

MUSINGS ON IDENTITY

IN "The Keynesian Revolution," a contribution by James Meade to the recently published *Essays on John Maynard Keynes* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), there is a simple statement which, the writer suggests, gives "the quintessence of Keynes's intellectual innovation." First came the theory, then the practice:

There are in fact two distinct, though closely related, Keynesian Revolutions: first, the theoretical revolution in economic practice; and, second, the practical revolution in governmental policies. . . .

Keynes's intellectual revolution was to shift economists from thinking normally in terms of a model of reality in which a dog called *savings* wagged his tail labeled *investment* to thinking in terms of a model in which a dog called *investment* wagged his tail labelled *savings*.

There is of course a vast literature concerned with the meaning and good and bad applications of Keynesian doctrine. This book will doubtless be useful to students of economics, although, for brief analysis, Sumner Rosen's chapter in Roszak's *The Dissenting Academy* might prove the most helpful reading. Here, however, we are concerned with wider considerations. The real importance of this book of essays on Keynes is its exposure of the taken-for-granted assumption that economic activity is the crucial matter in human life, that economic thinking is the most decisive thinking that people do, and that the resolution of human problems must be pursued in economic terms. These attitudes are not defended, or even asserted; the prior reality of Economic Man is the substratum, not the substance, of the arguments.

Cultural historians would doubtless tell us that the rationalization of this outlook began with Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. Economics aspired to be a science, and scientists are supposed to study the way people behave. Then, whether or not they can say why people behave as

they do, they are to describe *how* they behave, and try to arrive at principles of action. Smith and Bentham thought they could explain both why and tell how. The ruling motive, they said, is that people want to get things for themselves as individuals. As Kendall Cochrane put it recently (*Review of Social Economy*, October 1974):

Now there was really no question on this matter for Smith and Bentham; the situation was inescapably clear to them. Society was no more, and no less, than the sum of the individual consumer, investor, workman, employer. In short, there was no society, no ongoing social organism with a life process of its own. There were only individuals acting in their own self-interest. From this point of view, the economic system exists only to satisfy individual wants or needs of the consumer or investor; therefore, the public wants or needs must take second choice or whatever is left over.

One who accepts this view—and its acceptance enters into every aspect of modern life—is also likely to accept, as Mr. Cochrane notes, "the position that since individual self-interest is supreme, then any governmental action is a restraint on individual freedom and is therefore pernicious and evil by definition."

The Keynesian revolution, insofar as it was mind-changing, amounted to a reversal of this last assumption. To a world filled with apprehensions caused by the economic disaster of 1929, Keynes declared that governmental action is a requirement of economic stability and growth. Otherwise the system would break down and all would be losers. Sumner Rosen says:

More perhaps than that of any other of the great economists, Keynes's work had great and important meaning for policy and policy makers. This, more than the depth and originality of his analysis, explains the continuing degree of controversy about it. Keynes argued forcefully that the successful preservation of capitalism requires that the state intervene in the economy. The major purpose of this

intervention is to secure a high level of employment. Since this will not happen automatically, the state must act deliberately to make it happen.

This, we see, is a change in the second assumption of classic economic theory, but not in the first, which maintains that the pursuit of self-interest is the basic law of life. In effect, Keynes's new proposition was: individual self-interest, left to itself, will no longer work. We must add the principle of collective self-interest, he said, to keep the system in balance. Man is still Economic Man. Obviously, even in the radical Communist version of political economy, he is still Economic Man. As Robert Heilbroner has remarked, present-day communism "is not so much the successor to but the substitute for capitalism." It helps the backward nations to speed their elevation to economic equality with the others.

What, then, has actually happened? The answer is plain. The logic of events, the lesson of bitter experience, within the context of the assumption that man's life and being are fundamentally economic, inevitably teaches that *only the State can save us*. This, surely, is the only possible explanation of the fact that the most vociferous—and often most listened to—critics of the status quo practically all imply or declare that an all-powerful authority (with the instruction and support of a suddenly enlightened electorate) must put things right. The bumbling, ineffectual, short-term political action of the past fifty years is completely ignored in these demands (except for occasional shrill insistence that a new slate of "responsible" statesmen and office-holders is required).

Why this reliance on salvation from the State? To what other power can the impatient moralists who accept economic process as the primary reality appeal? The state, in the prevailing analysis of recent history, has become the *locus* of power, so that humans, if they are to get what they need, must capture and use the state for their own, the common, good.

