time. In consequence, the pioneers of science left the subjective side of being or nature strictly alone. The fate of Bruno (burned at the stake) and later of Galileo (years under house arrest) was sufficient reason for choosing the "how" of things and ignoring their "why" for the content of scientific knowledge. What did science do? It looked at nature and selected aspects of natural phenomena that could be measured, and would lead, with the aid of mathematics, to specific forms of control. The results were overwhelmingly impressive. Today our lives seem largely dependent upon inventions and devices using this power of control. Why should we look to any other source for help in our uncertainty?

The reason is clear. The power of control over nature obtained from study of the external world is increasingly the cause of disorder in our world. While scientifically minded people tell us that we need more science, not less, to get out of our difficulties, we are unable to believe them. We need help of another kind.

What about ourselves—so long objects of scientific indifference, almost disdain? Well, a wariness if not disdain is certainly in order. Our lives seem mostly guesswork, not scientific at all. Yet there is a filtering process that time has applied to knowledge obtained from ourselves—a selection performed by the best minds among us across the centuries. The classics of humanist literature are its results. But can we tell a *modern* classic when we see one? Probably not. Yet the challenge is there and world opinion is eventually affected by little else. Is the present a time for the birth of a new assortment of classics? One hopes so, but we can hardly be sure.

It should be added that to be human is to harbor the potentialities of the classics. What, ideally, is their lesson? The capacity to live with uncertainty—with, we might say, the certainty of uncertainty. What can humans do in the face of uncertainty? They can be sure to have worthy purposes whatever they do, fully aware that they will go on making mistakes.

Meanwhile, it is evident that we have *some* knowledge. Let us say that our scientific knowledge is technical—theoretically neutral with respect to human purpose. It can be used by good men and bad men alike. But the neutrality is arguable. A means (technique) used for bad purposes takes on the quality of its use, is continually adapted to its use. A sword can be turned into a plowshare, but only vast troughs of death can be gouged by a nuclear bomb. The

more complex the technology, the more fixed becomes the moral quality determined by its use. A good technology helps to generate a good atmosphere, affected by the motives giving it play. The good is really in the user, but tools are transformed by the reasons for which they are used. Thus good, a moral quality, becomes tangible, even objective. There are also technologies which exude only the effluvia of acquisition, tyranny, and destruction.

These are feelings which are influencing our thoughts, these days, often bringing blame for all our troubles upon the means of the time. Yet the means, finally, are only material extensions of motives, innocent enough as gadgetries but twigs we have bent.

What about inquiry into ourselves? The question is like opening a door into stygian darkness. The mind flitters or flattens out. An intermediate area more manageable to look into is the daily mood of our lives. There is a level of inquiry that is common to us all. The specialist's knowledge—now taught in the schools—tells how to do certain things, but neither how much nor when it will be best not to do them at all. What is education for non-specialists—in other words, everybody? For help with this question we go to a little known source—a paper by the modern Indian sage, Vinoba Bhave, who knows the classics of the East. In "Education or Manipulation," he says:

> It is not education to fill students' heads with information, but to arouse their thirst for knowledge. Teacher and pupil both learn by their contact with each other. Both are students. True education is that which is experienced, tasted, digested. What can be counted and recorded is not education. Education cannot be doled out; it cannot be weighed and measured.
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> In the *Upanishads,* the praises of ignorance are sung side by side with the praises of knowledge. Man needs not only knowledge but ignorance too. Knowledge alone, or ignorance alone, leads him into darkness. But the union of fitting knowledge with fitting ignorance is the nectar of eternity. The world is so filled with the matter of knowledge that men would go mad if they were to attempt to cram all of it into their heads. The ability to forget is just as necessary as the ability to remember.
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> We do not quote this as a classic solution for our dilemma, but only to "shake up" our thinking about knowledge and ignorance. The solution is not simply to replace ignorance with knowledge—which would indeed be the end of the human condition—but to learn how to balance the two. The management of our knowledge is certainly as difficult as managing our ignorance, perhaps even more difficult.

