

## THE WORLD THAT MUST BE MADE

EXCEPT for case histories, we might all be resigned to living in the penal colony. Except for stories of how some men struggle to carve out lives of their own from the monotonous materials which people tell one another are "real," we could hardly have the courage to believe our own dreams or listen to our own longings. Reading is a support for dreaming. It seems likely that the novel, as an art form, first began with the idea that a man can dream his own dream, and then, by calling on inner resources, make some of it come true. Novels are about individuals, while myths are about cultures. People wholly identified with their cultures subsist on myths—they need Homer; but people who are struggling to think of themselves as individuals need Dostoevsky. Could the novel somehow merge with the myth? This seems to be a secret hope of every writer of novels. Why else would he long to write *the* novel—the universal story of man?

The expression, "case history," comes to us out of the literature of medicine and psychology. Many case histories tell about the pain and defeat felt by people who have become persuaded that their life-stories were written by somebody else, not by themselves. How to write their own lives—that is what people want to know—and there are obviously many forms of self-deception which confuse the issue. There are also difficult decisions to be made—such as between writing a life and simply "enjoying" it, between accepting and rejecting what other people say is a "good" life, and between the contradictory personal readings one makes of experience. Mixed in with these decisions are the curious clues one sometimes gets in subjective reverie.

In a culture that is reaching maturity, there is often little difference between an imaginative psychologist and a novelist, since maturity means the capacity to identify the enduring questions. It means the beginning of an understanding of the

kind of decisions human beings have to make in order to remain human and to grow. The psychologist does the service of abstracting this perception from the stories of peoples' lives and giving it generalized expression. We might have done this for ourselves—a great story tends to make us do it; but a lot depends upon the habits of the time—the extent to which there is an atmosphere of general recognition that people need to grade the decisions in their lives. This atmosphere results from finding out that the most important decisions are probably the most difficult to recognize *as* decisions.

In a book of delicate explorations along these lines, an English psychiatrist gives some instances of the private evidence a person may obtain concerning the comparative unreality of the external field of his existence. Sometimes he is cast down by this subjective revelation—made to feel that he is on the edge of Nothingness—or he may be upheld for a time, perhaps for his whole life, by an Illumination he cannot forget. In this book, *The Savage and Beautiful Country* (Houghton Mifflin, 1967), the author, Alan McGlashan, speaks of a class of inner experience which he regards as virtually "ultimate"—involving "*theophany*," or "an intersection of Time and the Timeless." The language people use to describe such "visions" may be borrowed from theology or philosophy, but the abstractions which result are usually so remote from the impact of the experience as to be of little use or help. As Dr. McGlashan says, "the professional philosopher is an unconvincing witness." We want to hear about such things as part of somebody's *life*. The psychiatrist writes:

One of these cases was a Surrey cowman, an illiterate farmhand, who came to me many years ago, hesitantly, and said—"It isn't that I'm *ill*, doctor, but I get the queerest, damndest feeling sometimes, for no cause at all. Last time was in the middle of the

Guildford Cattle Market. Suddenly the notion came over me that all this—the animals, the farmers and their dogs, the smells, the noise, the sunshine—was just silly, empty, made no sense. My life, and everyone's life, somehow went blank. There wasn't no point in going on. . . . It didn't seem 'ardly right, doctor, to feel that way, so I thought I'd pop in and see you. Mind you, it doesn't last long—in a few minutes I'm meself again. . . . I suppose it's nothing, really."

"Nothing, really," the cowman said, yet there is hardly a reflective human being in the world who has not had something like this experience, although probably, most of the time, of lower intensity. Dr. McGlashan says that in twenty-five years of experience he encountered only two patients who told him of feeling this way. So, from a scientific point of view, he is in a weak situation for making judgments. This is the problem of the small sample. What significance can be attached to such testimony?

Well, the fact is that this is the kind of testimony or experience which influences people to start writing their own lives. You don't want a mountain of compulsive uniformities to write your life. And not everybody's life would make a novel worth reading. Books about people who do not, cannot, will not write their own lives are studies of pathology. They are about non-lives. You can find them among the works of many modern novelists, and if you soak your mind in these books you begin to believe that nothing is any use—that there's no way to get out of the penal colony. What kind of thinking and feeling makes people write books like that? Well, they claim they are facing "facts." The world is filled with such facts, and these writers ignore private reality and deny any meaning to the small sample.

It is a fairly common assumption among men who try to base their lives on facts that the people who get the most facts have the most truth. So why should you listen to some farm laborer? What he "felt" lasted only a few moments, anyhow. And he only felt it, he didn't even pretend to *know* it, the way people do who want you to join their religion. So if you want to live in

the real world and get things done, you'll face up to the facts which other people experience and know to be true.

