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THE MISTS OF OBJECTIVITY

THIS article was to be called "The Myth of Objectivity," but it seemed that the word "myth" ought to be saved for better purposes. In the growing usage of the present, Myth means a light on the way you relate to the field of experience. It is a kind of fulcrum for the deliberated acts of human beings. It helps to identify and range the elements of the human situation according to their role and value in the drama of self-discovery.

Until very recently, "Objectivity" signified a state of intellectual blessedness peculiar to modern thought. You propped up the thing you wanted to know about, got far enough away from it to count its arms and legs, made tabulations of the frequencies of its various "behaviors," exposed it to various stimuli to learn about its reactions; and then, if sufficient samples were available, you cut it up, hoping for information about its inner structure and dynamics.

A formal account of the rise in importance of Objectivity would take us back to Galileo. Following the lead of Kepler, Galileo distinguished even more clearly between the objective qualities of things, such as their size and weight, and the attributes which result from the sensibility and intelligence of the human being who looks at them. The idea was to eliminate any possibility of equivocation concerning the "real" world, which meant—for the purposes of physics, at least—getting rid of whatever could not be precisely defined in physical terms. This became known as the correct way to read the "Book of Nature." As A. E. Burtt summarized the result: "From being a realm of substances in qualitative and teleological relations, the world of nature had definitely become a realm of bodies moving mechanically in space and time."

It seems likely that this stripping of nature of all but physically measurable qualities would have remained no more than a handy methodological device, save for the extraordinary success of the mathematical manipulations of matter and force by the first "natural philosophers"—who became, thereby, the founders of Modern Science. Newton's laws *worked!* The World Machine (despite Newton's objections) soon took the place of God and all purposive intelligence in nature. You didn't have to wrestle with theological imponderables any more, but could study the Book of Nature and prove your readings as you went along with the wonderful objectivity of mathematical demonstrations. In his *History of Materialism* (Harcourt, Brace, 1925), Frederick Lange describes what happened:

> From the triumph of this purely mathematical achievement there was curiously developed a new physics. Let us carefully observe that a purely mathematical connection between two phenomena such as the fall of bodies and the motion of the moon, could only lead to that great generalization in so far as there was presupposed a common and everywhere operative material cause of the phenomena. The course of history has eliminated this unknown material cause, and has placed the mathematical law itself in the rank of physical causes. The collision of the atoms shifted into an idea of unity, which as such rules the world without any material mediation. What Newton held to be so great an absurdity that no philosophic thinker could light upon it, is prized by posterity as Newton's great discovery of the harmony of the universe!

The broader cultural effects of the enthronement of scientific objectivity, and of the worship of "fact," are brilliantly summarized by Carl Becker in the first chapter of *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers:*

> We start with the irreducible brute fact, and we must take it as we find it, since it is no longer permitted to coax or cajole it, hoping to fit it into some or other category of thought on the assumption that the pattern of the world is a logical one. Accepting the fact as given, we observe it, experiment

with it, verify it, classify it, measure it if possible, and reason about it as little as may be. The questions we ask are "What?" and "How?" What are the facts and how are they related? If sometimes, in a moment of absent-mindedness or idle diversion, we ask the question "Why?" the answer escapes us. Our supreme object is to measure and master the world rather than to understand it. . . . [In the twentieth century] natural science became science, and scientists rejected, as a personal affront, the title of philosopher, which formerly they had been proud to bear. The vision of man and his world as a neat and efficient machine, designed by an intelligent Author of the Universe, gradually faded away. Professors of science ceased to speak with any assurance of the laws of nature, and were content to pursue, with unabated ardor, but without any teleological implications whatever, their proper business of observing and experimenting with the something which is the stuff of the universe, of measuring and mastering its stress and movement. "Science," said Lloyd Morgan, "deals exclusively with changes in configuration, and traces the accelerations which are observed to occur, leaving to metaphysics to deal with the underlying agency, if it exist."

It is well known that the result of pursuing this restricted aim (the scientific method reduced to its lowest terms) has been astounding. It is needless to say that we live in a machine age, that the art of inventing is the greatest of our inventions or that within a brief space of fifty years the outward conditions of life have been transformed. It is less well understood that this bewildering experience has given a new slant to our minds. . . . Science has taught us the futility of troubling to understand the "underlying agency" of the things we use. We have found that we can drive an automobile without knowing how the carburetor works, and listen to a radio without mastering the secret of radiation. We really haven't time to stand amazed, either at the starry firmament above or the Freudian complexes within us. The multiplicity of things to manipulate and make use of so fully engages our attention that we have neither the leisure nor the inclination to seek a rational explanation of the force that makes them function so efficiently.