Another quotation from Vinoba:

> The question "What shall we teach our students?" is raised in the *Upanishads,* and the answer given is that we should teach them "the Veda of *Vedas."* We teach the *Vedas,* but omit the Bible; we teach the *Bible,* but omit the *Quran;* we teach the *Quran,* but omit the *Dhammapada;* we teach the *Dhammapada,* but omit science; we teach sciences but omit political economy. Where are we to stop? No, we have to give them instead the Veda of *Vedas,* that is to say, the power to study the *Vedas,* and everything else for themselves. We have to put into their hands the key to knowledge.
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> The things we set children to learn are bound to be forgotten; they are not worth remembering in full. And because we know this, we allow them to pass if they get thirty-three per cent of the marks. A boy who gets thirty-three per cent of the marks is sixty-seven per cent a failure, but we have to pass him because we know he cannot remember the things we have taught him. It is no use for him to remember them and so we give him so much margin. On the completion of his education a student ought to have confidence in his own power. This is what matters, not a supply of miscellaneous information and a degree.
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> The goal of education must be freedom from fear. . . . Fearlessness means that we should neither fear anything, nor inflict fear on others. Both these things are parts of fearlessness. . . . The only sufficient basis for such fearlessness is knowledge of the self. This self-knowledge is the foundation of education. But the education which children get today is the direct opposite of this.

It is now admitted that what we call the "laws of nature" are only abstractions from the reality of nature and that all of them together are an elaborate construct by which we gain access to

certain energies, of which we make use. This is far from being *knowledge* of nature in the grand sense; it tells us about as much about Nature itself—what all those varied forms of mineral, vegetable, animal are doing here on the planet—as the conditioned reflex tells us about the being of the dogs Pavlov experimented on. He could make their mouths water, but what is the meaning of being a dog?

Well, a physicist might reply: "The poet, the mystic, the essayist, the authors of scriptures and epic classics—they too make use of abstractions to get at the meaning of life. Life in the round, in its fullness, is totally enigmatic, too much for us to understand. The Platonic philosopher, the Sufi sage, the metaphysical poet, the New England Transcendentalist—every one of them abstracts from his inner experience for his moral laws, for his account of the logical structure of invisible being. He, no more than we, gives you the truth of the reality of being." And the physicist, of course, would be right.

It is certainly the case—from all reports—that the seeker for self-knowledge, should he find it, will discover that this ultimate illumination of the human condition is not at all what he expected it to be. It is not definable or communicable. He becomes a walking mystery to his fellows. He probably chooses the best abstractions of all to communicate, and then is desolated to hear them come back to him in the mouthings of true believers, the dead letter of the codifiers, and the miraculous formulas of religious demagogues. "There is," as Emerson said, "somewhat deceptive about the intercourse of minds. The boundaries are invisible, but they are never crossed."

Piling up knowledge (information) is not the answer. There are not sufficient common denominators of principle, and these are about all we are able to remember—have available for use in action because we can hold them in our heads. That sort of knowledge is a temporary thing at best—it goes out of date with changing conditions, and if we try to hold on to it the result may be disastrous. It no longer fits.

Vinoba, you might say, is a pragmatist of the human spirit, and for a start we might take his account of making the best of the situation we are in: "the union of fitting knowledge with fitting ignorance is the nectar of eternity." Our position on the scale of development is somewhere between total ignorance and total understanding. What we want—or ought to want—is a balance of means with meaning, but with our sense of meaning in control. Our old and now failing theory of knowledge has been: Get the means, and then all things will be added unto you. Vinoba's counsel would be: Get the meaning, and the things will prove to be good enough.