But if you do this—if you accept what "everybody" says are the facts about human beings—you will no longer even think about writing your own life. You don't have any. Imagining you do is some kind of a sickness. The facts are all against you. As A. H. Maslow says in *The Psychology of Science*:

The various behaviorisms all seem to generate inexorably such a passive image of a helpless man, one who (or should I say "which"?) has little to say about his (it's?) own fate, who doesn't decide anything. Perhaps it is this ultimate philosophical consequence that makes all such psychologies totally unacceptable to so many—because they reject what is so richly and undeniably experienced. And it does no good to cite here the ways in which common sense perceptions are contradicted by scientific knowledge, e.g., the sun circling the earth. It is not a real parallel. My crucially important experience of being an active subject is—depending upon the comprehensiveness of the objectivism—either denied altogether or is melted down into stimuli and responses, or is simply pushed aside as "unscientific," i.e., beyond respectable scientific treatment. An accurate parallel would be to deny the existence of the sun, to insist that it was really something else, or else to deny that it could be studied.

What shall we think about this? Well, one important thing to notice, humanly speaking, is that Dr. Maslow has become a very popular man from saying things like this. He is now president of the American Psychological Association—which is a little like putting Gandhi at the head of the United Nations. Dr. Maslow asserts that something terribly important has been left out of modern psychology—*human beings* have been left out. The single sample of what one man thinks about himself must be accepted because there is a sense in which it is all that we can ever know about being a man. More and more people are agreeing with him and wondering if Hannah Arendt is not right in saying, "The trouble with modern theories of behaviorism is not that they are wrong but that they could become true, that

they actually are the best possible conceptualizations of certain obvious trends in modern society."

The behaviorist psychologist reminds you a little of a medieval robber baron. He tells you the rules—how and why you live—but he's not part of the system. He's *above* it, and it annoys him to be invited to think about himself. It's none of your business what he thinks about himself. If he thought about himself he would have to start *living* in his house of cards, and they would all fall down. They would fall down because there can't be any reason in conclusions wholly produced by outside forces, and all scientific theory earns attention by its adherence to reason. He also reminds you a little of the Grand Inquisitor, with all his talk of positive and negative reinforcement and the claim that he can make you do practically *anything*, if he has complete freedom and enough budget to set things up.

And that, again, is why case histories are important. *The Brothers Karamazov* is a case history of people who are concerned with trying to write their own lives. Ivan tries more than the others. How is Ivan different from Alyosha? Why? How does Ivan think of himself?

Questions like these throw light on one of the most difficult problems of recent intellectual history. They suggest a meaning for the word "modern." What is it to be "modern," anyhow? If you read what is probably the best anthology of selections from "modern" writers with such questions about individuals in mind, you begin to get a common denominator. For the modern writer is one who dares—and is compelled—to try to answer them at least partly *out of himself*. He has no language for this, so he creates it in pain and sometimes fury.

The anthology we speak of is *The Modern Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1965), edited by Richard Ellman and Charles Feidelson, Jr. In their Preface, the editors say:

If we can postulate a modern tradition, we must add that it is a paradoxically untraditional tradition. Modernism strongly implies some sort of historical continuity, either a liberation from inherited patterns or, at another extreme deprivation and disinheritance. In an essay on "The Modern Element in Modern Literature," Lionel Trilling singles out a radically anti-cultural bias as the most important attribute of the modern imagination. Committed to everything in human experience that militates against custom, abstract order, and even reason itself, modern literature has elevated individual existence over social man, unconscious feeling over self-conscious passion and will over intellection and systematic morals, dynamic vision over the static image, dense actuality over practical reality. In these and other ways, it has made the most of its break with the past its inborn challenge to established culture. Concurrently, it has been what Henry James called an "imagination of disaster." Interwoven with the access of knowledge, the experimental verve and the personal urgency of the modern masters is, as Trilling also finds, a sense of loss, alienation, and despair. These are the two faces, positive and negative, of the modern as the anti-traditional: freedom and deprivation, a living present and a dead past.

The modern writer, then, is a man who feels *in himself* the terrible dilemma of being at the same time both lost and found—found in his unbreakable determination to speak for himself, to know for himself, and to act for himself; and lost in the sense that he can never invoke or rely on the old securities, which are not in himself, and are seen, indeed, as the enemy of himself. He longs with unbearable longing for an order which does not confine, but he fears to find it—he is also in headlong flight from a success that would betray his freedom. If he thinks he sees even the shadow of such a victory he cries *Counterfeit!* and tears off in some other direction.

