

## THE ROOT IDEAS

AN enormous amount of emotional energy goes into feelings of anger at the inability of other people to see what is "right." It seems reasonable to say that this emotion is wasted, and that it often becomes immeasurably destructive, since it raises impassable barriers to communication. Obviously, people are disinclined to listen to other people who condemn them. What sense can a condemner make? And since those who won't listen to criticism can then be regarded as stubbornly ignorant, it seems all right to call them not only ignorant and wrong, but hopeless as well.

This is a situation which effects the conduct of life and the affairs of men all over the world, since the reactions we have described must be conceded to be universal. It grows out of the common failure of individuals and groups to gain the assent of others to what is conceived by them to be indubitably true. What does this failure mean? Well, it can mean that some people are wiser, more righteous than others. If it means this, then the less wise and less righteous are either incapable of learning, or the wise and the righteous are poor communicators and ineffectual educators. But if it be admitted that people who think they know the truth, or certain important truths, often turn out to be bad communicators and educators, then it is at least possible that they do not in fact know as much as they think. Indeed, they may be quite wrong in certain crucial respects. They may even have a deeply mistaken idea about the nature of "truth." So this situation involves calling into question the idea of truth, and it involves examination of the common and widespread failure of people who think they know the truth to consider why they fail to communicate it. It may be that these considerations are simply facets of the same basic reality—the reality that truth and its communication ought never to be considered separately.

What are the currencies of generally accepted truth, today? We have two great resources: Ethics and Science. In saying what we believe to be true, we try to put together our ethical ideas and our scientific ideas in some reasonable relationship. The ethical component is made up of what we *feel*; we *feel*, for example, that war and killing are wrong, that the strong should not take advantage of the weak, and that people should have opportunity to grow and enrich their lives as much as they can. All those who think about the good of man believe in these ideas, more or less. How shall they persuade others? Well, they have to have a theory of how ethics works in practice, and for this they go to science. They go to science, or they go to some practical psychological equivalent, such as "Natural Law," or "universal human experience" concerning what will work to human benefit, and what won't. The ethical part of their communication is supposed to be self-evident—that is, it seeks an obvious good that needs no supporting argument. The scientific part is supposed to nail down the means to get the ethical goodness into operation. Scientific argument is expected to do this because science represents objective truth and must be indisputable on any rational grounds. You *have* to accept science, or you are a know-nothing. Or, if not "science," then "common sense" or "the facts of life."

There is also a non-coercive view of communicating the truth which depends more or less upon the power of ethical ideas alone. Proponents of this view tend to hold that the impact of an ethical idea varies with the saintliness of its communicators. These people try to become practical embodiments of the dynamics they believe to lie behind their ethical ideas, which will thus be shown to be not just "ideas," but *laws*. One difficulty of this method of communication

seems to be that saintliness somehow stands in the way of the communicator's attempt to identify with the people he hopes to persuade. Persuasion and reproach are psychologically hard to combine. Possibly the fact that this sort of persuasion is in modern experience usually confined to conflict situations (without, that is, some version of Gandhi's Constructive Program) is at the root of such failures. But this question is subordinate to the larger issues we hope to explore, although it points in the same direction.

For example, our ethical expressions—those which are widely representative—seem to be mostly expressions of opposition to evil. That is, they gain sharp definition from their opposites, the obvious inhumanities of the times. In terms of positive principles of the good life, our ethical ideas remain abstractions—on the whole, *unlived*. We could say that our ethics voice the pains of a common conscience, not the vision and enthusiasm of affirmation. They are communicated, therefore, in a context of reproach. They mourn, deplore, and compare existing evil with nonexistent good.

Equally important, it may be, or perhaps more important, is the generally *unlived* character of what we hold to be our scientific knowledge. How many men, after all, have first-hand knowledge of scientific certainties? Then, too, the scientific definition of truth excludes knowledge about subjects, which has an alienating effect on many people. We may have here a root cause of our difficulties in communication.

At this point we lean heavily on the conclusions of Michael Polanyi's book, *Personal Knowledge*, since this work is the first major study which rises above the naïve assumptions of our recent scientific past, exposing the devitalization of the idea of truth that has resulted from the cult of "Objectivity." We quote from the first words of his Preface, as much to invite the reader to get the book as to establish a fresh beginning in the present discussion:

This is primarily an enquiry into the nature and justification of scientific knowledge. But my reconsideration of scientific knowledge leads on to a wide range of questions outside science.