In dismissing the underlying agency with a casual shrug, we are in good company. The high priest of science, even more than the common man, is a past master of this art. It is one of the engaging ironies of modern thought that the scientific method, which it was once fondly hoped would banish mystery from the world, leaves it every day more inexplicable than ever. . . . the essential quality of the modern climate of opinion is factual rather than rational.

This was written in 1932. It is now beginning to dawn on us more emphatically that a world defined in terms of its supposed "objective facts" is a world with which we cannot successfully relate in human terms. The human being inside every one of us is undeniably some kind of "underlying agency"—which science systematically and by design ignores. The three-hundred-year experiment by which Western man attempted to achieve absolute certainty by barring from the "real" world the non-objective facts of subjective experience has not worked. The assumption that you can get an adequate account of the nature and needs of human beings through statistical description of human behavior has not worked, either. And the political proposition that justice can be done by establishing a system based upon a "scientific" reading of history has broken down.

We are beginning to recognize that a theory of knowledge which claims objectivity to be the only criterion of truth is a theory which turns its supporters into arrogant, fanatical men. They think they *know*.

Now the fact of the matter is that they do not know. They understand neither the good nor the evil of which the human heart is capable. They do not know the difference between being an organism and having one. They make no definitions which distinguish between appetite and aspiration. To them, "Socratic ignorance" is a meaningless expression. Access to cybernetic techniques of suppressing subjective "error" has not helped the present government of the United States to illuminate what the country ought to do about its unbearable problems in Viet Nam. The great mechanical brains we call computers are the climactic achievement of what we may hope is the final attempt to make "objective"—and therefore capable of technical manipulation—the elements of the problems of human beings. They won't work—not, at least, for this end. The problems of

human beings are living, inner, moral and intellectual problems. They are not "objective," and they can't be made so without killing and cutting them up into manageable ("dead") parts.

Well, then, is "objectivity" good for nothing at all? Discussion of this question may serve as an answer to a letter of a reader who says, after reading "The Apologetic State" (MANAS, Feb. 3): "You seem to deny the existence of objective truth and regard all thoughts and theories as subjective. Is this what mystic philosophy or religion is really teaching us?"

We should say rather that a purely objective truth can say nothing of final importance to human beings. Objective truth is filled with counsels concerning what to do about man as an object, but it is totally silent on what man himself ought to do as subject. And man is first subject, then object.

After all the facts are in about the "objective situation," you still have to *choose.* And there is a whole universe of reality—mostly unexplored reality—which ought to affect such human decision and choice. The objective world may be some kind of analogue of the subjective world, but *it is not the same world.* Objective truth is a great boon to the practical needs of mankind, but only if it is understood that the so-called "practical" needs are not man's only needs. By the claim that only objective truth is "real," it becomes, for human purposes, no longer truth but obsession.

What is an "objective truth," anyway? The simplest definition we can think of is that it is a truth which is intrinsically the same for all men. It can apply, therefore, only to the parts of all men which are the same. But the important parts of all men are the parts that are *not* the same. Objective truth can say nothing about the individuality of human beings.

Of course, in order to "handle" or "manage" people, we devise tricky little techniques to make judgments about them. We make them fill out forms before they can get jobs. We grade their papers in school. Geniuses have been known to get very bad grades because the objective criteria of the tests employed did not cover the symptoms of genius, or were actually designed to discourage any such deviations from the mediocre norms of mass education. Further, if you have a properly docile population of students, exams intended to disclose originality are bitterly resented. The students prefer to deal with what is *expected* of them.

Another approach would say that "objective truth" is something that one man can really *give* to another. Or you can hire somebody to collect the objective truth you need at the moment, such as the knowledge needed for building a house or a city hall. Objective truth, in short, is the kind of truth you can put into handbooks. It is the kind of truth you can use without understanding how it was obtained.

If science is made over into an ideology—"Scientism," as some people call it—you get the proposition that eventually scientific research will resolve all problems by the accumulation of the relevant objective truths. Then our troubles will be over. People who have a tendency to accept this doctrine ought to read Roderick Seidenberg's *Post-Historic Man,* Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man,* and Ellul's *The Technological Society.* Here, we want to look at a cultural side-effect of the "Objective Truth" doctrine—what it has done to journalism.

In *Harper's* for last October, Otto Friedrich discusses the devotion to "facts" practiced by the news magazines of the United States. Having in the past fifteen years worked on four newspapers, a wire service, and two magazines, Mr. Friedrich brings expert knowledge to the subject. His title is "There Are 00 Trees in Russia," which is supposed to indicate how many of the "factual" stories in the news magazines get written. The idea is that a news magazine wins the loyalty of its readers by dealing in facts, so that their stories are always loaded with facts, even if the reporter on the spot doesn't know what they are, and puts "00" in his copy, leaving it to a girl researcher at

the home office to add the figures. The parade of "facts" often turns out to be a totally meaningless embellishment. As Mr. Friedrich says:

> The first question about this fetish of facts, which no newsmagazine ever questions, is whether these facts, researched and verified at such enormous trouble and expense, really matter. Obviously, there is an important difference between saying that Charles de Gaulle accepts Britain's entry into the Common Market, which a number of prominent reporters used to report, and saying that de Gaulle opposes Britain's entering the Common Market, which mysteriously turned out to be the case. But how much does it really matter whether a newsmagazine reports that de Gaulle is sixty-seven or sixty-eight years old, six feet one or six feet two, that he smokes Gaulloises or Chesterfields, that he eats a brioche or a melon for breakfast, that Madame de Gaulle puts fresh roses or does not put fresh roses on his desk every day?