At work, of course, during all this hubbub of claims and counter-claims—of stubbornly blind declarations of faith by "practical" men, replied to in outraged cries by frustrated utopians—are grim doubts and wonderings about the fundamental underpinnings of economic assumption. The Natural Law which Adam Smith thought he was interpreting to eager eighteenth-century entrepreneurs is no longer plainly operative. The multinational and conglomerate monopolists have put their own conventions of self-interest in the place of the law of the market, while the government and the unions have added theirs, so that a network of devious complexity now obscures whatever principles happen to be ruling. Hardly anyone not still living in the past will dare to say, today, that Nature, given an opportunity, will correct our mistakes and restore the good old days. Cocky planners assure us that we must now learn how to make a *totally invented* system work; because man has become master and is replacing nature, we have to decide about *everything*. Our economic and social life, even our physiology, must now be planned and arranged by experts. And who will give instruction and guidance to the experts, and watch them carefully to prevent power plays, control egomania and excesses of every sort, to say nothing of simple mistakes? The State, of course.

Thinking of this sort is so obviously shallow, so plainly based on anxiety, insecurity, and a lack of acceptable alternatives for its support, that its actual effect is to produce increasing uncertainty and confusion. Meanwhile, slowly emerging, from sources of inner strength, are doubts of another order, questionings which have a lining of affirmation. Such positive feeling has a long way to go before it can exercise a major influence on general conceptions concerning the locus of power, but common sense should eventually make it evident that basic human good *cannot* result from the low-grade political manipulations, and that locating power elsewhere is the first step of *any* intelligent change.

For at least the past twenty years thoughtful socialists have been calling attention to the disappearance of humanist vision and goals in radical thinking. They don't know how to restore these qualities, but they warn that without them socialism will not be an improvement on capitalism worth fighting for. See for example statements by Erich Fromm (in *The Sane Society* and elsewhere), pamphlets and articles by Jayaprakash Narayan, and work by various other radical critics. The problem is to find assumptions which make it strongly rational to change the locus of power—to seat it once again in individual human beings. Quite possibly progressive historical analysis will eventually put it there, but to get all the evidence in—in, that is, on a scientific basis—could well mean waiting until our lives have been practically ruined by a rapid succession of tinkerers with external power mechanisms. More than the *ex post facto* thinking of science is called for.

There is of course encouragement in the fact that for ten years or more the environmental crisis has been undermining faith in power manipulations. But meanwhile, as confidence in past assumptions wears thin, the vacuum in responsible thinking is increasingly exploited by patch-up solutions, along with angry nihilist gambits. The intellectually impoverished Left unites with desperate ex-colonials who insist on action, *now*, and who don't know what else to do. Anyone can see that a major vision is lacking—a vision corresponding in leverage to the Copernican revolution. When, in a time of crisis, the thought of an age weakens, it goes both mushy and wild. Today there is no recognition of new integrating principles.

Meanwhile, certain necessary preparations seem in progress. Some of the best preparations are being carried on by economists who are abdicating from conventional economic assumptions. Take for example Karl Polanyi, whose *Great Transformation* and essays on ancient and primitive economics demonstrate the

narrowness, the almost blind assumption in both classical and Marxist economic theory. Economics, Polanyi demonstrates, has not always been regarded as the central reality of man's existence. There is no real justification for the economic interpretation of history. "I plead," he said, "for the restoration of that unity of motives which should inform man in his everyday activity as a producer, for the reabsorption of the economic system in society." This means subordinating economic activity to its proper role, as *merely* the way we shelter and clothe ourselves, and get enough to eat. E. F. Schumacher is another economist who points out that the principles of economics are and *must* be derived from a humane philosophy of life. Economics is not and cannot be an independent "discipline." Economic ends are instrumental and subordinate to human ends. Elevated to the position of dominance, Schumacher declares, Economics shuts out human ends, and if we look around we see that this is exactly what has happened, exactly what is wrong. What more "proof" do we need?

Such men as Karl Polanyi and Schumacher are not really "economists" at all; they are intelligent human beings redressing balances, exposing excesses, and restoring sanity in an area darkened by the language and delusions of specialists. They speak the language, but use it only to explode the delusions, since they know that they must address not a few experts, but all men, if they are to have a noticeable effect on human affairs.

Slowly it is becoming evident that the future any future worth having—will be made by human beings moving on radically changed assumptions about the nature of man, on fresh recognition of the qualities of individual and social good, and on a true identification of the sources of power for the creation and maintenance of healthful forms of social life. The centuries-old obsession with acquisition will have to go. The habitual reliance on wealth for security will have to go. The self-ignoring assumption that only the state can direct

the energies of men in the right direction will have to go. The hierarchy of values which places economic enterprise and goals at the top, and philosophic ends and conceptions at the bottom, will have to go.

