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THE THRUST OF A LIFE

A MAN'S life is a thrust into the Unknown. Even if we admit that a great deal of human energy is spent in shoring up the bastions intended to keep out the unknown, there is still force in the claim that men thrust themselves or are projected into the unknown. We recognize this from the fact that we give a heroic, *all-man* character to those whose lives are best described as thrusts. There is humdrum action and there is heroic action, and to the extent that "aspiration" is a word with meaning we prefer the truth about heroes to ordinary, humdrum truth.

Yet we are obliged to live from day to day by humdrum truth. If you tell a farmer his life is an encounter with the unknown, he will probably answer that *he* knows what he is doing. He has both experience and government pamphlets. The seeds he plants grow. If you say that many mysteries are present in a field of wheat, he may be patient enough to reply that such matters, while unknown, are irrelevant to him. What he doesn't have to know in order to grow wheat is not a challenging part of his life. If he can produce a good harvest, what else does he have to know? Who needs "heroes"?

Well, the world of literature needs heroes. At any rate it is filled with them. A literature without heroes seldom survives. It isn't really literature. The farmer raises wheat but the epic poet raises demi-gods. We eat the wheat and forget it, but the demi-gods live on. We cherish their thrusts into the unknown. We *identify* with them. A civilization that left no demi-gods to remember hardly interests us. It might interest an archaeologist enough to dig up its remains, but then he would announce that these people had *no* gods or heroes, and what do you think of that!

Serious thought about human beings is selective in this way. Without asking permission it takes great men as types of all men. It moves from peak to peak of achievement. You know that the peaks are supported by foot-hills, that they rise above smiling valleys and fertile fields, but you want to read about the peak-experiences. Only when the heroes get too abstract, too stylized, do you ask for ordinary detail. This is the longing for *cognitive* reality, and it comes in at every level of human inquiry. You know that Othello was Nature's Nobleman, but what did Iago look like? Iago increases the reality of Othello by being a proper contrast.

A farmer may get along pretty well without inquiries into the unknown—unless his name happens to be Job. Job was a gentleman farmer with something to lose. No book in the Old Testament fascinates us more. In his case the Unknown was an invader. It flowed past all the institutional and private defenses, making Job ask, What kind of a Universe *is* this? The traditional answers of pious friends were no help. Job wanted cognitive meaning, not hearsay explanations.

The point is that a full cognitive grasp of the meaning of human life requires encounter, at first hand, with the full gamut of life. From having this encounter you develop a restless hunger for knowledge about the shape and depth of the Unknown. If the encounter is at first hand, you may forge a philosophy of life; but if it comes at second hand—from, say, reading books—you may develop only a theory or two. Such theories are not without importance; they are the conscious preparation we know how to make for the first-hand encounter.

The key word here is *cognitive.* Cognitive reality is a reality that you know and know that you know it. It is nitty-gritty understanding and there is a kind of ecstacy in the certainty it brings. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Cognition is "The action or faculty of knowing in its widest sense, including sensation, perception, conception, etc." It seems clear that a man's sense of cognitive reality will depend on the level of awareness that feeds his feeling of meaning. Philosophers, for example, sometimes forget to eat meals. They are involved with other realities. In his *Meditations on Quixote*, Ortega relates an experience of Goethe while in Italy. Goethe would often fall into a silent and thoughtful mood, and this worried a fellow traveler, an Italian captain, who one day exclaimed:

> What are you thinking about! One ought never to think, thinking ages one! One should never confine oneself to one single thing because he then goes mad: *he needs to have a thousand things, a confusion in his head!*

This is a way of insulating oneself from the threat of isolating abstractions and penetrating questions which have no answer. For Goethe, it would have been a way of not being Goethe. The Captain in effect was arguing that to submit to abstract thought means to shut out all the buzzing, bawling confusion which is the common "experience of life." The Captain believed that this low-grade cognitive reality was alone safe and sane.

The Italian Captain's view and reproach to Goethe has lately attained the status of a scientific theory of the properly arranged life. In an article in *dot zero 3*, Jay Doblin, a well known designer, discusses the mass media as a "stimulation system," which, he thinks, we can hardly do without. He writes:

> Mass communications media perform two functions. One function is well recognized—that of communicating information. The other has only recently begun to receive serious attention—this is the function of providing the sensory stimulation without which men cannot remain normal.
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> The need for continuous sensory input has been called the fifth need of man. It is as essential for his survival as are food, water, air and shelter.
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> This recognition of the fifth need of man—an obvious, yet extraordinary realization—has opened our eyes to what is, in an important sense, the actual, general and major use of the mass media. They provide us with a continuous flow of sensory input. The fact that mass media are largely directed toward stimulating a viewer, reader, etc. rather than conveying information to him, should not be viewed as a criticism but as pointing out what is the result of a perfectly human drive. . . .
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> For centuries we have known that people placed in isolation soon become deranged. But recent studies in psychology and space technology have demonstrated what sensory deprivation really does. Men deprived of sensory stimuli, even for a few hours, lose their ability to be normally functioning human beings. . . . Man's demonstrated inability to function normally without sensory stimulation has revealed a critical role of mass media. It helps people to function by supplying a constant source of sensory stimuli which is vital to our very existence.