I start by rejecting the ideal of scientific detachment. In the exact sciences, this ideal is perhaps harmless, for it is in fact disregarded there by scientists. But we shall see that it exercises a destructive influence in biology, psychology and sociology, and falsifies our whole outlook far beyond the domain of science. I want to establish an alternative ideal of knowledge, quite generally.

Hence the wide scope of this book and hence also the coining of the new term I have used for my title: Personal Knowledge. The two words may seem to contradict each other: for true knowledge is deemed impersonal, universally established, objective. But the seeming contradiction is resolved by modifying the conception of knowing.

Far from throwing "scientific caution" to the winds, Mr. Polanyi is rather giving it a new meaning. He shows, from variety of evidence, that all science has in it a problematic factor, and that the prime ingredient of all truth, whether called scientific or something else, is the informed faith of its protagonist. Truth, to have meaning, represents commitment, and this, under the exhaustive development of Mr. Polanyi's thesis, is an essential element in all scientific discovery. The mistaking of "objectivity" for some kind of sure-thing guarantee of truth has had a vastly sterilizing effect. It has also made dogmatists of those who imagine themselves armed with final scientific certainty. The following passage, taken from the chapter on Commitment, will illustrate a portion of his argument:

The most strictly universalized processes of inference are shown to rely ultimately on their inarticulate interpretation by a person accepting them, and life pursuing its self-centered primitive urge is shown to rely upon universal technical principles; while between the two we meet man's momentous acts of responsible commitment, made by accepting his own starting-point in space and time, as the condition of his own calling.

Within its commitments the mind is warranted to exercise much ampler powers than those by which it is supposed to operate under objectivism; but by the

very fact of assuming this new freedom it submits to a higher power to which it had hitherto refused recognition. Objectivism seeks to relieve us from all responsibility for the holding of our beliefs. That is why it can be logically expanded to systems of thought in which the responsibility of the human person is eliminated from the life and society of man.

In recoiling from objectivism, we would acquire a nihilistic freedom of action but for the fact that our protest is made in the name of higher allegiances. We cast off the limitations of objectivism in order to fulfill our calling, which bids us to make up our minds about the whole range of matters with which man is properly concerned.

No sooner do we read this than we begin to understand more clearly the drive behind the contemporary demand by both psychotherapists and educators for the quality of "commitment," so long barred from anything but the most primitive, spontaneous, and (scientifically) unrationalized expressions. We recognize, also, the insistence of the young on "personal relationships" and the almost maudlin demand for "self-expression" in their character as escape valves of the intense longing for individual *being*, to which the publicly accepted theory of knowledge has given no scope at all. In the schools, the Humanities long ago became sentimental, while science is boldly inhuman, and proud of it.

On every hand, we see the symptoms of what Robert Lowell named "horror of lost self." To the extent that this is a culturally produced attitude, we may look to intellectual influences for its cause. As we know, the rise of objectivism as an outcome of the scientific spirit was in large part a reflex of the conflict between science and religion. But in leaving that conflict unresolved on the question of human identity—science had no real interest in this—the protagonists of the modern outlook created an enormous vacuum in an area which should have been filled with man's serious thought about himself. (Traditional religion was no help here, having been discredited by scientific analysis of its pretensions, its arrogance, and its misinformation.) Being concerned only with the "objective," science had to be mechanistic, so how

could there be any attention to the human qualities of human beings? The general consequences of all this are well put by Georgy Kepes in a recent article (*Technology Review*, December, 1965):

Science has opened up immense new vistas, but we shrink from accepting the deeper and richer sense of life uniquely inherent in the new parameters of our Twentieth Century world. Where our age falls short is in the harmonizing of our outer and our inner wealth. We lack depth of feeling and the range of sensibility needed to retain the riches that science and techniques have brought within our grasp. Consequently, we lack a model that could guide us to re-form our formless world.

The formlessness of our present life has three obvious aspects:

First, our environmental chaos, which accounts for inadequate living conditions, waste of human and material resources.

Second, our social chaos—lack of common ideas, common feelings, common purposes.

Third, our inner chaos—individual inability to live in harmony with one's self, inability to accept one's whole self and let body, feelings, and thought dwell together in friendship.

Kepes is a designer, an artist, and a teacher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He looks at the breakdown in the symmetry of human life.