We can live successfully neither in the past nor in the future. In what sense does the present contain the best of both? They, too, are abstractions. Our conceptions of the past are formed by what we abstract through memory, picking what we think will help us in the present. Yet historians, forever going back with nets making different selections, keep on altering what is "relevant." The best of the past is doubtless the fabric of our being, but how does one read its weave? The future is a matter of imagining. It is designed in terms of what we think we now are, and what, at this hour and day, we suppose it would be both good and possible to become. Yet we know in this we are likely to make great mistakes. In a current magazine we found a humble filler labeled "Tibetan verse," giving what might be the best rule to follow in such circumstances: "Plans for the future need not be made, for if every present duty is performed, all plans will be made by nature." What is nature? Some sort of god? Nature is the aggregate of all the living forms of intelligence, finite in its attainments, infinite in its variety. There are dozens of splendid books which tell of the exquisite intelligence in crystals, plants, animals, and sometimes in man. We have hardly begun to understand why this should be, what it is for, how

a lowly consciousness of some sort became so exquisite a designer. Bacon said that to command nature we must first obey her. But what if nature needs our help more than commands? Ecologists now tell us that we have been commanding nature to death. What *meaning* should be deduced from the fact that our use of "certainties"—the abstractions of physical and chemical law—have carried us to the brink of both self- and planetary destruction?

It seems clear that the ethical life goes beyond any reachable certainties. The question before us, then, is whether we have any alternative to shaping our lives on principle, but without certainty. Should we any longer accept that since we are unable to plan for a sure thing, it is right and good to do what we please, without any other guide? This has been the course of our decision-making during the scientific age, on the ground that "ethics" is something we'll decide about on the basis of "need to know," and we've not felt much need beyond the coarse demands of self-preservation, the freedom to exploit at will, and theories of the division of the spoils—which work poorly, if at all. Ethics are a bother to spoilers.

This is also a way of asking if the universe, ruled by cosmic laws we are far from knowing in full, has in it a segment where the cosmic becomes the moral sphere—hardly a new idea. What is the meaning of moral order? The moral, we could say, is the order of intelligence that is capable of going wrong, but also capable of going right, and is obliged to choose without certainty of being right. For guide in "morality" there are ancestral ideas, often blurred by misinterpretation, yet cleansed and reaffirmed from age to age, while remaining, ultimately, matters of self-discovery for each one. For perfect beings, there are no moral issues or problems, and how such beings would occupy themselves, save as Promethean missionaries, remains a puzzle. For beings without reflective consciousness such as we possess—enabling us to argue with ourselves and others about what is right and true—there would be no moral order to discover. Animals do not trouble themselves with issues of good and evil.

But humans are really concerned with little else. The rest is sweat and invention, and we pretty much know about that. The present seems a time for recovery of our essential calling.

REVIEW
"ONE FINE DAY IN GREECE"

THERE are some books—the ones that should never be forgotten—which, when you pick them up for a little reading, may be opened almost anywhere with immediate gain. The paragraphs, even the sentences, have dramatic unity. These are the books by teachers, writers who always illuminate what they choose to discuss. It is their business to throw a light; and if, in some areas, it is impossible to throw much light, they have learned how to explain this, too. A teacher is one to whom you can entrust yourself—one whose first rule of life is never to do anything that will diminish another human being. He never pushes, because he knows it is useless. The pushed human does not learn because he is too busy defending himself, which at that moment is more important than "learning" anything. He is defending his right, and need, to learn for himself.

So, the really good writer never argues with the reader, but conducts public discussion with himself. The reader is in effect invited to hold a similar dialogue, but with *himself,* and he sets the pace. The writer knows this rule so well that he can safely forget it, since it is spontaneously embodied in practice. From his own well-examined experience he has learned what being human means, and this determines both his content and his style.

Our present example is a book by Ortega, *The Idea of Principle in Leibnitz and the Evolution of Deductive Theory* (Norton, 1971), said to be his "most systematic contribution to philosophy." With what seems unerring penetration, Ortega selects Leibnitz as a model philosopher and studies, not so much what he thinks, but how he thinks. He presents a Leibnitzian conception, and then takes off on his own. The book is formidable, filled with abstractions, with reflections on the nature rather than the conclusions of mathematics, but also with many luminous passages. One remembers, while enjoying them, the way Lincoln explained the intensity of his thinking to a casual inquirer—how he, while reading law, noted the great importance attached to the word "demonstrate," making him take a few weeks off and go home to study Euclid until he felt assured that he really knew what "demonstrate" meant. Ortega has the same intensity, uses words with the same precision. These are individuals unable to traffic in second-hand truth. Except for catalogs and manuals we should read no one else.