The terrain of this modern "reality" is every bit as uncertain as the deceptive world of the senses, and the modern writer cherishes its ambiguity as other men cherish life itself. And yet, and yet . . . there is Apollonian longing behind every Dionysian frenzy, and the hope of dynamic equilibrium behind every furious shaking of the balance in the myths less daring men hold dear.

There is only one way to feel the substance behind all this, and that is to experience in oneself the terrifying options of modern man, either from intense reflection or from reading a book like *The Modern Tradition*, in which there is a full spectrum of the exploratory circlings of modern self-consciousness. From the horror of nothingness outside the old myths to nostalgic longing for ancient pantheisms—how can we feel what the ancients felt?—the world of modern man is disclosed in this book. Loneliness acquires a Promethean grandeur from the work of men who are eternally risking their perishable hopes in projects from which there may be no return.

Casting his vote for this improvised and dimensionless world of the imagination, Alan McGlashan speaks of the dilemmas which are inescapable for all those who accept the challenge of being a modern man—a man who insists on the validity of the single sample of reality in himself. As he says:

It is, for instance, disconcerting for me to realize, which I can do only with continuous effort, that half the world feels no need whatever to "escape from time," has no sense of being imprisoned in a three-dimensional prison, is, in fact, perfectly content with Reality as defined and limited by the five senses, extended, of course, by all the resources of modern technology; and wishes for nothing better than to go on exploring the exciting possibilities contained within this ample framework. To the other half of the world—my half—such an attitude is as inconceivable as for an embryo to be content to live and die within the womb.

The other side, of course, will not accept this simile, and tells me my trouble is that I cannot face up to Reality with its tragic implications, and try to escape into some Never-Never Land of my own imagining.

The devil of it is, he may be right. There are as many of him as of me; perhaps in the contemporary world, far more. I should hate to risk a vote on it. In the last resort I have only a passionate conviction to sustain me, and he has an opposite conviction as passionate as my own. But at least I will not let him get away with this story that I "can't face up to Reality." By putting it in this way he begs the question. The whole point is that his Reality is

different from mine. If his Reality is the more basic, then I am, in his sense of the word, "an escapist", if mine is, then he is spending his life in a locked room without bothering to look for the key.

What can be done about this dilemma? Exactly nothing—for, as Dr. McGlashan says, it is a false dilemma. It is the seeming dilemma which appears wherever there is some kind of phantasmagoria! spread between subject and object, and in this case the argument is about whether the inner or the outer phantasmagoria! spread is "real." The answer has to be: Neither and both. For a practical man, this is no resolution at all. It is empty double-talk.

So nothing important is done about the dilemma. All that we have is short-term resolutions on one side achieved by ignoring the other side. The hard-headed, Johnsonian solution is provided by men who kick the cobblestone, show their swelling toe, then give you a whole mechanistic cosmology and no alternatives. On the other side there is the resolution—which has brave style but no reason in it—of the man who tells you, "I know that my Redeemer liveth!" He offers you a fanciful subjective cosmology which accommodates human weakness and justifies flight from autonomy. It is a mushy system which can be changed at theological whim into anything but a system in which men bear their own woes and make their own decisions.

What we are trying to say is that to be a modern man is to have discovered that human beings now have no alternative except to learn to live with the tensions of dilemma. Only in these tensions can we find the stuff of Becoming for modern man.

But who, it will be asked, can *bear* all this uncertainty? The answer might be, many more men than we imagine. Great strength can come from recognizing that uncertainty is certain, and that only this strength fits with the love of adventure and the daring that spring in the human heart. We do not really know how high human beings can rise through daring until we see what

happens when there are leaders who create a heroic style of human life. Not until the modern age has developed its own kind of classicism will we have any right to make self-defeating judgments about human potentiality.

There is a secret about human courage that is seldom told, these days. We seem to have lost or spoiled the language for telling it. But an old language can be reborn. It is a language which has no win-lose words, no failure-success comparisons, no hero-slave dichotomies to overwhelm us with impossible dilemmas and choices too hard to make. It is also a language in which men do not tell lies. Something of its content was repeated by G. Lowes Dickinson after his visit to a temple at Borobudur, in Java. The temple is a three-dimensional chronicle of the behavior of a man who identified himself with the entirety of life. Dickinson wrote about Borobudur in a small book published in 1914—*Appearances* (Doubleday, Page):