Mr. Friedrich quotes the opening of *Time's* cover story on Henry Cabot Lodge, then comments:

> "In the early-morning gloom of Saigon's pre-monsoon season, an alarm clock shrills in the stillness of a second-floor bedroom at 38 Phung Khac Khoan Street. The Brahman from Boston arises, breakfasts on a mango or papaya, sticks a snubnosed .38-cal Smith & Wesson revolver into a shoulder holster and leaves for the office."
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> This is a fine example of the well-trained virtuoso at work, not only disguising the subject of the story but combining a series of insignificant facts into a cadenza of exotic weather, breakfast food, strange street names, and gunplay. The author was so pleased with the results that he went on repeating himself for three paragraphs, which disclosed that the temperature that day was ninety degrees, with 99 per cent humidity, that Lodge's moving vehicle was a Checker Marathon sedan, that the U.S. Embassy building is located at 39 Nam Nghi Boulevard, and that Lodge's office desk contains yet another gun, a .357 Smith & Wesson Magnum. There are two reasons for this inundation of minutiae. The first—based on the theory that knowledge of lesser facts implies knowledge of major facts—is to prove that *Time* knows everything there is to know about Lodge. The second, based on the theory that a man who carries a gun is tough and aggressive—is to dramatize the basic thesis, that Lodge would be a good Republican candidate for President.
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> But what does the specific fact itself matter? Does it matter whether Lodge carries a .38-cal. Smith & Wesson or a Luger or a pearl-handled derringer? Does it make any difference whether he lives on the second floor of 38 Phung Khac Khoan Street or the third floor of some other building? The newsmagazines have provided their own answer by evolving a unique system which makes it theoretically possible to write an entire news story without any facts at all. . . . This technique enables the writer to ignore all facts and concentrate on the drama. If he is describing some backward country for example, he can safely write that 00 per cent of its people are ravaged by TK [meaning, "To Come," that is, to be added by a checking researcher] diseases. It obviously doesn't matter too much whether the rate of illiteracy is 80 per cent or 90 per cent. Any statistic will sound equally authoritative. It is the checker who is responsible for the facts, and she will fill in any gaps.

It becomes clear from Mr. Friedrich's analysis of popular (magazine) culture in the United States that the shibboleth of "objectivity" has devastating effects at this level. On the whole, Americans are converted to the view that "facts" are all they need to be well informed. This puts the media which claim to provide the facts in a position of practically sacerdotal authority. The editors, of course, know better—as must anyone who has ever had anything to do with any kind of reporting—but the press and the news magazines are involved in justification not only of the "objectivity" theory of knowledge; they also are involved in a process of economic survival dependent upon being "authorities," which virtually turns them into conscious frauds. Since facts, by themselves, are without meaning, interpretations have to be smuggled into the news stories, as though they were some kind of secretion of the facts. Unless this is done, the magazines won't sell. As Mr. Friedrich says of American readers: "They accept the newsmagazines not as magazines of commentary or interpretation but as magazines which will tell them yet more facts, 'the real story'."

When you think about this situation, you begin to see that the pretense of settling all important matters by reference to "facts" is a great big razzle-dazzle which has no legitimate connection with authentic processes of deliberative thought and intelligent decision-making. The old scientific slogan, "Facts, justly arranged, interpret themselves," is the key to this confusion. The joker is the phrase, "justly arranged," since any arrangement involving fitness or appropriateness depends upon subjective considerations. A just arrangement of facts is an arrangement according to philosophical and ethical—that is, *human*—criteria. Such criteria are reached by human beings in their inner lives as subjective and moral agents. The development of those criteria is the only important project of an association of civilized human beings, since the use they make of whatever "facts" they have, or think they have, is finally determined by the ruling moral attitudes of the people involved.

What shapes ethical criteria? This simple question has a simple answer. A man's feelings about his own nature and worth and the nature and worth of other people, his ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, in all personal and social relationships, shape his ethical criteria.