You come to trust Ortega's "research"—the facts he uses—because what is not research, but simple thinking, seems so reliable in terms of common sense. Here are some passages on "philosophy" from a later chapter:

> Philosophy is a system of basic interpretive, and therefore intellectual, attitudes which man adopts in view of what is for him, the tremendous event of finding himself alive. . . .Man dedicates himself to this strange occupation of philosophizing when, because he has lost his traditional beliefs, he finds himself lost in life. That consciousness of being fundamentally lost, of not knowing what to cling to, is ignorance. But this primary ignorance, this fundamental not knowing is a not knowing what to do. This is what forces us to frame for ourselves an idea of things and of ourselves, to find out "what there is" in reality, so that we may be able, in view of the image which the Universe presents to us as "being what in truth it is," to project our conduct with certainty, that is, with sufficient meaning, and to emerge from that primary ignorance.

To those who object to "theorizing about reality" when we are faced with the need to *act,* he says that "the 'knowing what to do' is founded on 'knowing what it is'."

> This is the reason why there is no room for perfection in life—that is, no security and no happiness—if one is confused and has no clear idea about the Universe. Knowing adds perfection to doing, to pleasure, to pain. . . . Hence when philosophy, after its initial stutterings and fortuitous discoveries, set forth formally on its historic traverse of millennial continuity, it sets itself up in the Platonic Academy as an occupation primarily concerned with ethics. On this point Plato never ceased to be Socratic. Publicly or privately, philosophy always implied the "primacy of practical reason." It was, and as long as it exists, it will be *the science of doing something.*

The philosopher, then, is not someone who has retired to his country home to think deep thoughts, but one who thinks about the reasons for acting in this or that way, and then *acts* on his thought. Plato's Academy was not an academic place. Philosophizing is a form of the refusal to drift

through life. It begins when we find reason to stop drifting.

> Adam could not have been a philosopher, or at least he could be one only after he was thrown out of Paradise. Paradise is living in faith, having one's being in it, and philosophy presupposes having lost this and having fallen into universal doubt. . . . Philosophy can spring up only when these two things have happened: that man has lost a traditional faith and has gained a new power of which he finds himself possessed: the power of concepts, or reason. Philosophy is doubt directed toward everything traditional; but at the same time it is confidence in a wholly new *way* that man discovers open to him. . . . Doubt with no way in sight is desperation. *Desperation does not lead one to philosophy,* but to the death leap. The philosopher does not need to leap because he believes he has a way by which he can proceed, go forward, and arrive at Reality by his own means.

But the philosopher, while he must doubt in order to think, cannot be *only* a doubter.

> One forgets that positive philosophy always goes hand in hand with its mongrel brother, skepticism. This too is a philosophy: in it man laboriously constructs for himself—even more laboriously than in the positive or dogmatic philosophies—a basic defensive attitude *vis-à-vis* possible false worlds, and on being in that negative state toward all knowledge, he feels himself to be in the right, free from all error, neither more nor less than the dogmatic philosopher. Thus we would have in skepticism an essentially *empty* image of the world which leads to . . . abstention from judgment, to *apathy,* . . . the dry, cold attitude, severe toward everything. . . . all authentic philosophy is at once skeptical and dogmatic.

What is the difference between science and philosophy? Science, as we are beginning to realize, is a limited "portrait" of nature, a collection of isolated discoveries about the world which give us power but not understanding. Present-day science (physics), Ortega says, deals now with probabilities, not natural facts. But you don't find any "probabilities" in your path if you go for a walk in the country.