This seems a careful statement of the Captain's theory, bolstered with clinical evidence from a laboratory at McGill University. One "needs to have a thousand things, a confusion in his head." That's *normal*. Then, if something happens with sufficient force to get through all that confusion, you'll know it's "real"! Don't go looking for trouble with your abnormal, abstract ideas. Don't thrust.

The point is that without the necessary sensory stimulation, people hallucinate. This is the madness the Captain wanted to avoid. So that the solitude cherished by Goethe was seen by the Captain as a symptom of impending mental disorder. Goethe might have been meditating another *Faust!*

It is no doubt the case that total sensory deprivation leads to abnormal states of mind. What is not pointed out is the possibility that *voluntary* entry into a state of abstraction from sense experience may lead to a disciplined mind's private laboratory of the creative act. It is a thrust into the unknown, whereas the hallucinator has been made vulnerable to the unknown's thrust into him, and he is in no condition to handle it.

It must be admitted that not every man wants to be a Goethe or is ready to be one. Goethe's sense of cognitive reality was several levels above that of the average man. And yet, if pressed, we should agree that we don't mean *deliberately* to make a world that shuts out Goethes. On the other hand, we are not ready to turn off the mass media in behalf of Goethes to come. Let them find their own solitary places if they can. Geniuses are supposed to have a tough time.

In his chapter on Tragedy, in *Meditations on Quixote,* Ortega describes another aspect of this "average man" point of view. The average man doesn't find much cognitive reality in tragedy. It doesn't touch him where he lives. He goes to the theatre because he thinks he ought to—or because his wife thinks he ought to. He behaves the way people behave when they listen to other peoples' theories about the way to balance out a good life. As Ortega puts it:

> Let us listen to the effect that drama produces on the ordinary spectator. If he is sincere he will have to confess that it really seems a little unlikely to him. Twenty times he has been tempted to get up and advise the protagonist to desist, to abandon his position, because the plain man very sensibly thinks that all the bad things happen to the hero through his persistence in such a purpose. By giving it up, he could make everything turn out well and, as the Chinese say at the end of a tale, alluding to their former nomadism, could settle down and raise many children. There is no fate, then, or rather what happens is fated to happen because the hero has caused it.

The point is that the hero has access to a level of cognitive awareness denied to the ordinary spectator. He is a *hero.* He lives by other rules. It is the hope of the tragic dramatist to lift his audience to the hero's level for at least an hour or two. He wants the audience to *borrow* the cognition of the hero—to be inspired. This happens for some. For the rest, it is as Ortega says:

> The plain man is ignorant of that stream of life in which only sumptuary, superfluous activities take place. He is ignorant of the overflow and excess of vitality. He lives bound to what is necessary and what he does, he does perforce. He is always impelled to act; his actions are his reactions. He cannot conceive that anyone should get involved in affairs which are not his concern. Anyone who shows the will for adventure seems a little crazy to him, and in tragedy he sees only a man forced to suffer the consequences of an endeavor which no one forces him to pursue.
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> Far from the tragic originating in fate, then, it is essential for the hero to want his tragic destiny. Therefore, tragedy always has a fictitious character when regarded from the point of view of the vegetative life. All the sorrow springs from the hero's refusal to give up an ideal part, an imaginary role which he has chosen. The actor in the drama, it might be said paradoxically, plays a part which is, in its turn, the playing of a part, although the latter is played in earnest. At any rate, an entirely free volition originates and produces the tragic process. This "act of will," creating a new series of realities which only exist through it—the tragic order—is naturally a fiction for anyone whose only wishes are those of natural necessity which is satisfied with what merely exists.

What is a hero? A hero is a man whose thread of cognitive reality dictates a course which is unmistakable to him although unclear to others who see his faithfulness to his ideal as a merely quixotic consistency. Yet the others also see a certain splendor in his single-mindedness. Too bad, they say, it isn't more practical in its objectives.