The next question is: How do people change or improve their ideas about themselves and others? And the answer is, they do it only by strenuous effort and search. They do it through the conscious search for truth—a task that can never be delegated to anyone else. It is for this reason that our article. "The Apologetic State," made a frontal attack on the doctrine of "objective truth." Without subjective criteria, objective truth isn't truth—it isn't anything at all, except a meaningless jumble of unrelated appearances. We should all of us know by now, from a study of the history of Western thought, that the claimant to "objective truth" without a subjective (philosophical, metaphysical, and ethical) foundation is a completely deluded person. His thinking is filled with unexamined assumptions.

Are, then, "objective facts" no good at all? It would be foolish to suggest this. The quest for objectivity, if honestly pursued, inevitably instructs us in the futility of arriving at real knowledge by this means. A man soon learns that assembling an array of facts, or approximate facts, is in some cases possible and in other cases not, but that, either way, the decisive problem is always gaining assent for the moral implications with which the investigator started out, or which began to emerge as he worked on the project.

One of the interesting things about the development of thought about physical science in the twentieth century is its gradual withdrawal of scientific authority from the cult of objectivity. The Logical Positivists, as is well known, long ago abandoned hope of reaching "truth" by means of inductive investigation, and grow a little irritated when anyone suggests that scientists have any responsibility in this direction. What seems probable, however, is that attempts at objective (scientific) description are analogues of the search for truth, and that a man who has some experience in this direction is likely to have acquired a decent humility in relation to all attempts to get actual knowledge.

Some years ago, Pierre Duhem, a theoretical physicist and philosopher of science, showed that without a philosophical foundation in metaphysics, science could never be anything more than a kind of elite technology. In an article published in *Science* for April 23, 1954, Duhem wrote of physical science:

> Concerning the very nature of things, or the realities hidden under the phenomena we are studying, a theory conceived on the plan we have just drawn teaches us absolutely nothing.

Physical theory by itself, Duhem maintained, could never accomplish explanation, but only representation and classification. He said that the nature of ultimate reality was beyond the scope of physical science, although it might provide a kind of parallelism in its account of physical structure. Duhem continues:

> Physical theory never gives us the explanation of experimental laws, it never reveals realities hiding under sensible appearances, but the more complete it becomes, the more we apprehend that the logical order in which theory orders experimental laws is the reflection of an ontological order, the more we suspect that the relations it establishes among the data of perception correspond to real relations among things, and the more we feel that theory tends to be a natural classification.

This, indeed, from the point of view of the quest for knowledge, is the justification of physical science:

> . . . the physicist is compelled to recognize that it would be unreasonable to work for the progress of physical theory if this theory were not the increasingly better defined and more precise reflection of a metaphysics, the belief in an order transcending physics is the sole justification of physical theory.

The interesting thing about a statement of this sort by a theoretical physicist is its candid return to Platonic idealism as the basis of a theory of knowledge. This is not a tendency limited to physical scientists, although it obtains special importance from the fact that the physicists were primarily responsible for isolating the measurable, external qualities of nature and proposing that reliable definitions of "reality" could be had in no other way. Today, the entire movement of serious thought is in the direction of restoring the primacy of subjective perception. This is certainly the central significance of the work of the humanistic psychologists; it is an obvious requirement of Erich Fromm's assignment of responsibility to the individual for his own transformation (the therapeutic "leap"), and it appears unequivocally as a Platonic revival in Louis Halle's *Men and Nations.*

It is natural to ask: But won't such high claims for the subjective side of human existence lay us open to the hazards of uncontrolled emotionalism? Surely we ought not to jettison the hard-won disciplines of scientific impersonality and impartial devotion to truth?

This comment seems exactly right. Science *was* born from a love of truth. The spirit of scientific method must be preserved, if we are not to lose the value of some three hundred years of hungering and striving for knowledge. And it is perfectly possible to recognize the rediscovery of subjective reality as a climactic achievement of science itself—making it possible once again for men of science to be serious philosophers. What we lose, from this development, is only the delusion that from endless collection of "objective" facts we can finally construct a sure-thing science of man, and we gain, to take its place, a growing awareness of the subjective potentialities of human beings.

REVIEW
"CONFORMITY" AND "FREEDOM"—AGAIN

AN article by Everett Wilson in *Trans-action* for last November, titled "Conformity Revisited," replies to the critics of "conformist" thinking, notably Erich Fromm, David Riesman, William H. White, and others. Dr. Wilson, an assistant Dean of Antioch College, is attempting to be provocative by refuting what he regards as oversimplified and high-sounding polemics against sensible adjustment to the social environment. For example, argues Wilson, it is not necessarily true that "conformity implies equality, uniformity [and] derogates individuality, [that] conformity implies manipulation, [that] conformity damps out the life of impulse and emotion, [that] conformity implies softness, [that] conformity means mediocrity." The core of Wilson's argument seems hardly more than a stating of the obvious:

> There are many *kinds* of conformity. If some are bad, some should be preserved at all costs. Some non-conformities are license rather than liberation—futile and destructive rather than purposeful and creative. "The effect of liberty to individuals is that they may do as they please," said Edmund Burke. "We ought to see what it will please them to do before we risk congratulations."
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> It seems to me that conformity is good when it involves those conventional forms, those niceties of conduct which are the customary cues to our respect for one another. They are the signs of reciprocity of consideration in human affairs. However trivial conventional greetings might seem, for instance, they carry some slight intimation of the Golden Rule.
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> Conformity is good, above all, when it applies to the political and scientific rules for making rules. To rule on an issue politically we insist on free and open discussion, encouragement of diverse views, decisions based on majority judgment, and impartial execution and respect for that decision, even if we disagree with it—until we can change it.