Let us listen also to a distinguished writer, J. B. Priestley, who examines the enthusiasm of modern political leaders for the "dynamic society" which continually offers us more and more of what we already have in surfeiting supply. According to these leaders, says Mr. Priestley, in 1970—

Everybody will have a car and drive home in it to watch color television and eat frozen scampi and artificially flavored peas. We shall be living in an adman's dream. But is this what we really want? . . . One reason why owning a car appeals to so many people is that they are becoming more and more restless. They don't know where they want to go but they want to go somewhere. Life might be better there; it isn't satisfying here. . . .

The possibility of doing good work, on any level, vanishes altogether when the community begins

to look like a kaleidoscope. Standards of all kinds disappear. Fashion always seemed so restless that it was absurd to any sensible mind, but now fashion has taken over everything. . . . We are all—not only manufacturers, shopkeepers, restaurateurs, but politicians, artists, philosophers, scientists—in a huge dress show, modelling hard. And clearly a society like this is well on its way towards intellectual and moral bankruptcy and final idiocy. So how will being dynamic help? We don't need an accelerated pace but a change of direction. . . . It is as if we were all asked to run as hard as we can to catch sight of a new advertisement of a detergent. (*New Statesman*, Oct. 9, 1965.)

We turn now to a psychiatrist, Dr. Charles B. Thompson, who bases what follows on a study of some nine thousand prisoners who came under his observation during four years of work in a clinic attached to the Court of Special Sessions in New York City:

In the early period of his life each of us as individuals is conditioned to react with a special affective content to the stimulus of the word "you," or, as he himself feels it, "I," and the picture or image denoted by this word comes to have more importance than everything and anything else in the world.

That which is "good" is to the advantage of this "I" and is to be sought, and that which is bad is to the disadvantage of the "I" and is to be avoided. . . . Each one becomes so conditioned that his thought automatically is, "How will what is going on in this moment cause *me* gain or loss?"

By virtue of the image of himself, which is thus secondarily acquired by the individual, which differentiates him from all others of his kind, an over-emphasis has been placed upon the individual and he has in turn been given an exaggerated sense of his own importance.

It is sufficient for our purposes in the moment that this conditioned, separative "I" image represents a common denominator for the compulsive egocentric acquisitiveness of man throughout the species, including the reaction of criminals as well as the non-criminals. Getting for one's self at the expense of others is both civilization's outstanding characteristic and its fundamental anomaly. In our superficial angers and hatreds or in our agreements, in our wars and in our equally superficial and evanescent arrangements called peace, "normal" man, like the

criminal, is himself a repeater of pathological reactions.

The purpose of these three quotations (Kepes, Priestley, Thompson) is to set the stage for a broad conclusion—namely, that a kind of social pathology is involved in the human condition at the present time, and that there are direct parallels to be drawn between the individual psychological disorder termed alienation and the social phenomena of the times. Accordingly, those who hope to communicate their plans for a better life for all need to include the methods of the therapist and educator in whatever they do. Least of all can they hope to accomplish good by verbalizing abstract ethical ideals and by arguments drawn from supposedly "scientific" facts. "The patient needs," as Frederick A. Weiss remarks in a recent paper on alienation, "not explanations but emotional experience." Dr. Weiss, who is attending psychoanalyst at the Karen Horney Clinic, continues:

To break through his alienation, he needs to begin to feel himself and to permit himself more and more to be. "Any true psychotherapy," Binswanger states—and this is particularly true for the alienated patient—"is reconciliation of man with himself and thereby with the world, is a transformation of hostility against himself into friendship with himself and thereby with the world."

But who knows enough to act as "therapist" to the world in these troubled times? A better question would be, Who knows enough, or has the effrontery, to act in any other way?

Therapy, these days, is becoming the practice of Socratic ignorance, through recognition by the therapist of his own fallibility and limitations. He knows, moreover, that communication of the sort that has a useful effect is not telling people what he thinks they need to know. They will learn only as *he* has learned, and this is by living out his beliefs and correcting his errors by experimental means. It is for this reason, perhaps, that only the old-fashioned psychologists can find a role in conventional politics, since only the mechanists and the image-makers are still persuaded that

service to human beings can be accomplished by manipulation.

The methods of change in the future—if change for the better will ever come—are surely in the hands of epistemologists like Michael Polanyi, of the makers of therapeutic communities like Synanon, and of all those who recognize that truth is communicated, not as an abstraction, but by the slow process of living it, after having learned that only lived truth has authentic communicability.