All round the outer wall run these pictured lessons. And opposite is shown the story of Sakya-Muni himself. We see the new-born child with his feet on lotuses. We see the fatal encounter with poverty, sickness, and death. We see the renunciation, the sojourn in the wilderness, the attainment under the bo-tree, the preaching of the Truth. And all this sculptured gospel seems to bring home to one, better than the volumes of the learned, what Buddhism really meant to the masses of its followers. It meant, surely, not the denial of the soul or of God, but that warm impulse of pity and love that beats still in these tender and human pictures. It meant not the hope or desire for extinction, but the charming dream of thousands of lives, past and to come, in many forms, many conditions, many diverse fates. The pessimism of the master is as little likely as his high philosophy to have reached the mind or the heart of the people. The whole history of Buddhism indeed, shows that it did not, and does not. What touched them in him was the saint and the lover of animals and men. And this love it was that flowed in streams over the world, leaving wherever it passed, in literature and art, in pictures of flowers or mountains, in fables and poems and tales, the trace of its warm and humanising flood.

Here—not, of course, in the language of Mr. Dickinson, but in the resolving process with which it is concerned—may lie a practical solution for the "subject-object dichotomy," and a working resolution of the dilemma of conflicting reports men make about Reality. When the world is awash with such feelings, it may at last be possible for men to recognize their own visions of reality in the dreams of other men. The puzzle remaining to be solved by modern man lies in the growth-meaning behind his constitutional incapacity to accept hearsay testimony about "love." He knows that hearsay is always bad—not in what it says, which may have had obvious value in the past, but in being hearsay. He knows that the rejection of hearsay evidence is what makes him a man. No one else can tell him what to do in this situation. He has to find out, just as the Buddha did, what else is involved in being a man.

There is this possibility to be considered: that the transcendental reality, the synthesis of opposites, the utopian dream which men long for in their hearts is always a generated and *created* reality, conceived in the imagination but sustained by the will. It is born of longing, nurtured by altruism, constructed by loving determination, and maintained by the collaborative acts of men. This reality is not found by being searched after or reasoned out: it has to be made.

## *REVIEW*

### PLATO AS SOCIOLOGIST

WHAT qualities of mind entitle a man to write comprehensively and extensively about Plato? They would surely include a readiness to encounter vast intellectual complexity, susceptibility to the most delicate nuances of feeling, and the ability to see through the eyes of other men of other times. At any rate, these are some of the qualifications which seem to belong to Alvin W. Gouldner, professor of sociology at Washington University, author of *Enter Plato* (Basic Books, 1965, \$8.50), a study of the origins of social theory in classical Greece.

There is great suitability in the increasing attention given to Plato. We see in our day, as Plato saw in his, a disturbing decline in the quality of government. We feel the same pressing need as he felt to regard the human situation in its entirety. Thus we share with Plato a common problem and a common motive, and whether we have more, or fewer, resources than he had to draw upon, it is unlikely that we shall ever find a more imaginative as well as disciplined attempt to deal theoretically with all aspects of the human being, than that of Plato. The stage is set for this enterprise by a quotation from one of his epistles:

When, therefore, I considered . . . the type of men who were administering the affairs of State, with their laws too and their customs, the more I considered them and the more advanced in years myself, the more difficult appeared to me the task of managing affairs of State rightly. . . . Consequently, although I was filled with an ardent desire to engage in public affairs, when I considered all this and saw how things were shifting about anyhow in all directions, I finally became dizzy; . . . until finally, looking at all States which now exist, I perceived that one and all they are badly governed; for the state of their laws is such as to be almost incurable without some marvelous overhauling and good luck to boot. So I was led to the praise of the right philosophy and to the declaration that by it alone is one enabled to discern all forms of justice, both political and individual.

How can a scholar do justice to Plato without sharing in his philosophical assumptions? This is to suggest that cognitive and feeling appreciation of a

thinker's first principles is necessary in order to recognize the importance of particular developments which result from those principles. Of Dr. Gouldner, in this respect, we can say that he manfully *tries* to think as Plato thought, in order to understand him.

And why, we may also ask, should a man like Plato, a lover of Apollonian Order, a believer in first-hand contact with the Ideal Forms of Goodness and Truth, a defender of the Mysteries and Pythagorean wisdom, a teacher of Immortality, of Palingenesis—why is it that such a man can so consistently attract the attention of modern scholars? The answer can only be that Plato is studied in spite of these foundations of his thought, and not because of them. Plato is increasingly studied, today, because of his unparalleled educational insight, his cosmopolitan grasp of the diversities of human nature, and his unblinking honesty in admitting, and even dramatizing, the very difficulties which he seeks to overcome. Dr. Gouldner helps us to see this, but some other reading in recently published books is even more valuable in showing the broad pertinence of Plato's thought for contemporary thinkers. These would include Leonard Nelson's *Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy* (Dover), Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (Harvard University Press), and Robert E. Cushman's *Therapeia* (Chapel Hill).