There are all sorts of variations in this kind of popular judgment. There is acceptable heroism, dubious heroism, and there are postures of heroism which are regarded as simply ridiculous. Acceptable heroism is usually validated by some convention. The early Christians preferred martyrdom to betrayal of their faith. A defeated Roman general died with his army. A captain goes down with his ship. These are heroisms *à la mode.*

A puzzling heroism is more instructive. It makes the witness search for the thread of cognitive reality to which it responds. A few years ago, the Synanon Foundation sought government grants. After some encouragement from a public official or two, it asked for money from the National Institute of Mental Health. No money came, but there were large grants to other groups. Then, with the War on Poverty and related government-sponsored efforts to encourage self-help and rehabilitation, it began to seem that public funds might be obtained to ease Synanon's serious economic problems. If more houses could be opened, more heroin addicts who were sick of their dependence on the drug could have opportunity to live in close proximity to clean ex-addicts—people who had once used heroin but were now relying on a slender and often fragile Ariadne's thread they found within themselves. There they could see that if an addict lets go of that thread, no other threads are available. Not in Synanon, which is a place where a system of careful suppression of external substitutes for cognitive reality has been developed. The system is rough and ready, but it has been working for a long time. A former and still very un-heroic addict could watch it work. He had a chance to study a germinal sort of heroism—a practice scaled to his minute capacities in an environment deliberately devised to take his mind off his fractured life. This environment was partly, or perhaps mostly, a "natural" one. That is, it was improvised out of natural necessity. It takes a kind of genius to turn necessity into therapy, but if you study Synanon you see that this is about what happened. It is good for people who feel old weaknesses coming on to see Necessity staring them in the face. Not artificial, bureaucratized necessity, but tough, implacable, leave-if-you-don't-like-it necessity. No ambiguity allowed. You have to hang on to your personal thread.

The problem, for Synanon, is to keep the Necessity and increase the facilities for coming into contact with it in a responsive mood. That way, Synanon can produce more clean man-hours, which is its modest measure of an ex-addict's heroism. Synanon needs this modesty. After all, what's heroic about becoming "normal"? You practice this private heroism and catch up with the squares.

But among themselves, the Synanon members don't minimize their private heroism. It's all they've got. And in getting it they find it has practically nothing to do with heroin, and everything to do with the cognitive reality they discover inside themselves. Synanon is nothing more and nothing less than a stage-setting for this discovery—a curious and wonderful private-public situation in which, for a given level of human behavior, the subject-object dichotomy has been temporarily resolved.

The life of Synanon depends upon preserving the main outlines of that situation. So, when public funds were offered to Synanon, the Director turned them down. The reason was that with the funds would come a periodic "inspection" of how the addicts supported by the funds were doing. The government has its own ideas of how to inspect the progress of a former addict. Urinalysis is one of them. Nalline tests are another. The justification for the tests is that taxpayers have a right to ask how the addicts are doing. So there have to be checks. The Government has to know. Why would that interfere with the self-administered therapy of Synanon?

Well, it does, or rather it would. So, no government money. Synanon explains to the Government that it doesn't know how an addict's or a recent ex-addict's mind works. And the government says it doesn't really care about how those little minds work: it has to be sure the money is properly spent, and it has to keep books on what is going on. So, back to peanut butter and sleeping in the halls for the people at Synanon. If Big Brother is watching you, you don't need Ariadne's thread. Big Brother doesn't believe in Ariadne's thread. It has statistics to prove that Ariadne's thread does not exist for drug addicts. Big Brother is in the statistics business, not the clean man-hours business. And you can't use tax money without keeping government-type books.

So Synanon gets no public subsidies, except those which come without strings attached. Is Synanon practicing self-denying heroism? Not at all. Synanon is following the common sense lead of its cognitive reality, which is far above bureaucratic cognitive reality. The situation is all mixed up. Here are government people who know enough not to take heroin telling people who were stupid enough to take it how to be sure they won't take it any more. What's wrong with that? Well, what's wrong with it is the same as what's wrong with mistaking convention and conformity to law and order for reliance on cognitive reality. Anybody can find this out by relying on cognitive reality for himself. It is the foundation of heroism. Mickey Mouse heroism is still heroism, although you don't *call* it heroism until it gets up there on the horizon where everybody can see its outline and wonder at its acts.

We now need more help from Ortega's exquisite insight in *Meditations on Quixote* (Norton Library paperback, 1963, $1.55), which instructs in the appeal of literature to the reader's cognitive awareness:

> The hero anticipates the future and appeals to it. His gestures have a utopian significance. He does not say that he is but that he wants to be. Thus, the feminist woman hopes for the day when women will not need to be feminists. But the comic writer substitutes for the feminists' ideal the modern woman who actually tries to carry out that ideal. As something made to live in the future world, the ideal, when it is drawn back and frozen in the present, does not succeed in satisfying the most trivial functions of existence, and so people laugh. It is a useful laughter: for each hero it hits, it crushes a hundred frauds.
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> Consequently, comedy lives on tragedy as the novel does on the epic. Comedy was born historically in Greece as a reaction against the tragic poets who wanted to introduce new gods and set up new customs. . . .
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> Comedy is the literary genre of the conservative parties. The distance between the tragic and the comic is the same as that which exists between wishing to be and believing that one already is. This is the step from the sublime to the ridiculous. . . . This happens with Don Quixote when, not content with affirming his desire for adventure, he persists in believing himself an adventurer. The immortal novel is in danger of becoming simply a comedy. The edge of a coin . . . is all that separates the novel from pure comedy. The first readers of Quixote must have seen just comedy in this literary novelty.