We need the poet's, not the scientist's, understanding of science. Almost a hundred and fifty years ago—in 1818—Shelley wrote:

Our calculations have outrun conception, we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.

Or as Thoreau wrote in 1842: "We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method." Truth, in other words, can never be more than what we are personally committed to; and there must be an element of personal discovery in relation to that truth, or we can never feel the commitment, nor the responsibility involved in affirming it.

The issues of the time do not lie in plans and programs, however urgently needed we may think them to be, but in a conception of the self which does not lead to the behavior described by Dr. Thompson, and therefore to the alienation described by Dr. Weiss. They lie in forms of communication which do not preach, moralize, or condemn, but which, so to speak, convince only by unintentional overflow, the way a work of art convinces.

The morale of a man of principle is about the toughest thing in the world, but it is also the most

difficult thing in the world to communicate, since it cannot be "taught"; rather, in a humane culture, this morale goes into solution with the contributions of other responsible members of society, and is drawn out by the slowly maturing young by mysterious osmotic processes nobody really understands. The generation of morale is the (usually) unconscious work of distinguished individuals who accomplish the most for all when others honor and try to emulate them. This kind of communication is a delicate operation which begins with the development of extremely fragile fruits, and it seldom succeeds in the presence of impatient, angry and self-righteous men.

The idea of self, the idea of truth, the idea of the world—these are the matters which need our attention, if we would remould human behavior closer to the heart's desire.

## *REVIEW* "HUMAN ECOLOGY"

THIS is the title of a book which presents a manuscript left unfinished at the death of Sir George Stapledon (Faber, London, 1964)—the great British agriculturist's attempt to assess the whole of modern society in ecological terms. Stapledon spent his life superintending various institutions for research and agricultural development, and as president of the Grasslands Association was apparently influential in effecting numerous far-sighted programs in England and Wales. Prior to World War II, he pressed for the preparation of unused land, because he foresaw that an extensive growth in population and a probable war would require an expansion of the sources of British food supply. Along with these duties and official responsibilities, he found time to be a philosopher, even something of a mystic. His rigorous biological studies habitually gained expression in a form which reached beyond the facts and figures of the practical problem; he was concerned with "alienation" in a way that had little to do with economic theory. One of his essays, "The Way of the Land," pointed out that urbanization not only creates cramped and crowded living, requiring much unrewarding labor, but also brings a frustration of the need for wild and open countryside.

Robert Waller, who supplies an understanding introduction to *Human Ecology*, comments on this dimension of Stapledon's thought:

What is needed now is a constructive philosophy of the instinctive which will enable us to evoke and train this element in our lives which has been variously called mystical, supernatural, occult and psychic, because it wells over the threshold of the unconscious and seems to take the conscious mind into its possession. Those who have trained themselves to cope with this element, and who are not afraid of it, expand their conscious apprehension of life, increase their spontaneity and, because they learn to be expansive rather than depressed, they attain to reason and wisdom beyond the reach of most of us.

*Human Ecology* invites reflection on the wondrous human capacity to identify with the "natural world," as expressed by writers whom we all honor—Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, Joseph Wood

Krutch—and some others, including Fairfield Osborn, who declares (in his introduction to John Storer's book, *The Web of Life*) a premise shared by all such men:

There are some truths, even fundamental ones, that are apt to elude us. The most basic truth regarding our Earth-home is that all living things, in some manner, are related to each other. This fact, while mainly important as a physical principle, carries implications even of a spiritual nature.

The youngster, captive on the sidewalks of our big cities, the farmer struggling in a dust bowl, the sullen river that once ran silver, the desolate tangle of second growth, even the last condor on a California mountaintop—all have a tenuous relationship to life on this earth as a whole. Man does not stand alone.

Although the balance of nature is a complex business, the story told here is in simple language and presented with clarity. While this book is not written primarily for specialists, it is valuable for all students of agriculture, and even for students who are interested in the social sciences. One of our great ecologists, the late Aldo Leopold, became eminent in his field not only because he was an accomplished scientist but because he was a philosopher as well. He used to say that unless one approached conservation with an ethical as well as an economic perspective, the problem had not even been adequately defined.

In *Cry the Beloved Country*, Alan Paton expresses a view of human ecology in which man assumes guardianship over the bounty of nature at his disposal:

The grass is rich and matted, you cannot see the soil. It holds the rain and the mist, and they seep into the ground feeding the streams in every kloof. It is well tended, and not too many cattle feed upon it; not too many fires burn it, laying bare the soil; Stand unshod upon it, for the ground is holy, being even as it came from the Creator. Keep it, guard it, care for it, for it keeps men, guards men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed.