> Now then, there can be nothing more contrary to "knowing reality" than "constructing reality." . . . If, on trying to know reality A our knowing creates another reality B which takes its place, the knowledge we thus acquire will always lag behind Reality, retarded with respect to it, and it will be like a greyhound which, instead of running down one hare, prefers to race after a continual series of new hares, thus condemning itself to catching none of them.
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> This is typical of science today.

Philosophy has no wish to fall into this fate. It now, he says, "ceases to look wall-eyed with envy at the sciences."

> It is cured of its scientific snobbery. More than that, it will try to become as different as possible from the form of theory which characterizes the sciences, because it has no choice but to go on trying to be knowledge in the sense of presenting reality to thought. . . . When philosophy recovers its position of independence with respect to the sciences, it must see with superlative clarity that it not only differs from them in its way of thinking . . . not only, that is to say, for the very special *content* of its problem, but because of the character of its *problem as such.* According to established rules, science is preoccupied with problems which are, in principle, solvable. Therefore, these are problems which are relatively, tractably, problematic; problems which, when they emerge as such, are already half-solved. Hence the scandal produced in mathematics when an unsolvable problem is encountered. But the problem which stimulates philosophical effort is limitlessly problematical, it is an absolute problem.
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> Nothing guarantees that it will be solvable. . . . Scientific problems are those which man sets for himself when he is in that mood. Philosophic problems pose themselves by themselves, that is to say, pose themselves to man whether he wants this or not. It follows that philosophic problems are not independent of the methodic treatment to which they are submitted.

Restricting his inquiry to the West, Ortega says that philosophy began one fine day in Greece with Heraclitus and Parmenides, and in the twenty-five centuries since there have been a number of attempts "to face up to the Universe by means of the mental process which is philosophizing."

> Each new attempt profited from earlier ones. Most of all it profited from the errors and limitations of former efforts. Thanks to this it can be said that the history of philosophy describes the progress in philosophizing. This progress may consist at the end in the discovery on another fine day that not only was this or that philosophic "way of thinking" limited, and therefore erroneous, but that philosophizing, all philosophizing, is a limitation, an insufficiency, an error, and that man must begin with a totally new way of facing up to the Universe intellectually, a way which will be neither one of the precursors of philosophy nor philosophy itself. Perhaps we are at the dawn of this other "fine day."

Which seems a way of saying that, at last, we know that we are indeed "on our own."

COMMENTARY
"THE TYRANNY OF PROOF"

IN last week's lead article, Ortega y Gasset was quoted to the effect that being human is problematic, which means that it is not automatic. We have to work at it continually or our human qualities will degrade. That decline is the automatic part of our lives. T. H. Huxley saw this clearly enough. Our task, he said, is to *combat* the cosmic process!

This week, in "Children . . . and Ourselves," Huston Smith discerns a kind of blessedness in our uncertainties. Without them we would be no more than the mechanists assert—animated machines. He speaks of the "tyranny of proof," showing that proof can be obtained only for solvable problems—questions which have answers. The ultimate questions are of another sort. They have no final answers, only way stations which sooner or later must be passed. Recognizing this seems a kind of graduation from the animal kingdom, or from the state of being an animal human.

Huston Smith writes for wayfarers determined to go on:

> "Not to prove, but to discover" must be the humanities' watchword. To rise above the tyranny of proof and with pounding heart bid farewell to the world of the inadequate—the rope is cut, the bird is free—is in no wise to abandon thoughts for feelings, as if bogs could accommodate the human spirit better than cages. To relegate the health of our souls to the whims of our emotions would be absurd. To say that in outdistancing proof we take our minds with us is too weak; they empower our flight. At this higher altitude the mind is, if anything, *more* alive than before. . . . Such ozone atmosphere is not for this essay. Ours is the . . . intermediate realm between proofs that cannot tell us whether the garden is enchanted or not and inspiration which shows us, face to face, that it is.

Now comes an important warning, one seldom heard:

> Proofs being unavailable in this "middle kingdom," there remains the possibility that reasons may have something to say—proofs, no; reasons, yes. Even here we should not expect too much, for the more we try to make our reasons *resemble* proofs—in justifications or arguments that compel provided only that the hearer has rational faculties—the more they must take on proof's earthbound character; in grounding them in demonstrations that compel, we will "ground" them in the correlative sense of preventing them from getting off the ground.