Which is it, *really?* It depends upon how you look at it. "The transference of the heroic character from the plane of will to that of perception causes the involution of tragedy, its disintegration—and makes comedy of it." It follows that a great piece of literature requires personal reality-testing by the reader; and he can do this only by deciding where on the scale from will to external perception he will make his test. Is a man what he is or what he may become? Is he a potential hero or only a clown?

REVIEW
A STUDY OF ANXIETY

THE most useful thing about Eugene E. Levitt's *Psychology of Anxiety* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1967—paper, $1.75; cloth, $6.00) is that it makes clear that everyone has anxiety. Healthful, wholesome activity reduces anxiety to a minimum; feelings of completion or realization tend to displace worry or fear; but both specific and non-specific anxiety lie in wait for every human being at the door of birth, and wanting to do away with anxiety entirely may be an aberration of the "happiness" cult. We may need anxiety as much as we need all the other emotions which declare the states of feeling of human beings and establish the levels of action of the will.

"Anxiety," says Dr. Levitt, quoting Berthold, "is the mother of the drive to know." The author continues:

> A few theorists carried the philosophical speculation even further, suggesting that anxiety, or emotional maladjustment in the general sense, produces creativity. Even if we could define creativity for experimental purposes, the hypothesis is untestable. There have been, and are, geniuses who seemed extraordinarily well-adjusted, and some who appeared equivalently mentally disturbed. What someone might have been if the circumstances of his life had been different is an unanswerable question. We can only wonder vainly what De Quincey or Poe or Van Gogh would have produced if he had been better emotionally balanced.
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> Thus anxiety is a Janus-headed creature that can impel a man to self-improvement, achievement, and competence, or can distort and impoverish his existence and that of his fellows. The distinction appears to be a sheer matter of degree, of intensity, as it is with many other phenomena of human life. The urgent need is to acquire the knowledge to utilize anxiety constructively, to be its master and not its slave.

One of the effects of Dr. Levitt's book may be that the reader will no longer feel uncomfortable or guilty in the presence of anxiety. If the anxiety has a specific remedy, you try to find it; but if it arises simply from awareness of the difference between what is and what ought to be, or between what you are and what you want to become, there is little to do except to reduce that difference. This will work, so long as it is realized that there is always more to be done.

For the modern psychologist, however, anxiety is "socially" defined. It is "an inevitable by-product of the process by which a person learns to become a member of society." Will I make it? he asks himself.

But what if society is itself messed up and sick? This is a question which conventional psychological theory tends to neglect. What is normal when the norm is suspect? There must be a double anxiety for those who wonder if enduring "socialization anxiety" is only an approved way of growing up absurd. This question haunted Plato, forcing him to coin the expression, "double ignorance," to describe those who fail to question the assumptions of society. It seems likely that the man who hopes to free himself entirely of anxiety will have to learn not only to resolve his own problems, but to bear the problems of the world.

It is almost as though the psychology of anxiety needs extension in a way that might help individuals to understand themselves and their feelings in relation to dreams of an ideal society. More and more, as people come to see contradictions in the standards of the established order, there is a need for psychological balance while working toward general human improvement. This means using existing relationships while not wholly accepting them. It means compromises which are not compromises of intentions but way stations in life. Guilt may still be felt, but it, too, one might say, would be "socialized," since the delays of progress are a kind of waiting for one another while we make what individual effort we can.

Is it conceivable that the abyss of anxiety—or of fear of the unpredictable or unknown—can be workably filled by the infusion of love? Many of the young seem to be groping in this direction.

Love has a way of dissolving the personal limits of the *status quo,* of including more of the world in one's feeling of what is real. To love is of course to risk something, to be vulnerable. But it is also a reaching out to link separate parts of life in a passionate synthesis. It is an attempt at positive whole-making. One might think of it as a way of driving away some anxieties while opening up to others. Yet the anxieties of the man who tries to act from love are not the anxieties of a man in flight. *Choosing* the risks to which hope is exposed might bring non-specific anxiety under control.

In an article in the August *McCall's*, Erich Fromm speaks of the failure of love in the person who fears to be spontaneous. This is the one "who can never feel free, because he insists upon controlling his feelings, thoughts and actions." This would-be lover frantically seeks certainty, but is tormented by doubt when certainty cannot be found. Loving, Dr. Fromm points out, includes understanding. True love, that is, brings to the person or thing loved exactly what is needed for nourishment and growth: "unless I know the need of the plant, the animal, the child, the man or woman, and unless I can let go of my wish to control, my love becomes destructive, a kiss of death." This seems to imply an incompatibility between love and anxiety. One of the two must go.