Aldo Leopold, the biologist and forester named by Osborn, wrote about human need for conservation in *A Sand County Almanac*. He saw a wasteful, unappreciative use of resources as having "an ethical sequence":

Ethics, so far studied only by philosophers, is actually a process in ecological evolution. Its

sequences may be described in ecological as well as in philosophical terms. An ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. An ethic, philosophically, is a differentiation of social from anti-social conduct. These are two definitions of one thing. The thing has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of co-operation. The ecologist calls these symbioses.

There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus' slave-girls, is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.

The extension of ethics to this third element in human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. It is the third step in a sequence. The first two have already been taken. Individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong. Society, however, has not yet affirmed their belief. I regard the present conservation movement as the embryo of such an affirmation.

We began this collection of thoughts with Sir George Stapledon's *Human Ecology* and wandered afield by way of references and quotations, but not as to attitude and philosophic temper. Stapledon evolved feasible plans for enlightened de-urbanization. He proposed changes in the educational structure of England which would synthesize the sciences and give a new and broader meaning to biology. These proposals can be read by those interested in putting a stop to the serious invasions and mutilations of the human psyche accomplished by the city of our time. We turn, for conclusion, to a blend of philosophy and practicality which summarizes the thought of this man who, to borrow Paul Goodman's terms, always sought to combine "Utopian Essays" with "Practical Proposals":

Man is by no means the most highly specialized species; man is something vastly different and vastly more exciting, for he is incomparably the most adaptable species. Man's peculiar and unique adaptability turns upon his power to harness his faculties to the fulfilling of what, in practice, amounts to an unlimited number of purposes. For example, if *Homo*, in a fit of lunacy, decided to eliminate all trees

from the face of this planet, he could do so. No other species has powers of this order developed to anything like the same degree. By virtue of his very adaptability man has, however, contrived for himself an environment of such extreme complexity that he is in the gravest danger of being swallowed up by his own innovations. He has been excessively adaptable in some directions and insufficiently adaptable in others, so that we should be in error to judge human progress by the degree of complexity of man's achievements and of the environment which he has made for himself. Not only has man to learn the biological lesson of how to react simply to complexity, but he must also take heed of his spiritual and moral aspects. . . .

Agriculture implies so vastly more than the growing of crops, the care of livestock and the production of food. Food matters profoundly. Human nutrition, it is at last realized, is at the core of human health and happiness, and probably is also not far from the core of social and national stability. In a sane world food would be the background against which all international arrangements were made. In private life food is used not only to feed the inner man, but to nourish cordiality, hospitality, good-will and friendship. We live in a dark age with fitful gleams of light penetrating to the depths of human conscience. No gleam is brighter than that which has reflected the conscience of the United Nations in creating the Food and Agriculture Organization, a tangible and visible picture of representatives from upwards of twenty nations joined in permanent conclave to make proposals of an international character relative to food and agriculture. If this is earnest of a change of heart in international relations, and if at last man has learned to be guided in his international actions by the same feelings that have created what is best in domestic life and social intercourse, then indeed there is some hope for the world. There is no hope whatsoever for the rural-agricultural of any country, unless all countries understand precisely what is at stake in every respect, and unless world arrangements make possible a sound food policy and a balanced agriculture in each separate country of the world. In this crucial matter, great and small, we stand or fall together.

## COMMENTARY

### PUZZLES OF HUMAN NATURE

THE material in this week's *Frontiers* again draws attention to the equivocal counsels of "Nature" as a guide to human conduct. For man, nature is a vast allegory, not a source of didactic instruction. Even the great evolutionists of the nineteenth century virtually rejected biological canons of progress or survival in relation to man. Darwin, in a letter to A. R. Wallace (1864), agreed with his distinguished collaborator that "the struggle between the races of man depended entirely on intellectual and *moral* qualities," and Huxley, in his Romanes lecture, "Evolution and Ethics," asserted that the cosmic forces of evolution must be opposed by man in order to save the arts and civilization.