There can be no doubt about the fact that to regard Plato as a sociologist presents him in his least appealing aspect. Plato as philosophical teacher, as educator, holds our attention almost in awe. But when he turns to the organization of society, pursuing the analogy between the individual and the social whole, he finds that the irrational elements of society—represented by slaves—must be subjected to the same severe control that he has proposed for the passional and appetitive nature of man. And this, for all men who have lived since the eighteenth century, is unacceptable. But the puzzling thing is that this appalling defect in social philosophy as we see it does not corrupt the rest of his thinking, as we might easily expect. The man remains too wise to be ignored.

As a modern scholar, Dr. Gouldner puts the situation generously in the following words:

Reason, then, in the Platonic system, is tinged with authoritarianism because it premises a slave

system. That Plato does not see the way in which slavery is implicated in the basic tensions of Hellenic civilization, or that it embroils him in a contradiction by debilitating the very reason he wishes to fortify—that Plato could not, in fine, systematically take slavery as problematic and see beyond it—is a phenomenon that must make all social theorists deeply uneasy. That a man of his puissant and original intelligence is so mired in the presuppositions of his own culture remains, for all its familiarity, a telling lesson in intellectual history, dramatically exemplifying the tangible limits within which even the best of human reason operates.

A deep uneasiness should indeed be the lot of all social theorists of today, since the power structures of modern states all conspire in the imposition of a kind of slavery upon their people, even though this is done in the name of freedom. Psychological manipulation takes the place of control through chattel slavery, and it hardly needs pointing out that large masses of the populations of the existing nation-states are made to serve purposes which are by no means their own, through techniques of persuasion which are fully as effective as the controls exercised by the ancient institution of slavery. There is a hypocritical realism about the government of "free men" in modern times, and this may oblige us to say that political states are a bad job at any time, and that only fools or cynical pretenders will refuse to admit it. We think of as exceptions only those rather wonderful moments of history when *beginnings* take place—times when an entire society seems absorbed in the wonder of "revolutionary love," and when the ardor of working together under the ægis of a new ideal keeps anti-social and exploitative tendencies to a minimum.

We might relieve Plato of some of the onus of slavery by arguing that he was indeed exploring an analogy rather than writing a literal constitution, and that slaves corresponded in their social role to the elements in the individual which need continual control and direction from his higher faculties, but even the analogy is repulsive to the modern mind, however useful it might have been to the Athenians. It seems best to recognize that an apology for Plato, on this question, too easily becomes an apology for slavery, and to let it go. It is more to the point to ask how we can really abolish the slavish condition, and

to see how Plato may help us to construct answers to this question. Too many lovers of mankind and haters of slavery have been devoted to Plato's wisdom for us to suppose that he will be no use in this.

One of the most interesting parts of *Enter Plato* is concerned with the question of power. Plato, Dr. Gouldner points out, seems to neglect it. But this, he says, is because it is everywhere available and easy to get. The problem is not power but the wise use of it. People always have power. As Dr. Gouldner says:

. . . the mobilization and use of power is neither inconceivable nor mysterious to Plato. It is familiar to him. He has seen it done time and again and has lived close to those who have done it. The trouble, from his standpoint, is that he has not seen it done successfully, in the sense of leading to a stable and desirable polity. Power brought forth counter-power, and what one side did, another undid. Plato concludes that the customary use of power in Greek society is a corrupt and corrupting thing, a kind of dirty politics at its worst. Time and time again he remarks that power corrupts those who have it, and the more so the more they have of it, especially when they are not themselves subject to a restraining authority such as the laws. . . . It is thus not only that Plato, knowing the ways of power, feels free to neglect it. There is the further consideration that he does not like what he knows about power. Plato has lost confidence in the ability of the established loci of power to use it wisely. From his standpoint, the major conventional power centers are morally bankrupt.

The vital educational enterprise thus becomes, not a study of power, but of what is right. Men in any case have power, but they do not know what is right. So not power, but what is right, is the objective. It is in the pursuit of this inquiry that we see Plato's ultimate respect for the individual, his unwillingness to obtain agreement by any means other than understanding, and his lack of illusions concerning the weaknesses and follies of men. These are the qualities which return the reader again and again to the dialogues of Plato. With him, not conclusions, but the quest is of paramount importance. So doctrines are secondary in the Platonic philosophy, and for this reason, like the quest itself, it lives on and on.