If successful love, as Dr. Fromm maintains, is love combined with understanding, then anxiety may be seen to be at least partly the shadow of ignorance. These are days when the need for a more universal love is spoken of widely. But how such universal love would work remains obscure. Its mechanisms, which would be made from understanding the world's needs, are not easy to imagine. Human needs often appear contradictory, and people take sides about them and generate partisan doctrines which oversimplify and confuse. So the man who hopes to contribute to peace by a feeling of love for the world at large may be contracting for more anxiety than he knows. It is difficult for him to get at the world in order to put his love to work. How will he learn its needs?

Many people are today asking this question. One could wish for a psychology of world needs. At present, the categories of behavioral studies do not seem to include the possibility of such generous motives or emotions. How would a person who feels undifferentiated longing—a confused kind of love, perhaps—relate this feeling to what he can learn about himself from psychology?

Such feelings would need to be distinguished from daydreams, which are sometimes a substitute for practical action. Daydreaming fantasies, Dr. Levitt says, may be concerned with the "heights of life," but because these remain inaccessible the dreamer may be afflicted by shame or guilt.

Is it reasonable to ask if a distinction should be made between having a sense of high purpose and what we ordinarily mean when we speak of "self-esteem"? Self-esteem is apparently a barrier to anxiety. Dr. Levitt writes:

> An individual with a high predisposition to anxiety is one who is more easily threatened than his fellows. Such a person is likely to have a poor opinion of himself because he is easily threatened. . . . A relationship reported by Rosenberg (1962) is hence not surprising. Rosenberg measured self-esteem in more than five thousand junior and senior high school students by means of a questionaire comprising 10 items like "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself," and "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." A somewhat crude measure of anxiety was obtained by means of self-reports of incidents of physical symptoms associated with anxiety. Rosenberg found a definite, inverse relationship between the self-esteem and the anxiety measures, a finding which indicates that a high level of anxiety was associated with a low level of self-esteem.

A little later, Dr. Levitt enlarges on findings of this sort:

> Simple logic indicates that an individual who is highly predisposed to anxiety will be threatened by unknown and unfamiliar circumstances and thus will

> prefer a well-explored milieu even if it is mundane and uninteresting.

One wonders how these conclusions would be affected by considering the case of an individual who sets himself very high goals, and then is discouraged by how much remains to be done in order to reach them. This seems different in quality from conventional loss of "self-esteem." Could there be a two-valued theory of anxiety—one for the socialization process, the other for coming to terms with one's trans-status-quo ideals?

One kind of anxiety would be worry about becoming a member of society, the other would spring from Promethean unrest. Accepting the fact of anxiety as a condition of life might make some people lower their sights, but it could spur others to dispute the claim of Arthur J. Schlesinger, Jr., that "Anxiety is the official emotion of our age." Anxiety may be stilled in various ways, and if daring and understanding were to play a larger part in men's lives, anxiety might no longer have "official" status.

COMMENTARY
BOOKS BY ORTEGA

OF the eight paperback books by Ortega y Gasset we have for review from the Norton Library, one, *What Is Philosophy?,* has already been noticed (Aug. 16). *His Meditations on Quixote* is given attention in this week's lead article. One difficulty in reviewing Ortega's writings is that they are *all* devoted to the same subject—the philosophical question of the meaning of the human life. Thus *Concord and Liberty* ($1.35), made up of four essays, ought to have been considered along with *What Is Philosophy?,* since it is concerned with the relation of philosophy to history.

For Ortega, philosophy becomes living, present reality through historical understanding. It is the task of man to encounter and to understand the timeless through portals made by time. We learn from one another's thoughts, and since men live and have experience in different epochs of time, it is necessary to identify with past thinkers in terms of their own time if we are to grasp what they say. In this way we assimilate the past. Simply to read the history of philosophy without entering into the feelings of other epochs will not accomplish this assimilation. As Ortega says:

> . . . any attempt to form an idea of what philosophy is through mere historical induction, by simply collating the formulas of the philosophers, would be a mistake. Such a procedure cannot but result in a zero definition, since the multiplicity of formulas produces nothing but their mutual annihilation. It can, however, teach us that history cannot be made from the past alone. The past has to be complemented by another instance—that is, ourselves.
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> In the analysis of our own mental life philosophy does not primarily appear as a doctrine or a formula. We arrive at these because our mental life prods us to seek them. Philosophy is a constant *function* of our living consciousness, a function which, immutable itself, produces most diverse "philosophies." Having once elucidated the working of this function of consciousness within ourselves, we can detect it in past periods and will then recognize its identity and permanence throughout the most divergent doctrines.
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> Two and only two, therefore, are the properties defining philosophy in its character as a permanent and identical function of human life throughout its history: totality of theme, autonomy of mode.