The conclusion, however, is certainly subject to rejoinder:

> The attributes of man we most esteem are intimately linked to the group with all its coercive impact. Conformity of a very basic sort is the price of self-realization—even of non-conformity. Our cultural legacy, the very existence of a social order, personal stability, the development of an unique self with a capacity for thought and choice, grow out of the conformities of group life.
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> We have been fed a half-baked critique of conformity noble in intent but shallow in analysis. Conformity is sometimes bad, of course. Conformity is sometimes good, certainly. But first of all, conformity *is*.

Trans-action adds to the discussion with material from two other writers: a socialist, Dennis Wrong, and Ernest Van Den Haag, a professor of social philosophy at New York University. What Dr. Wrong says, we think, is to the point:

> I agree with Wilson that the view that we live in a "mass society" in which men are increasingly manipulated by others and regarded as interchangeable units in a huge and impersonal social system is often overstated and reduced to caricature. But one does not dispose of such a view by merely reiterating a few obvious truths about our dependence on a cultural heritage received from others or the need for some consensus on rules of conduct if we are to have a society at all. All views of social reality become distorted and sloganized when they pass from the writings of thoughtful scholars and intellectuals into popular parlance—something that happens very quickly nowadays. The critic is obliged to distinguish between their original and their—in the literal sense of the word—vulgar form, whether he is concerned with Christian theology, classical economic theory, Marxism, psychoanalysis, the theory of mass society, or the root ideas of modern sociology. Wilson's schoolmasterly admonitions include no recognition that the critics of conformity were originally challenging debased versions of the very ideas he solemnly affirms in rejecting similarly debased versions of the anti-conformity thesis.

Dr. Van Den Haag clarifies further, discussing "Psychological Conformity":

> Still another definition of "conformity" refers to a psychological attitude. A conformist thus may be a personality type who does not feel comfortable unless he shares the prevailing views, and acts according to the prevailing customs. A nonconformist is one who does not feel comfortable unless he dissents, opposes, and stands out. Both types may exist in mild and extreme, voluntary and compulsive editions. It seems to be about as silly to be "for" (or against) either, as it is to be "for" (or against) redheads. Neither Fromm

nor Riesman advocate, as far as I know, the nonconforming character type as here described though they defend it as a useful antidote, or leaven, on occasion. Both advocate an autonomous personality type capable of conforming or nonconforming decisions without being driven by inner compulsion or by external pressure.

Thus if Fromm, Riesman, et al., maintain that people are too conformist, they argue that people too often unnecessarily abdicate their right to think and act independently and instead blindly accept prefabricated ideas, or submit to manipulation or to rules they ought and could not submit to, and that there is unnecessary manipulation which is not in the social interest.

To these contributions on a now-familiar theme, we might add some paragraphs from an article by Carl Rogers, titled "Learning to be Free" (*NEA Journal*, March, 1963). Dr. Rogers is neither attacking nor defending a "position," and it is perhaps for this reason that what he says seems fresh and alive in comparison to "argument" about these questions. Dr. Rogers, clearly an educator in the genuine sense of the word, writes:

To some, it must seem strangely out of tune with the modern world to speak of learning to be free. The growing opinion today is that man is essentially unfree. He is unfree in a cultural sense. He is all too often a pawn of government. He is molded by mass propaganda into being a creature with certain opinions and beliefs, desired and preplanned by the powers that be. He is the product of his class—lower, middle, or upper—and his values and his behavior are shaped to a large extent by the class to which he belongs.

He is unfree in a scientific sense. The behavioral sciences have made great strides in showing that all his actions and thoughts are determined, being simply the result of previous conditioning. Hence it seems increasingly clear that the individual is formed and moved by forces—cultural forces without, and unconscious forces within—which are beyond his control. He is in all these ways unfree.

However, the freedom I want to discuss is essentially an inner thing, something which exists in the living person, quite aside from any of the outward choices of alternatives which we so often think of as constituting freedom. It is the quality of courage which enables a person to step into the uncertainty of the unknown as he chooses himself. It is the burden of being responsible for the self one chooses to be. It is the recognition by the person that he is an emerging process, not a static end product.