The old argument about nature versus nurture inevitably continues, since it involves the most crucial questions of what to do in behalf of the improvement of mankind. Hallock Hoffman stresses the same potentialities of human beings that are singled out by Sir George Stapledon (see page 8) in declaring that man "is incomparably the most adaptable species." Yet this adaptability creates for him unique problems:

He has been excessively adaptable in some directions and insufficiently adaptable in others; so that we should be in error to judge human progress by the degree of complexity of man's achievements and of the environment which he has made for himself. Not only has man to learn the biological lesson of how to react simply to complexity, but he must also take heed of his spiritual and moral aspects. . . .

For this conclusion to be reached, a certain sophistication based upon experience is necessary. Who would have thought, a century earlier, of making such criticism? Except for Carlyle and a few others, man's endless technological "adaptability" was hailed as fulfillment of both the laws of nature and the laws of God. In 1836, J. A. Etzler published in England a book with this title—*The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men, Without Labour, by Powers of Nature and*

*Machinery*, and in 1844 Willis Hall proclaimed in a Phi Beta Kappa address at Yale:

The age of *philosophy* has passed, and left few memorials of its existence. That of *glory* has vanished, and nothing but a painful tradition of human suffering remains. That of utility has commenced, and it requires little warmth of imagination to anticipate for it a reign lasting as time, and radiant with the wonders of unveiled nature.

While bright expectations of the boons of technology are still a widely voiced enthusiasm, the warnings of Stapledon seem more to the point, these days. So diverse are the directions of development which can be claimed as "natural" to man, it is certainly time to take seriously the responsibility pointed out by Arthur Morgan:

Our inborn inclinations do not exist as a harmonious unity but as an assemblage of traits with much conflict and discord, the results of evolution and survival under greatly varied conditions. . . . Aspiration, insight, and purposefulness undertake to critically appraise and direct both inborn inclination and cultural tradition and other conditioning so that they will best serve the more inclusive and optimal values. . . .

Can we say, then, that Nature, as manifested in *human* nature, is filled with contradictory tendencies? If so, "contradictory" according to what rule? It seems evident that we use mainly a pragmatic criterion. In the perspective of the past century, we find the "adaptation" implied by Social Darwinism to be a bad thing. This and other "mandates of Nature" capable of partisan justification turn out to be destructive in the long run. Is this, then, the kind of problem that is solved only by experience? Or can we have a theory of the nature of man that will not take us into one box canyon after another of misdirected development?

Is there a higher unity of resolving meaning that would enable us to see some kind of rational order even in the very "contradictions" of human nature? That would relieve us from relying entirely upon the slow empiricism of negative guidance by our accumulating mistakes.



The ancient idea of man being the microcosm of the Macrocosm might be a clue. This would give us at least a metaphysical basis for understanding the presence in ourselves of qualities which seem useful to animals in their separate and limited developments, but often confuse and delude human beings. Plotinus proposed that this confusion came from the "sorcery of Nature," arguing:

. . . to pursue the non-good as a good, drawn in unreasoning impulse by its specious appearance: it is to be led unknowing down paths unchosen; and what can we call that but magic?

Alone in immunity to magic is he who, though drawn by the alien parts of his total being, withholds his assent to their standards of worth, recognizing the good only where his authentic self sees and knows it, neither drawn nor pursuing but tranquilly possessing and so never charmed away.

The language may be very different, but the problem is the same. And Plotinus at least found a level of investigation where he believed rational order could be made to prevail.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

### NATURE AND NATURAL RELIGION

AN article by the late Rachel Carson in *McCall's* for last June is concerned with the need of children for a "sense of wonder." Mrs. Carson believed that a chief source of contemporary man's alienation comes from unnecessary estrangement from the "magic" in nature—always available in that larger "world around us" which dwarfs man's technical creations. If the child's awe at the breadth and scope of natural phenomena is encouraged, he may never need to struggle to understand the "reverence for life" implied by ideals of spiritual aspiration. Mrs. Carson concludes "The Sense of Wonder" with these paragraphs:

A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, an unailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.

Whether they are scientists or laymen, those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. Whatever the vexations or concerns of their personal lives, their thoughts can find paths that lead to inner contentment and to renewed excitement in living. Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of the birds, the folded bud ready for the spring. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the ebb and flow of the tides, the assurance that dawn comes after night, and that spring will follow winter.