This passage is in a section devoted to Wilhelm Dilthey, whom Ortega regards as crucially important for his discovery that the nature of man is not independent of his history—man is what he has made of himself during past history. Hence the importance of history for self-knowledge. Through study of the history of ideas—of philosophy—man may come to self-consciousness in the present. Ortega uses the expression "self-reflection" to indicate the method of philosophy. The objective is to find in human consciousness the answers to essential questions. This has a unifying purpose, as distinguished from the kind of introspection practiced by Locke and Hume:

> Pseudo-positivism assumes a priori that the immediate facts of consciousness, like visual facts, are *in fact* unconnected and has, therefore, since Hume, set up psychology as a physical science of the mind.
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> But an authentic and radical positivism, resolved to accept mental facts as they are given in man's reflection on himself, finds the opposite to be true. Being aware of a volition of mine, what I first find is the unquestionable fact that I am willing something. But this resolve of mine that certain things—my "ends," since my action ends in them—must be brought about by me does not present itself as an isolated fact completed in itself. My willing something always points back for its *motive* to a value feeling that has prompted me to adopt those ends. And this valuation in its turn presents itself as founded on, or motivated by, my perceptions and ideas of things. So that in the mind, in contrast with the world given by the senses, no fact stands *in fact* by itself, as much a fact, as evident and primary as a mental fact itself, is its connection with other facts.

This leads Ortega to conclude:

> Investigation of consciousness yields at the same time the facts and their explanation, the phenomena and the law. Physical laws are dictated to material

> bodies by the physicist the laws of mental or spiritual life are dictated to the philosopher by this life itself.

In the first chapter of *Meditations on Quixote,* Ortega explains his basic purpose:

> I do not devote my efforts to anything but the attainment of a little common sense. It is out of reverence for the moral ideal that we must fight its greatest enemies, which are perverse moralities. In my opinion—and not only in mine—all utilitarian moralities are perverse, and a moral code is not cleansed of its utilitarian vice by making its prescriptions more rigid. . . . When our acts are decided by virtue of intermediary dogmatic prescriptions, the essence of goodness, exquisite and volatile as the most refined perfume, cannot descend upon them. . . . Therefore any moral code which does not include among its injunctions the primary duty of being always ready for the reform, the correction, and the expansion of the ethical ideal will be immoral.

One easily sees why a reviewer's generalizations are inadequate to convey the content of Ortega's writing. These works could easily become a source of provocation and delight for a reader throughout his lifetime.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
IT WASN'T THEIR FAULT

THE *Atlantic* for September has an article by Jonathan Kozol, a public school teacher who describes his experiences in a school in the Roxbury district of Boston, where he taught the fourth grade. (The article is adapted from a forthcoming book, *Death at an Early Age*, to be published by Houghton Mifflin.) Mr. Kozol gives an unrelieved account of the mutilation of the spirit of the young. The only encouraging thing about this article is the honesty and daring of the writer. It took courage to teach in a segregated classroom in Roxbury, and it took courage to write a book about the hopelessness of it all. Mr. Kozol says:

> The Boston school system is not perhaps the worst offender but it provides a clear example of the kind of education being offered the disadvantaged children of many cities. There are, admittedly, in Boston a cluster of unusually discouraging problems, chief among them the school administration's refusal for a great many years to recognize that there *was* any problem. Only slightly less troubling has been the exceptional virulence of the anti-Negro prejudice, both among teachers and the general public. Yet Boston's problems are not much different from those of other cities, and the solutions here as elsewhere will have to await a change in attitude at all levels of society.

The article gets under way with description of an eight-year-old boy named Stephen who is always in trouble, is regularly whipped, does poor work, and is regarded as a "problem" child. Some days he comes to school bruised because he has been knocked about by his foster mother at home. Stephen, however, has one major talent: "he made delightful drawings." But this ability only brought him more trouble because his originality was regarded as an insult by the art teacher. "Garbage! Junk! He gives me garbage and junk! And garbage is one thing I will not have!" He wouldn't color the mimeographed designs in the neat way the teacher had planned.

Mr. Kozol recognized Stephen's life as a desperate and losing battle to survive. Totally ignored unless he was naughty, his bids for attention took the form of mischief which brought "a tongue-lashing or a whipping." Terror became his normal state of mind:

> One time, seeing him curled up in one of the corners, I tried to get him to look up at me and smile and talk. He refused and remained shriveled and silent, and so I said to him "Stephen, if you curl up like that and will not even look up at me, it will just seem as if you want to make me think you are a little rat." He looked down at himself hurriedly, and then up at me, chuckled grotesquely, and said, with a pitiful little smile: "I *know* I couldn't be a rat, Mr. Kozol, because a rat has got to have a little tail."