The individual who is thus deeply and courageously thinking his own thoughts, becoming his own uniqueness, responsibly choosing himself, may be fortunate in having hundreds of objective outer alternatives from which to choose, or he may be unfortunate in having none, but his freedom exists regardless.

It is a freedom in which the individual chooses to fulfill himself by playing a responsible and voluntary part in bringing about the destined events of the world he lives in.

Of particular interest is Dr. Rogers' treatment of the freedom-versus-conformity *contretemps* in respect to institutions of learning:

It seems at least a possibility that in our schools and colleges, in our professional schools and universities, individuals could learn to be free in this sense. I say this in full recognition of the fact that the current trend in education is away from freedom. There are tremendous pressures today—cultural and political—for conformity, docility, and rigidity. The demand is for technically trained students who can beat the Russians—and none of this nonsense about education which might improve our interpersonal relationships! The demand is for hardheadedness, for training of the intellect only, for scientific proficiency.

For the general public and for many educators, the goal of learning to be free is not an aim they would select. Yet if a civilized culture is to survive and if the individuals in that culture are to be worth saving, it appears to be an essential goal of education.

I would like to say that it is my opinion that for the most part modern culture—in its two main streams, Western and communist—does not, operationally, want persons to be free and is extremely fearful and ambivalent of any process which leads to inner freedom. Nevertheless, it is my personal conviction that individual rigidity and constricted learning are the surest roads to world catastrophe.

It seems clear that if we prefer to develop flexible, adaptive, creative individuals, we have a beginning knowledge as to how this may be done. We know how to establish, in an educational situation, the conditions and the psychological climate which initiate a process of learning to be free.

COMMENTARY
BEYOND THEOLOGY

IN connection with the discussion of teacher education in this week's "Children" article, the opening chapter of Joseph Henderson's *Myths of Death, Rebirth, and Resurrection* offers a wise orientation:

> Not so many years ago, in his *Varieties of Religions Experience*, William James foreshadowed an entirely new psychological relativity toward religious experience. Ignoring theology, he brought to his readers the benefit of an impartial and, above all, accepting attitude to all forms of religious experience. He did not consider some as higher or lower, better or worse than others, and although a good many were experiences reported by pathological individuals he did not interpret these experiences themselves as being essentially healthy or deranged. It is with this attitude that I should like to approach the subject of death; in fact, the subject of death and resurrection as a whole. It is a subject which defies our ever finding the ultimate truth but one around which cluster a variety of symbolic representations by which the living have sought to approach the end of life in a meaningful way.
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> Whenever we find the theme of death, whether in recurrent myths or modern dreams, we find that it is never seen to stand alone as a final act of annihilation. Apart from extreme forms of pathological depression or of infantile sadism, death is universally found to be part of a cycle of death and rebirth, or to be the condition necessary to imagine transcendence of life in an experience of resurrection. Somewhere between the myths of death and rebirth and the myths of death and resurrection we find abundant evidence for another theme in which the experience of death and rebirth is central—the theme of initiation. Initiation provides the archetypal pattern by which the psyche, whether in individuals or in groups of people, is enabled to make a transition from one stage of development to another and therefore brings the theme of death and rebirth into close relation to problems of education whether in a religious or a secular sense.

Alfred Reynolds' critique of the political way of life (see Frontiers) makes one wonder why this view is not more widely accepted. We can think of only one explanation: the alternative to reliance on political action requires a high faith—actually, a metaphysical faith—in the potentialities of human beings. The truth of Mr. Reynolds' analysis is obvious, but when we come to large public decisions we adopt methods whose results are so blurred that we can argue that, somehow, they "worked." Will it be only after massive and completely disastrous failure of the political means that we turn to faith in man?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE U.S. AND RELIGION—A NEW CONCEPT

THE "Voice of America," a U.S. government agency, has been sending fifteen-minute religious programs abroad each Sunday, designed, presumably, to indicate that America, unlike Russia, has deep respect for religious values. These programs attempt a balance of material from various religious denominations and faiths, and reach Europe, the Far East, West Africa, East Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, the idea being to give sympathetic expression to various sectarian points of view—the approach of comparative religious study.

Commenting on this development in the New York *Herald Tribune* for Jan. 11, David Lawrence suggests that this involvement of the government with religion, which has never been challenged as unconstitutional, might show how the public schools could pursue nonsectarian religious instruction. He writes:

> At last there has emerged a possible solution of the controversy that has recently arisen as to whether the worship of God and the reciting of prayers shall be continued in the public schools. For the government itself apparently has found a way to overcome the handicap imposed by those decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States which were widely construed as forbidding any governmental connection with instruction on religious subjects in the public schools. The system that could be used in the schools now is being employed by the "Voice of America."