Children have no difficulty with the practice of this outlook; the theory comes in its time.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
LIFE WITHOUT PROOFS

THERE are dozens of versions of the changes in thinking now going on—most of them in some way useful—but if the project is education, the account of the changes needs to be *fundamental.* This is sufficient justification for giving attention to an essay by Huston Smith in the second issue of *Temenos,* an English semi-annual (available in the U.S. from the Lindisfarne Press, RD2, West Stockbridge, Mass. 01266). As Prof. Smith shows, struggling to come to the surface is a new way of thinking about both ourselves and the world.

The very possibility that both we and the world are not what we have been taught—and in consequence have thought—means that we can no longer consult authorities on what to think. But we, it seems natural to say, don't feel *qualified* for such decisions! Yet the reply comes that this is precisely the point: the need for making them is the intrinsic meaning of this moment of history. Why are we not qualified? Is it because the church, the academy, and the formulators of scientific writ have for centuries claimed to answer all our questions, so that our capacity to think seriously has atrophied? But, obviously, it has not atrophied in everyone. We are at least able to read those who not only think, but affirm the human capacity to make ultimate decisions. Huston Smith sets out with this view, and for text and sounding board he uses what are known as the Humanities, by reason of their "central concern":

> They have many facets, of course, but we will not be far from the mark if we think of them as custodians of the human image; one way or another, in cycles and epicycles they circle the question of who we take ourselves to be—what it means to be a human being, to live a human life. We know that self images are important, for endowed as we are with self-consciousness, we draw portraits of ourselves and then fashion our lives to their likenesses, coming to resemble the portraits we draw.

The poets, one might say, have always known this. Alfred de Musset asked:

> Sleepest thou content, Voltaire;
> And thy dread smile, hovers it still above
> Thy fleshless bones . . . ?
> Thine age they call too young to understand thee
> This one should suit thee better—
> Thy men are born!
> And the huge edifice that, day and night, thy great hands undermined,
> Is fallen upon us . . .

Psychologists, Huston Smith says, "tell us that a revised self-image is the most important single factor in human change." Why is it, then, he asks, "that the social, economic and technological modernization of the world is accompanied by a spiritual malaise that has come to be called alienation"? These are the words of a contemporary social scientist, Manfred Stanley, who gives this account of the meaning of "alienation":

> At its most fundamental level, the diagnosis of alienation is based on the view that modernization forces on us a world that, although baptized as real by science, is denuded of all humanly recognizable qualities; beauty and ugliness, love and hate, passion and fulfillment, salvation and damnation. It is not, of course, being claimed that such matters are not part of the existential realities of human life. It is rather that the scientific world view makes it illegitimate to speak of them as being "objectively" part of the world, forcing us instead to define such evaluation and such emotional experiences as "merely subjective" projections of people's inner lives.
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> The world, once an "enchanted garden," to use Max Weber's memorable phrase, has now become disenchanted, deprived of purpose and direction, bereft—in these senses—of life itself. All that is allegedly basic to the specifically human status comes to be forced back upon the precincts of the "subjective" which, in turn, is pushed by the modern scientific view ever more into the province of dreams and illusions.

Prof. Smith sets the stage with this quotation, which shows what has happened to us. We are beginning to resist; our outraged subjectivity is finally asserting itself. What are our resources for resistance? How shall we confirm the validity of our subjective feelings in order to turn them into authentic convictions? Is the fact of outrage sufficient? Outrage at least makes a beginning:

> If modern man feels alienated from this world he sees enveloping him, it shows his wits are still intact. He *should* feel alienated. For no permanent stand-off between self and world is possible; eventually there will be a showdown. And when it comes, there is no doubt about the outcome: the world will win—for a starter, it's bigger than we are. So a meaningful life is not finally possible in a meaningless world. It is provisionally possible—there can be a temporary stand-off between self and the world—but finally it's not possible. Either the garden is indeed disenchanted, in which case the humanities deserve to be on the defensive, no noble human image being possible in an a-noble—I do not say ignoble—world; or the garden remains enchanted and the humanities should help make this fact known.