Mr. Kozol's article fills out the picture of children going to a ramshackle, poorly maintained school, often in the charge of frightened substitute teachers, doing work that is on the average below the failing level.

Mr. Kozol tried. He proved that with intensive teaching test score averages could be brought up from 36 to 79 in three weeks. He showed that the children could understand prints of paintings by Joan Miró and Paul Klee. And they could get excited about the poetry of William Butler Yeats. He was able to do this, but he couldn't change the system itself:

> To hand Paul Klee's pictures to the children of a ghetto classroom, particularly in a twenty-dollar volume, constitutes a threat to the school system. The threat is handled by a continual underrating of the children. In this way many students are unjustifiably held back from a great many experiences that they might come to value, and are pinned down instead to books the teacher knows, and tastes that she can handle easily.

The school system solidifies its position by declaring that it aims to raise the children from the condition in which they "have for too long been submerged by parental lack of values." Mr. Kozol met the parents and he did not find them lacking in real values. There were bad conditions, now and then, and broken homes such as Stephen's, but the pertinent comment was rather that "Negroes in

Boston are deprived of rights" and their children are "deprived of good schools." And, as Mr. Kozol puts it, "to say that they are deprived culturally, in the face of the present school administration and in the face of the profound callousness and cynicism of the entire system, seems . . . meaningless."

Earlier, this writer had said that solutions for such problems "will have to await a change in attitude at all levels of society." How, it is natural to ask, are such changes accomplished? The answer must be that we hardly know. Yet this teacher, working under the most adverse of circumstances, was able to show an immediate change in the performance of the children, within three weeks.

But how will we find more teachers like that? Able, and willing, like Mr. Kozol, who took on a fourth grade in a ghetto school and proceeded to expose the façade of lies about the children by doing his job well?

In the case of the class taken over by Mr. Kozol because of the anguished plea of the principal, the children had had seven different substitute teachers in ten days. There was no continuity of teaching and practically no learning. He agreed to teach the class for the rest of the year if he could be sure that his own class would not be turned over to a string of substitutes. This is what he faced:

> Consider what it is like to go into a new classroom and to see before you suddenly, and in a way you cannot avoid recognizing, the dreadful consequences of a year's wastage of so many lives. You walk into a narrow and old wood-smelling classroom and see thirty-five curious, cautious, and untrusting children, aged nine to thirteen, of whom about two thirds are Negro. Lifetime records of seven of them are missing, symptomatic and emblematic at once of the chaos of the teacher changes. On the first math test the class average is 36. The children tell you with embarrassment that it has been like that since fall.

The schools would no doubt be transformed in a matter of months, if there were dozens of teachers like Mr. Kozol to start changing them from within. For him, the excitement of showing that the fault lay with the system and bad teaching, not with the children, was compensation enough for attempting it. And he explains that what made it possible was not any "expertise" on his part, but the "personal motivation of the children." They *wanted* to learn. All they needed was "a few grains of faith and expectation" on the part of the teacher—a little fun, some relaxation, and open agreement that the bad record of the past was not their fault.

FRONTIERS

Ionian Philosophy

WHAT shall we ask about first: the nature of the universe or the nature of man? Can these inquiries be separated? If not, is it expedient to separate them anyway? These are questions which are likely to occur to the reader of the review of G. L. Huxley's *The Early lonians* (Faber and Faber), in the London *Times Literary Supplement* for Aug. 24.

Devotion to truth for truth's sake, the reviewer says, animated the Ionian philosophers, and this high purpose made them the founders of objective scientific inquiry. In a tribute to these early Greek thinkers, the reviewer says:

> Egyptians and Babylonians might have accumulated astronomical or mathematical data, but always for *ad hoc* purposes; it was the Ionians who floated *historia*, scientific inquiry, free of mythic or religious framework in which it had hitherto been encumbered. They observed everything around them, from the cosmos to the smallest rock-pool with its teeming miniscule life; and where they observed they speculated. (Xenophanes, for instance, noted the fossil imprints of fishes and seaweed in the Syracuse quarries, and from them deduced a cyclical theory of geological history, with recurrent floods as the destructive factor.) They were the pioneers not only of natural science but also, as Professor Huxley points out, of the "first systematic geography" and also of "critical, secular history."