## *COMMENTARY* UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

THE contrast between the Surrey cowman quoted by Dr. McGlashan and Mr. Green's argument for life on a farm (see "Children") illustrates an essential problem of human beings. No doubt the Surrey cowman had all the benefits Mr. Green wants for Canadian youth. No doubt he used them all. Yet his really significant moment, according to Dr. McGlashan, came when it seemed to him that "all this—the animals, the farmers and their dogs, the smells, the noise, the sunshine—was just silly, empty . . . blank."

If there was any sense to that moment—and any sense, therefore, to Dr. McGlashan's book—it must be concluded that human beings have a double life. Two kinds of fulfillments are in operation for a human being. One kind gets in the way of the other kind, and this may be the source of all our bewilderments and troubles—even our wars.

It has been the contention of some philosophers that if our senses did not shut out all but awareness of the practical, workaday world, we would soon starve to death from the distractions of unearthly dreams. If the Surrey cowman's *theophany* had lasted longer, or came to him every day, he'd forget to milk the cows.

On the other hand, if it hadn't come at all, a whole universe of wondering and questions would have been lost to him, and to Dr. McGlashan, too. And if we were to make a catalogue of all the experiences that come to human beings from sources the senses ignore, we *might* have a list of all human ideals.

What seems the case for modern man is that serious attention to these questions now requires another *management* over the relationships between the two worlds. This used to be the responsibility of special people—religious teachers, prophets, some of the poets—and all their various interpreters. The random, undependable character of human experience of

the inner world once seemed to justify leaving it to experts to explain. However, the modern consensus is that the experts cannot be trusted.

Actually, Mr. Green believes that the farm is a good place to consider such matters. It is a place where you learn to avoid proceeding complacently all your life toward "some grand fallacy." And this also is the lesson sought by the thinkers we call "modern."

About all we can say, in the present, is that authoritative, outside management of the relationship between these worlds is a lot worse than private management, uneasy and uninstructed as the latter may be.



## CHILDREN

### ... and Ourselves

#### LET'S TEACH AGRICULTURE

[This is another chapter from H. Gordon Green's *Professor Go Home* published by Harvest House Ltd., of Montreal. Copyright © Canada, 1967, by Gordon Green.]

A YOUNG lad of fifteen came up the road to our farm one morning last June. "I'm looking for a job," he said. "Got anything for the summer?"

Well, the boy wasn't exactly a stranger to us for he had worked a few days the previous summer. Not too enthusiastically it's true, but as I looked him over now it seemed to me that he might have matured a little since I had seen him last. Or was it just the king-sized Man-Brand cigarette and the long hair?

Anyhow I said, "How much money would you have to have?"

His answer came as straight as if he had a union card in his pocket. "I want 85 cents an hour and my board," he said.

Well you know for an oldtimer like me who, when he was this age used to work from sun-up to star-shine for half a buck a day, 85 cents seems like an awful lot of money for an hour. But we were frantic with work just then so I told him to take off his coat and stay awhile. "In fact," I said, "you can take off your shirt as well because I think I'll put you to shearing some sheep for me."

"Oh no!" he said. "I tried that last year! That's one job I just don't agree with. My back won't take it."

My first reaction was to tell him that maybe he'd better go a little farther up the road where there were no sheep to ruin his back, but we needed help so desperately that I held my fire. "O.K. then," I said. "I'll give you a job you can do standing straight up. How about a bit of hoeing?"

And I took him down to one of our cornfields, put a hoe in his hand and showed him what milkweed was like. Because this year for some obstinate reason, we have a plantation of the stuff in one corner of our field and the chemical people don't seem to have developed a

spray yet that will kill this weed without burning everything else around it.

He didn't make any protest this time, but a few hours later I got a phone call from him. He had to go home, he said, because his mother wanted him for something or other. He would finish the job some other day. He had worked, according to his own time-keeping, one half hour.

Now do you get mad at a kid like that, or do you just feel sorry for him? And who is to blame for turning out a boy who is smart enough to go to high school and strong enough to play football, and yet who just can't abide the thought of physical labor?

I think the schools are at fault. Forty years ago when there were woodboxes to fill and ashes to haul and gardens or hens or a Jersey cow to tend, nearly every lad in the land had his own chores to do. Now those chores are gone. A little thermostat behind the door in the parlour has taken the place of the furnace that used to eat wood and the modern home frequently hasn't enough land around it now for a cat to make himself a comfort station.