In short, to have an unoutraged feeling of selfhood, we shall have to construct a new conception of the world. But dare we attempt it? The securities of the scientific consensus give no support. Is there a consensus of poets? Metaphysicians? Mystics? What are their credentials as testifiers to "reality"? Brooded upon, this question turns into reflection on what we have a right to demand of such witnesses, in comparison with what we demand of ourselves.

Teaching physics is not the same as tracking the deliveries of intuition to their source. The demonstrations in such matters cannot be delegated to the batteries of certified specialists on whom we have relied for health, welfare, and identification of "truth." Shall we say, then, that only *heroic* minds will be able to achieve unoutraged selves?

Interestingly, a brief passage in Kathleen Raine's editorial in this issue of *Temenos* gives a characterizing light on our past and present situation:

> The current ideologies of our society offer no support for spiritual growth and the children leave their vision of paradise when they leave their play-schools for the stony ground of a society that does not believe in Paradise at all.
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> The terms of the discussion have changed since those days: we no longer hear of a Modern Movement but of a New Age, a change in the premises of our civilization. A new generation no longer asks for "liberation" (poor things they have it) but for revelation.

Referred to is the sticky terrain of a subjectivity entered without maps, directions, or mulling over goals. The historical *reason* for scientific materialism is seen precisely here: in the fits and starts of an adolescent passion for doing as we please, the world has no rules for subjective validation. A tipsy sectarianism is the institutional form taken by precocious liberation.

Well, it will happen. There will be new sects, and cohorts of flamboyant authorities. They already exist. Yet, perhaps in accord with some rule of subjective evolution, these new institutions may be more fragile than the ones now breaking up. Their captives will be fewer, while the innovators will recognize increasingly that they cannot go forward without assimilating the good in the past.

Huston Smith writes for those situated in awareness of these issues in the great change. We have our outrage and our longings, our desperation and our yearnings: How, then, can we construct subjective maps? May there be some sort of dynamic balance, although without scientific certainty? One way of testing whether or not the world is noble is to move on the assumption that it is. There are today physicists who suggest that our assumptions have cosmological power, that thinking makes some things, if not all things, so. Huston Smith says:

> Here, surely, is something worth doing, a project to elicit the best that is within us including resources we might not know we possess: so even if we fail in the attempt we shall do so knowing the joy that comes from noble doings. To get the project under way we must advance into enemy territory—we shall find it to be a contemporary form of what Plato called "upside down existence"—and to do this we must cross a no-man's land of methodology, "no-man's" being precise here because if either side were to capture it the battle would be theirs.

This is a way of asking: What if the problematic is in itself an account of the nature of man? What if he has no "image," but leaves a trail of images behind him—himself an imageless maker of images—and that self-recognition in such terms is a freedom that cannot be lost?

FRONTIERS

The Area of Freedom

THE "system," people say, keeps invading our lives, limiting our action, and we can't do anything about it. Yet we can. Freedom is lost only because too many people fail to use the freedom they have. Naturally, it contracts. We have a communication from a man who, after serving four years in the army (in World War II), decided that he should give up violence in all its forms. He became part of "the American wing of the Gandhian nonviolent movement." He joined the War Resisters League and took part in the effort to end the Vietnam War.