What qualified the Ionians for this daring enterprise? What made their thought so *independent?* The Ionian seaboard, the reviewer says, was a more cosmopolitan scene than mainland Greece. Exposed to a vast traffic in ideas as well as the diversity in customs which traders brought to their shores, along with merchandise from many distant places, the Ionians were "not likely to take a stuffily ethnocentric attitude to life." While admitting that this loose and permissive environment is not sufficient to explain the scientific revolution launched by the Ionian Greeks, the reviewer thinks it freed them from a confining patriotism. In this milieu, it is suggested, the internationalism of science had some hope of survival. The early Ionian philosophers of the eastern shores of the Aegean Sea "all sought to explain the material universe as given in sensible perception; their explanation was in terms of matter, movement, force." But their work, while influential, was never popular. And intellectual eminence, by itself, was no safeguard for a man whose reference-points of reality were outside the city-state. The attitudes characterized by Ortega as the "revolt of the masses" were well established in Ephesus by the time of Heraclitus, as the London *Times* writer points out:

> When the Ephesians exiled Heraclitus' friend, the lawgiver Hermodorus, they did so with the words: "Let no one be best amongst us; or, if one be best, let him be elsewhere and with other men." Exceptional ability always provokes envy, conformism is the greatest virtue, and steady sniping at established tradition among the most heinous social crimes. Indeed it is cause for astonishment that the Ionian thinkers were allowed to flourish as they did.

This lesson of history is repeated again and again. The "climate of liberal, rational opinion," achieved briefly by the Ionian philosophers, can never rest on its laurels. The reviewer says:

> It is an ideal to be constantly fought for, with unremitting vigilance: a precious acquisition all too easily lost. Who in 1900 could have predicted all the vicious and tawdry machinery of intellectual totalitarianism—systematic brain-washing, slanted propaganda, the down-grading of concepts such as truth and freedom to mere counters in the political powergame, the contemptuous dismissal of all honest intellectual endeavor, from the Ionians' day onwards, as "bourgeois objectivity"?

Can we ever, one asks himself, grow men of Ionian stature again? They were men who looked outward at the world, hoping to understand man by analogy with Nature. But was Socrates wrong in contending, as he makes plain in the *Phaedo*, that their preoccupation with external Nature ought to cause a man to look in other directions? "Physical investigations" could reach only "probable" knowledge and neglected the needs of the soul. Was Plato's influence, as some think, a disturbing and costly interruption for the scientific movement? While he referred to the Ionians, he did not follow their lead. Plato focused attention on the inner, psychological constitution of human beings; he was more concerned with the autonomy of man and the morality of decision-making than with the autonomy of scientific knowledge. While praising the habit of exactitude acquired in scientific study, Plato let his own "science" blend into myth, neglecting the Ionian example, which was to free science from myth.

But is it possible that Plato, while deploring the materialistic tendency of the Ionians, saw something else in them besides? One wonders about the actual foundations of a philosophical movement which seems to begin with purely physical speculation, yet reaches a climax in views such as Heraclitus proposed. While Heraclitus was no "early" Ionian, his thought developed in the matrix made by his predecessors. We take the following summary from an early edition of the *Britannica:*

> We have seen that Thales recognized change, but attempted no explanation; that Anaximander spoke of change in two directions; that Anaximenes called these two directions by specific names. From this last, the transition to the doctrine of Heraclitus is easy. He felt that change is the essential fact of experience and pointed out that any merely physical explanation of plurality is inherently impossible. The Many is of Sense; Unity is of Thought. Being is intelligible only in terms of Becoming. That which is, is what it is in virtue of its perpetually changing relations. By this recognition of the necessity correlation of Being and Not-being, Heraclitus is in a very real sense the father of metaphysical and scientific speculation and in him the Ionian school of philosophy reached its highest point. Yet there is reason to doubt the view of Hegel and Lassalle that Heraclitus recognized the fundamental distinction of subject and object and the relations of mind and matter. Like the early Ionians he postulated a primary substance, fire, out of which all things have emerged and into which all must return. This elemental fire is in itself a divine rational process, the harmony of which constitutes the law of the universe. Human knowledge consists in the comprehension of this all-pervading harmony as embodied in the manifold of perception; the senses are "bad witnesses" in that they report multiplicity as fixed and existent in itself rather than in its relation to the One. This theory gives birth to a sort of ethical by-product whose dominant note is Harmony, the subordination of the individual to the universal reason, moral failure is proportionate to the degree in which the individual declines to recognize his personal transience in relation to the eternal Unity. From the same principle there follows the doctrine of Immortality. The individual, like the phenomena of sense comes out of the infinite and again is merged, hence on the one hand he is never a separate entity at all, while on the other hand he exists in the infinite and must continue to exist. Moreover, the soul approaches most nearly to perfection when it is least differentiated from elemental fire, but it follows that "while we live our souls are dead within us, but when we die our souls are restored to life." This doctrine is at once the assertion and the denial of the self, and furnishes a striking parallel between European thought in its earliest stages and the fundamental principles of Buddhism. Knowledge of the self is one with knowledge of the Universal Logos (Reason); such knowledge is the basis not only of conduct but of existence itself in its only real sense.

While this reading of Heraclitus is not wholly accepted by some historians of philosophy, it is clear that the philosophical achievements of this last member of the Ionian School went considerably beyond "bourgeois objectivity."