Today's living provides a man with just about everything it seems but the facilities to give his children that practical side of education which he couldn't escape when he was a boy. Surely it is up to our schools now to make up for this vitally essential part of learning that the home can no longer teach, and I am convinced that the most feasible way to make sure that every pupil gets acquainted with the ache and the exhilaration of honest toil would be to include a course in basic agriculture in every high school curriculum.

By its very definition, of course, agriculture implies labor of the most primitive kind, the never-ending struggle with soil, rocks, weeds, weather and the lack of weather which the Almighty, in His great scheme of things, declared should be the price of our bread and meat.

Now even if we were to teach agriculture just as a classroom subject and without the work in the fields and woods and gardens which obviously ought to go with it, I still maintain that there would be ample justification for it to be on the course of study. Surely it is as important for a student to know where his next meal comes from as it is for him to learn about the geographical features of Antarctica or the binomial

theorem. Nor is there any subject which can lend itself quite so neatly to the study of the processes of life, I think, as a course in basic agriculture.

A few years ago a group of parents came to the principal of the high school at Chateauguay, Quebec, with the request that a course in sex education be given as one of the required studies. The principal, while well aware of the need for this kind of teaching in a suburban community, declined the request because he was well aware of the fact that it would be almost impossible for him to find a way to handle such an explosive topic without precipitating a storm of righteous indignation.

But one day shortly after the request had been discreetly turned aside and the staff was still discussing its narrow escape, one of the teachers said, "You know, Mr. Principal, if these kids had been brought up on a farm like you and I were, there would be no need of a course in sex education!"

And since this particular school happens to be backed by a board which, believe it or not, actually encourages rut-jumping, that chance remark set the wheels in motion for the setting up of a Grade 9 course in Agriculture. Now there are many schools throughout the Dominion which offer Agriculture at some level or other, but such courses are invariably intended for students with a farm background who will probably return to the farm after graduation. What makes the Chateauguay idea unique is that it is a course in Agriculture which is designed specifically for city students. It is true that these pupils study Agriculture for only three months because it constitutes only a third of the General Science course. But three months is long enough to at least teach these fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds a few of the mysteries about ovulation, fertilization, insemination, gestation and inheritance. It is, after all, a rare parent who will object to sex education when you teach it under the label of animal husbandry.

It would be foolish of course to claim that three months is an adequate time to accomplish all the enlightenment that is needed, but by the time the study is over, the student will at least be interested in how the world gets its food and fibre and he will know that the function of a rooster is not to make a hen lay eggs—as a pretty little grade teacher told a class in a neighboring school the other day.

The fact still remains that if a course in Agriculture is ever to achieve the maximum good, it should get out of the classroom whenever possible. The student should not just talk about soils and crops and animals; he should have a chance to work with them. Personally, I think that land for plots and gardens has just as much right to be part of our modern school grounds as a football field or a cinder track, and I believe that if a school cannot provide enough dirt space to allow students to work at the practical side of agriculture, it should seek the cooperation of neighboring farmers in a program that would make sure that every boy and girl in the land would be required to do at least one month's physical labor before he or she would be given a graduation certificate.

Couldn't be done, you say?

Well, over on the other side of the world those people who are now challenging us for the leadership of the world are managing a program like that very well. In the new China which I visited a couple of years ago, every school in the land schedules physical work as one of the subjects on the curriculum. Not only do the students talk about it, they must do it. One afternoon in every two weeks regular classes are dismissed and every pupil must get out on a farm or in a factory and put his hands to some job which requires muscle. Finally, at the end of the school term, each student must, as a part of the course, devote a minimum of two solid weeks to physical labor. For a University student that two weeks isn't enough. He must give a full month of his summer to work in the fields or in the communes.

Ask the Chinese why they place such emphasis on this aspect of their educational program and the reply is always the same.

"So that our citizens of tomorrow may understand the dignity of labor."

Which to my mind is as valuable a lesson as we could ever hope to teach, and one which is quite beyond the comprehension of too many of today's teenagers, including that young lad who couldn't hoe my milkweed for more than half an hour.

H. GORDON GREEN

## FRONTIERS

### The Heroism of Jean-Paul Sartre

SARTRE'S insistence, in *Being and Nothingness*, that man is not an essence but an act—that he cannot be represented by a noun, but only by a verb—is a way of saying that a man is nothing unless he is in some sense becoming. The objection to essences is thus an attack on the idea of human reality as static and definable in objective terms. So, if we still wish to speak of the human essence, the word must stand for a moving point of awareness that is continually choosing what it will do—and therefore be. For Sartre, this is the entirety of the human situation. As he says:

Freedom is nothing but . . . the existence of a being which is its being in the mode of having to be it. . . . We shall never apprehend ourselves except as a choice in the making. . . . freedom is the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing. Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose. . . .