Mr. Lawrence thinks that "phonograph records or tape recordings of these programs could be readily made and supplied to all public as well as private schools, to be played in certain rooms over loudspeakers during a free period each day or at least once a week; those students who didn't care to listen would not have to do so." He continues:

> Certainly, if the "Voice of America" can broadcast programs based on religion and use taxpayers' money to do so, there doesn't seem to be any logical reason why the same thing cannot be done for the public school children of America also by using government funds. As long as the broadcasts do not have to be listened to by those who wish to dissociate themselves from particular faiths, the whole plan fits in with the argument for voluntary participation in religious exercises.
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> It could hardly be argued persuasively that this would be a violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution, since the "Voice of America" is already spending government funds to disseminate religious doctrines all over the world. If the government itself can select programs on religious subjects and pay for broadcasting them overseas, the individual educational institutions of this country would be well within their rights in asking for a similar service from their government. Surely what is broadcast to people outside the United States should also be available to children inside America.

What Mr. Lawrence has not considered, apparently, is that in these programs the only exception to the Christian faith is that of the Jews, represented by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. The "Voice of America" may be "ecumenical" in terms of Judaic-Christian tradition, but the perspectives of Eastern philosophy and religion are given no attention. The impression left by the "Voice of America," therefore, is that the United States is essentially a Christian country—a misleading oversimplification. The numerical preponderance of Christians of all denominations does not change the fact that, in the United States, *all* religious viewpoints are to be regarded as of equal value from the standpoint of individual conscience. This is the crucial point which needs to be clarified, so that religion is not defined by "America" as requiring, for instance, belief in God. The millions of Hindus and Buddhists throughout the world are not monotheistic in orientation.

Some paragraphs from Huston Smith's *The Religions of Man* suggest a more mature approach to religious study. Dr. Smith is concerned with the universality of all genuine

spiritual striving, and sees the essence of religion in the search for truth rather than in any particular beliefs:

> Religion alive confronts the individual with the most momentous option this world can present. It calls the soul to the highest adventure it can undertake, a proposed journey across the jungles, peaks, and deserts of the human spirit. The call is to confront reality, to master the self. Those who dare to hear and follow this secret call soon learn the dangers and difficulties of its lonely journey.
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> Science, as Justice Holmes was fond of saying, makes major contributions to minor needs. Religion, whether or not it comes up with anything, is at least at work on the things that matter most. When, then, a lone spirit succeeds in breaking through to major conquests here, he becomes more than a king—he becomes a world redeemer. His impact stretches for millennia blessing the tangled course of human history. "Who are . . . the greatest benefactors of the living generation of mankind?" asks Toynbee. "I should say: 'Confucius and Laotze, the Buddha, the Prophets of Israel and Judah, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammed and Socrates'."
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> The answer should not surprise. Authentic religion is the clearest opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos can pour into human existence. What then can rival its power to touch and inspire the deepest creative centers of man's being? Moving outward from there into myth and rite it provides the symbols that carry history forward until at length its power too is spent against the world's backwash and life awaits a new redemption.

In other words, there is a danger in limiting "comparative" religious presentations to Christianity and Judaism alone, either by way of broadcasts overseas or in the classroom. There is even something questionable in the psychology of "comparison" itself. As Smith puts it: "Comparisons among things men hold dear always tend to be odious, those among religions most odious of all." It follows that anyone seeking to be truly nonsectarian will avoid the "assumption that one religion is or is not superior to others; comparative religion which takes such questions for its concern usually degenerates into competitive religion." As Arnold Toynbee has remarked: "There is no one alive today who knows enough to say with confidence whether one religion has been greater than all others."

These considerations are meant to suggest that the public view of religion, which the Supreme Court has sought to articulate, must rise above comparison and instruction in the specific beliefs of various groups. And in the schoolroom, only the teacher whose education and reflection lead him to this conclusion is able to foster respect for the "spiritual nature of man"—regardless of formal creeds.

FRONTIERS

Political Action

WE often hear that those who refrain from acting in the political sphere are ineffectual, unpractical, and unwilling to do even the little good that a man living in a coercive social order is able to do. It is also maintained that any progress of that social order demands that individuals should act on hypotheses entailing unknown quantities, one of which is the inevitable compromise resulting from the clash of personal opinions and prejudices, and the other the acceptance of imperfection in the sphere of political action. Without these society would be paralyzed.

It is usually admitted that the faults of the social order are reflections of individual shortcomings which also find expression in individual relationships. It is claimed, therefore, that a compromise of personal opinions and the delegation of authority are the only alternatives to a complete surrender to forces which would condemn the individual to insignificance and stagnation. Who would not want to choose, so the argument goes, when the country in which we live were to be confronted with the alternatives of democracy or communism?

It is unfortunate that our critics and we do not use the same language. Almost all concepts they employ are an inheritance from the nineteenth century, still good currency in the market of ideas and in the daily press, but valueless if we wish to understand our own time.