*Speak to Us of Religion* by Elizabeth Manwell and Sophia Fahs (Beacon Press, 1960) has a similar emphasis:

Each child should feel the force of his own direct relation to the universe. It means, in this general area of life, as well as in all the other areas in which learnings may take place, that we can wisely give our major attention to the child's *having* these primary experiences. It means, instead of evading these primary experiences by casual and cryptic remarks or by religious phrases which may dry up the feelings of outreach, that we will share with the child the little that he can understand and will let him know that there is more that we, too, keep wondering about. It means that we can trust the very nature of life to keep alive the child's yearning search.

These thoughts are in the tradition of the great American transcendentalists. Bronson Alcott, for instance, believed that the only way to help children develop a natural capacity for "reverence" was by encouraging an unending search for beauty and value in everyday experience. Although Bostonians of a century ago were both puzzled and shocked by Alcott's proposal to teach religion merely by "conversation," they failed to realize that Alcott knew children did not need to be *made* good—that they had innate capacities for truth, goodness and beauty. Alcott held that "education, when rightly understood, will be found to lie in the art of asking apt and fit questions, and in thus leading the mind, by its own light to the perception of truth." As Edith F. Hunter has put it in *Conversations with Children* (Beacon Press, 1961): "Teaching religion through the give-and-take of conversation has been a method used by some of the greatest religious figures of the past. Buddha, Socrates and Jesus, to mention only three, used the method of conversation extensively. In dialogue unforgettable to those who knew them, they helped simple people grow in religious understanding. This way of teaching is based on the conviction that we learn primarily through our own experience. The teacher's most important role is that of midwife to thought rather than impartor of wisdom."

Mrs. Fahs' approach, then, is clearly that of the transcendentalists. She suggests that "religious instruction" will be of little value unless parents and teachers first share with children their wonder and awe in contemplating natural phenomena. She writes:

In a very real sense the beginnings of religion are to be found in the emotional flavor of a baby's first environment and in the warmth and happiness of his early childhood experiences. What a child will absorb out of what he hears about religion will depend on the emotional shading in the picture of his world that he has already made and accepted. If the child feels that he is fighting against odds in combating too severe parental authority, he may accept belief in a stern and arbitrary God, or he may rebel against all religious beliefs as a handicap. If he feels small and inadequate and ashamed of himself, he may accept as reasonable a kind of God who will confirm his pattern of deep guilt feelings. If he is, however, happy and outgoing and courageous, he may be able to think through the religious confusions he discovers in his community, and to work out a religious philosophy of life that will further establish his courage, and brighten his growing love for others.

Joseph Wood Krutch, in a disarming approach to natural religion, suggests how easily "nature appreciation" may lead to contemplation and even encourage a mystic sense of "selflessness":

Many whose temperaments are no more mystical than mine know moments when we draw courage and joy from experiences which lie outside the getting and spending of everyday life. The occasions of such experiences are many. The commonest and perhaps the least obviously related are these: reading a poem and contemplating a child—human or animal. But the experiences come to different men in many different ways. Some are most likely to be aware of them in solitude, others in crowds; some while looking at the stars, some while watching the waves roll in upon a beach. And whether you call the experience infrarational or superrational, it involves the momentary acceptance of values not definable in terms of that common sense to which we ordinarily accord our first loyalty. And to all such experiences one thing is common. There is a sense of satisfaction which is not personal but impersonal. One no longer asks, "What's in it for me?" because one is no longer a separate selfish

individual but part of the welfare and joy of the whole.

God looked upon the world and found that it was good. How great is the happiness of being able, even for a moment, to agree with Him! And how much easier that is if one is not committed to considering only some one section of the world or of the universe. (*The Voice of the Desert.*)

## *FRONTIERS* "The Way Things Are"

THE article by Hallock Hoffman on "Cooperation: the Problem of Survival [MANAS, Dec. 8, 1965] is incentive to great action. Intellectual assent is ineffective until it is emotionally stirred to action. Mr. Hoffman is right in assuming that the way things are includes the existence of aspiration and disciplined imagination or vision of what may be. The vision of the architect is as truly the cause of events as are the physical materials with which he works, or the funds available.

But vision and imagination and aspiration will be optimally effective when they are based on a recognition of *the way things are*, rather than on the way we wish things were. I believe that a fairly important premise of Mr. Hoffman is inaccurate. He writes:

People act as they do because they have learned to act that way. People are not born greedy, prejudiced or ambitious—they are taught greed, prejudice and ambition. People are born with little instinctive behavior—what they have is chiefly left over from an era when the human animal needed to stay alive under conditions that no longer exist. We are frightened by loud noises, dodge rapidly moving objects, resist sudden falls, suck when we are hungry—that is about all. Everything else we know and do, we have learned.