This leads directly to Sartre's ethical absolutism:

I never encounter anything except my responsibility. That is why I cannot ask, "Why was I born?" or curse the day of my birth or declare that I did not ask to be born, for these various attitudes toward the fact that I realize a presence in the world—are absolutely nothing else but ways of assuming this birth in full responsibility and making it mine. . . . The one who realizes in anguish his condition as *being* thrown into a responsibility which extends to his very abandonment has no longer either remorse or regret or excuse; he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this very revelation.

The heroism lies in reaching this position entirely by introspection. It amounts to saying: "I know that this is what it means to be a human being because I am a human being and I know what I am." Sartre calls no other witnesses. He invokes no established tradition. The fact that similar attitudes of responsibility are to be found in great religio-philosophical systems of the past is ignored, as are the supporting metaphysical and

even cosmological conceptions afforded by those systems. Sartre takes his ideas directly from the moment-to-moment subjective reality of his own life. It is for this reason, one suspects, that he has exercised such an enormous influence on the youth of the present—a time in which unspeakable crimes find justification or absolution by reference to the authority of some tradition or inherited belief. That a man can find profound personal truth and absolute commitment entirely within himself is so salutary a fact for our world that it stirs the beginnings of self-reliant thinking on the part of countless other men.

This attitude is beginning to penetrate the arts. For example, in the current (Summer 1967) issue of *Sight and Sound* (published in London by the British Film Institute)—possibly the best existing journal on the cinema as an art form—Michael Kustow presents some "Thoughts on Politics, Society and the Self in some Recent Films," in which the Sartrean idea of individual responsibility is a vital theme. In a passage concerned with Jean-Luc Godard's *Made in U.S.A.*, Mr. Kustow describes a bar-room scene in which Anna Karina, having overheard a song sung by Marianne Faithfull, turns to the camera and makes this declaration:

"Whatever I do it's impossible for me to avoid my responsibility to another person. My silence acts on him just as much as my words. My departure troubles him as much as my presence. My indifference may bring him disaster as much as my intervention. My sometimes thoughtless concern is fatal to him. Either this life is nothing or it must be everything. By facing the possibility of losing it rather than submitting it to some action, I place in the very heart of my relative existence an absolute point of reference: morality."

A little later, Mr. Kustow comments on the meaning of responsibility in a world where meanings are dissolving and the idea of "communication" is being subjected to relentless analysis. He says:

Just before Anna Karina makes her discovery of responsibility in the bar scene in *Made in U.S.A.*, there has been a very strange sequence about

language. It is a discussion between the barman and a workman about whether a sentence is an assemblage of words that makes sense, or whether they are merely useless words (there is a play on the French phrase *faire des phrases*, which is often used about a politician's windblown rhetoric). The worker reels out a list of nonsense sentences to prove that something can be a sentence, in the formal meaning of the word, and yet be senseless: "The glass is not in my wine. The barman is in the pencil's pocket. The floor is being stubbed out on the cigarette. The barman is filling his cigarette with his whisky. He lights his tap," etc.

All of which is one of those Godardesque straight-faced demonstrations by the absurd of a very serious point: that language itself, the confidence one could have in putting any two semantic elements together (whether elements of the written language or visual elements of a film) has broken down, and the very act of assertion has become self-doubting. This is not only because those who use power badly abuse language (cf. Orwell on the corruption of words by politics, and Mary McCarthy's Vietnam articles for present proof of same), but because those who can use language to pierce through to a truth about a situation may find themselves (a) killed, (b) overtaken by a changing situation, (c) less able to stand outside what they are analysing than they believed.

This, therefore, is the question that must indeed be put to every blazing prophet, evangelistic reformer, or indeed, crusading artist: where do you stand, you who say all this? Where did you find the vantage-point from which to speak your denunciations or cries of warning? Hence the best modern works which grapple with deep personal/social/political matters come from artists who have created self-reflexive forms, forms into which their own uncertainties and changeability are built.

So you could say that the art which speaks to our condition must be art which restores subjectivity—in which the artist reveals himself and risks himself as a man. One might even argue that the archetype for art in this sense is the Socratic Dialogue. Socrates is continually asking, Where do you stand, why are you doing or saying all this? And if uncertainty is essential to human meaning in the answers to all such questions, then works of art which reveal us to ourselves will have the right kind of uncertainty in them.

Men filled with certainties never question themselves. They do not risk themselves except in some trivial sense, and what they assert and demand continually risks countless *other people*—up to many millions in war. This terrible pretension to having no uncertainties is a mortal sickness of the present-day world.