There is, first of all, the idea of doing "good," still uppermost in the minds of English and American reformers and their less active but very enthusiastic spectators. I am afraid the terms "good" and "evil" are only meaningful in context, that is, in a context which assigns a clear role to these terms in relation to premisses and aims. We believe that "good" in the sense that it helps the survival and the growth of the specifically human personality, cannot be promoted in a coercive society and in the political struggle. It is admitted that good may, sometimes, occur as a by-product. Since, however, the people concerned cannot foresee the possible by-products of their activities, they must, to be successful, play the game according to its own rules. These rules do not allow the pursuit of "good" to be placed in the forefront of political endeavour and if anyone would spite the rules he would be ineffectual, success would elude him, and eventually he would lose the game.

Survival and growth of the personality are the only aims we are prepared to pursue. If they cannot be served in the political arena, by political means, we have to choose another road, however arduous and slow the progress it promises.

One of my friends put this point very succinctly: "When action is undertaken it should have some relevance to the ends which it was intended to produce. If you detest what political behaviour leads to, you should not indulge in it. It is no good having principles if you are continually flouting them."

Another important factor of which our critics lose sight: our main concern should not be the (impossible) changing of society. In the nineteenth century, political thinkers, wearing rose-tinted spectacles, believed that "right" action will lead to right results. (Right in the light of their own premisses, of course.) The twentieth century approach to politics is more sceptical and often errs in the other direction: All human effort is futile, the relentless political machine will bulldoze away all personal ideals and the hapless individual will suffer the fate of the noble savage in "Brave New World" or Winston Smith in "1984." I believe that we should resist both temptations, false hopes based on mirages, and the dark despair of the drowning man who thinks that a dying moment of lucidity is an, albeit poor, compensation for his failure to survive.

We should try an entirely different approach by concerning ourselves with an analysis and understanding of our society, its organization and institutions. We see the root of the trouble in

individual attitudes and therefore advocate the only possible course, the changing of individual attitudes. This endeavour seems to us entirely realistic and practicable. It contains, if our critics like these words, a measure of "compromise" and an acceptance of the "imperfection" of the world. We should consider, and side with, the human being whatever his faults, fears and prejudices, against those forces which prevent him from surmounting his faults, fears and prejudices. To encourage, condone and even emulate these can have but one result: the perpetuation, by our own action, of an order which reflects these shortcomings. The "social reformer" must always go two steps backward in order to go one forward.

Finally, we come to the question of hurrying to the defence of democracy against the danger of communism. Here again, we are hamstrung by words. Do we mean by democracy a parliamentary party-system? Do we mean by communism authoritarian centralism? If we are prepared to abuse language shamelessly in order to fall in with the common usage of newsprint, we may understand our critics' question. But then, we shall never be called upon to make such a choice. The parliamentary party-system is a social and political reflection of personal irresponsibility and inadequacy on the level of the masses. The masses abandon their responsibility in favour of the parties, and the parties do the same in favour of their leaders. The system is characteristic of a technically and materially advanced society. The other form of social and political organisation, misnamed communism, is a different system also based upon the irresponsibility of the many and the privilege of the few technical and material advancement of the afore-mentioned order.

Non-political man (that disreputable breed) lives either in one or the other order. It does not depend on him as to whether the irresponsibility of his fellowmen finds expression in a "democratic" parliamentary or a dictatorial totalitarian system. It depends on the technical, social and scientific advancement of the whole society in which he lives. Germany could not remain a parliamentary country in the 'thirties, not because totalitarian doctrines were foolishly tolerated, but because two-thirds of the population (as shown by the relevant elections) did not desire a parliamentary system.

Courageous "action" by the opponents of totalitarianism could not have averted, and indeed did not avert, the dismal collective fate. The material-advancement of Germany lagged far behind the success of most West European countries and a violent period of adjustment was inevitable. The Soviet Union is an even better example of a society which had to overtake in the twentieth century the social and material achievements of Western Europe. The levelling-up of material conditions will probably result in a balance of contending social forces, bringing about a system of more tolerant parliamentary and, if our critics wish to call it so, "democratic" government. On the other hand, the threat to the material supremacy of some Western countries is likely to bring about a tightening-up and a less tolerant, near-totalitarian social order.

In such a situation, individuals who recognize that politics is not a game of good intentions and praiseworthy hopes for reform, but the skill to channel mass-irresponsibility into a course favourable to the ruling minority, will wish to opt out of the political sphere. ("Zoon politikon" did not mean a political but a social animal.) As the "defenders of freedom" misinterpret freedom and unwittingly play into the hands of Big Brother, we are not surprised if the cause of freedom suffers one setback after another. The defender of freedom who realizes that man's emancipation is not a game of double-think and double-talk, will find more important ways of action than those still open to him in the field of politics.

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