> Because I was living in New York in the 1950s and 1960s, my activities took place there, in the media capital of the world. I held burning draft cards in Central Park, stood silent vigils in Washington Square, chanted around the United Nations, went limp in Union Square, causing the deployment of four largish policemen to cart away my sodden 145 pounds, wrote and delivered statements for television press conferences held in hotels and on curbstones all over the city. . . . I remember particularly that my friends who were not involved in all this so-called "activism" were especially interested in and provoked by my war tax resistance. The obvious futility of such an act was confirmed every year, when a collecting agent from the IRS would quite mercilessly garnishee my wages on his annual visit to the office where I worked, flashed his badge, asked for the treasurer of the company, and walked out with a check.
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> I lived with the dream of every tax resister, that I might some day sit down with Agent Cohen, and if I could rise above the impish urge to ask, "Does your mother know what you do for a living?", have a personal talk with someone who probably did not understand why the vice-president of a perfectly respectable, if not venerable, publishing house was doing such an uncivil thing as writing the government every year, complaining about how his tax dollars were being spent.
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> But I never had that dialogue. Agent Cohen was not "into encountering." . . . In all my resistance activities, while I was warmed by the connections with so many others who marched and sat and chanted and withheld with me, I was limited to making a mass impression, demonstrating that larger and larger numbers of people were sharing my convictions. There was nothing wrong with that sort of collective action, of course, and I do not regret a single moment or one vigil candle that I spent to "bear witness," as we were fond of saying then.

Gandhi once said to his co-workers, "We must have an unquenchable faith in our mission." That mission was to restore the health of the villages of India. *Our* mission is to reduce the health (war) of the State, and thus to revivify our communities. We must be patient, Gandhi said. "We have to deal with a chronic disease. . . . We are like nurses who may not leave their patients because they are reported to have an incurable disease." The State is probably incurable, but that's no reason for letting it go its way unimpeded. Our correspondent is now collecting signatures for a nuclear freeze petition, talking to his neighbors in a New England town.

The System is not really impregnable. It has its vulnerable areas, its interstices. And some of its servants are still quite human and (within limits) able to act as humans. All over the country there are groups of people working to humanize the State in regions where they still have freedom to be effective. For example, state (government) authority can do little or nothing about the quality of neighborhoods. A Washington newsletter, *Conserve Neighborhoods* (1785 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036), recently got out a special issue titled "Organizing Guide—Ideas for Bringing Your Neighborhood Together." It begins by explaining why city governments are incompetent to help neighborhoods.

> City departments are typically organized along functional lines, like parks and recreation, streets and highways, sanitation, housing, health and welfare. Such divisions may be the most efficient way to run citywide programs, but they also insure that each department has only a limited concern for any one neighborhood. Although all city services come together at the neighborhood level, no single department is responsible for coordinating the disparate services or overseeing the neighborhood's welfare. As a result, city services sometimes

contradict rather than complement each other and bewilder residents.

Residents who get together and share in responsibility for neighborhood welfare—they know what is needed; they live there and see things going wrong every day—are able to coordinate the city's services with their own efforts—starting, say, with an informally organized "clean-up" program. Next, they might plant some trees, even flowers and shrubs in wasted spots, and as they do this they generate, first, curiosity, then friendliness, then cooperation from people who have disconsolately watched the neighborhood go from bad to worse. Neighborhood is no remote "cause" to which people can give only money. Block clean-up is immediate and its result immediately visible. The special issue of *Conserve Neighborhoods* (September-October, 1981) is filled with suggestions which have been tested by neighborhood leaders who have become active in this way. Government agencies often prove surprisingly responsive with available resources when a neighborhood group proves its seriousness and capacity. Again, there is a resemblance to the problems in the Indian villages. There, as Sugata Dasgupta points out in *Social Work and Social Change* (Porter Sargent, 1968), village restoration projects must begin with simple undertakings which have immediate fruit. (Dig a well and you get water right away.) After some experience of this sort, the villagers may be ready for longer-term projects. But at first they need something that obviously works. So in neighborhood reclamation in America:

> It is very important for a new group to undertake some specific projects. Many people quickly become bored with meetings and committee work, but they enjoy being part of a volunteer effort that actually does something. It is easier to get more people involved in separate, varied activities because some people enjoy planting flowers in the park, while others prefer trips to city hall. Volunteers work best on projects of a specific, short-term nature. . . .

A healthful kind of power develops with such groups—power created by acceptance and fulfillment of responsibility.