That is too simple a picture. While avoiding the controversial word, "instinct," we can say that men carry heavy loads of genetic conditioning. Much of which, if it never is stimulated in any way, may never emerge in impulse to action, though it is there, waiting to be aroused. Jealousy is a nearly universal trait, deeply imbedded in vertebrate inheritance, at least in mammals and birds, as it is in the human line. Jealousy is recognition of a possible competitor with impulse to eliminate the competitor. It springs up in small children without teaching. Impulse to social conformity is genetically inherited, and is fairly universal. It is especially strong in children. I recall, as a small child, my extreme embarrassment

when my clothes were markedly different from other children's. Many inborn traits persist, lying dormant until circumstance arouses them, sometimes long after their usefulness has passed in human society. A large part of human ethics is half-conscious denial of the present validity of some of our biological drives, which human culture, insight and aspiration have found to be unsuited to the best of human purpose, or where if they still have value, yet call for control, direction and discipline.

It is a function of human culture to appraise our inborn drives and inclinations, to leave dormant and unstimulated those which are of no present value, and to curb, educate and discipline those which in their raw natural state conflict with the optimum fulfillment of human potential. Our inborn drives also include some of our finest qualities—affection, unselfishness, aspiration and other social traits. Even these are of greatest value when they exist, not only as emotions, but also with the discipline of critical judgment and purpose. For instance pity as an emotion is a social asset, but to realize its full value it must be informed, disciplined, and educated into a wise purpose.

Our inborn inclinations do not exist as a harmonious unity, but as an assemblage of traits with much conflict and discord, the results of evolution and survival under greatly varied conditions. If Paul had known about evolution he would have had an explanation of his condition (Romans 7:23): "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O, wretched man that I am!"

What favors survival tends to survive. Dishonesty often helps to individual or to provincial group survival and survives in our inborn traits. Because honesty is a long-range, inclusive value, it too tends to survive in some circumstances. Because honesty is a universal, long-range, social value for society as a whole, it is the business of human aspiration and insight to

recreate human society so that it will be true that "honesty is the best policy." The same is true as to other traits.

Aspiration, insight, and purposefulness undertake to critically appraise and to redirect both inborn inclination and cultural tradition and other conditioning so that they will best serve the more inclusive and optimal values, such as emerge from experience, insight, imagination, aspiration and critically informed appraisal. Elimination of war is one condition necessary to that end.

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This comment by Dr. Morgan, while it begins by calling attention to the need for recognizing "the way things are," also lays stress on the role of culture in selecting for encouragement certain human potentialities while discouraging others. The development of cultural agencies to perform this task is a neglected area of human effort in our society. We have highly developed infra-structures for channeling human energy and preparing people for technical decision, but the supremely important moral choices—such as are made by the best of men by means of their "insight, imagination, aspiration, and critically informed appraisal"—are left almost without any attention at all. It should be obvious that these agencies cannot be "public," in the sense of supplied by the State, nor can they be the responsibility of any specific interest group. Perhaps they ought not to be called "agencies," but by some better name.

State-supplied cultural orientation, by reason of the coarse nature of political action, and because of the many compulsions which tend to shape it, inevitably over-simplifies when it does not degrade and distort. On the other hand, the homilies of traditional religion suffer the same fate as any counsels of perfection which are left without uncompromised means of practical application. There must be the independent strivings of individuals: the very opposites of high

counsels are followed by people who know no alternative to institutionalized patterns of mass behavior. The comment of Chuang Tzu on the "universal love" of Mo Ti (quoted last week from Thomas Merton's new book) has direct application, here.

Education is commonly conceived as the means for establishing the qualities of character needed "to redirect both inborn inclination and cultural tradition," but it should be plain enough that this "redirection" must be capable of going against popular ignorance and prejudice. The indifference of the California Board of Regents to the Byrne Report, which pointed out the importance of this freedom for university education, is evidence enough that public educational institutions, despite the exceptional individuals in them, are a diminished cultural resource.

The situation is as Thomas à Kempis described it many years ago—"All men desire peace, but few men desire those things that make for peace." The basic fact is that no really important decision for human beings can be left to institutions. When this is finally recognized, then we may begin to get those living infra-structures of aroused moral intelligence, wholly independent of any "practical" bias or institutional lag, that will help the young to make up their minds in behalf of Man.