There have been great periods of history when other values ruled men's lives—periods of economic sufficiency despite technological childhood, including golden epochs of achievement in literature, arts, and crafts. These cycles of excellence seem to come and go. They cannot, apparently, be frozen in some perpetual status quo. Alternations take place. Human beings are unfinished; our world of culture is unfinished; human ideals have been truncated and reduced in the modern world. A limited stability resting on finite ideals does not seem possible for mankind. Too much of our history has been written by people wholly preoccupied with a few hundred years of achievements by machines. Lewis Mumford and others have pointed this out.

How shall we change? Not, to what shall we change, but *how* does any far-reaching change take place? If we go to the psychologists and the historians for help with this question, we find that they already have at least parts of the basic answer. Social changes come about in much the same way as individual changes. The mind-set of an age is altered by countless minute alterations in individuals, unsettling in cumulative effect, and in the same general direction. These small changes take place during the preparatory period. Then one or more big changes, usually begun by extraordinary persons, gain freedom of action. Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is an excellent case study of the anatomy of such great transitions. Buckle has a splendid passage on how they take place, in his *History of Civilization in England*. Hugo's idea "whose time has come" is a crucial ingredient. It is equally evident that great ideas whose time has not come languish from neglect and drop out of sight. When great ideas move the many to action, this is usually made possible by a benign

conspiracy of events. For example, Gandhi's non-violent, moral revolution in India was vastly assisted by the provocatives of events—India's concurrent struggle and opportunity to achieve political freedom. The American Revolution had similar assistance.

But the collaborations of history never supply a sure thing. After circumstantial assistance the vision has to be "lived up to"—by deliberation and choice, we might say. Good fortune must be deserved and verified by human character. Sometimes the onset of a new vision seems to come suddenly, but study reveals that both conscious and unconscious preparations preceded its advent for generations. The Revolution Thomas Paine fathered by publishing *Common Sense* gave visible objectivity to ideas and feelings already in the American air; he made the colonists see in concept and act what they really believed, and was existentially achieved by a hundred years of life in a new land free from feudal tradition. Yet a few months before Paine wrote his stirring appeal for independence, hardly anyone would have predicted an actual break with the mother country. Justice, not freedom or independence, was then the goal.

And who, in either England or India, could have seen the extraordinary implications of the determined decision made by Gandhi in 1893, riding on a train from Durban to Pretoria to settle a law case there. The enforcement against him of a racist regulation by the railroad fired in Gandhi a resolve of which he later declared: "My active non-violence began from that date." The meaning of that resolve grew into the larger vision: *human beings must make themselves free of their self-imposed tyrannies*, since inward freedom is the origin of all other freedoms. A generation later millions joined Gandhi to free India from British rule, but only a handful united with him in the more profound struggle for inner liberation. That moral revolution, although still going on, has barely begun. There are upper and lower levels of vision, but the lower levels—the politically

realizable levels—subsist on nourishment from the higher levels. When the higher levels of vision fade and become invisible, the lower levels lose all light.

This uneven reciprocity between levels of vision is the basis for understanding the processes of cultural and historical change. The relationship was described by Nietzsche with a few pithy sentences in *The Twilight of idols*:

We have abolished the true world. What has remained? The apparent one perhaps? Oh no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.

The problem and project of the present, then, is the restoration of our sense of the reality of the true world. Even if all we want is the apparent one back again, in better working order, we shall have to renew our faith in and understanding of the true world.

But *whose* true world? The question makes a difficulty, but not so great a difficulty as we may think. Visions have a mythic order of reality. The validity of a vision depends upon the order of its priorities, not upon verification of its factual content. The verification is moral-intuitive; the rendering into fact may occupy ages.

What is the source of visions? The source is both individual and common. Every human has some kind of vision, some dream of reaching a goal or a farther shore. To be human is to be motivated by comparisons between what is and what might be. So there is a scientist and a dreamer in each one of us. The scientist carefully reports on what is, while the dreamer gives us directions. How can a scientist give instruction on where to go? How can he talk about the dreamed-of uncreated future? He can, of course; but for doing so he must depart from fact and speak the language of metaphors and analogues; he must become an inventor, even a poet and a dreamer, too. His background may help or hinder in this, depending upon what sort of scientist he is. There are both bookkeepers and inventors in

science, just as there are both generators and curators among poets.

The individual takes cognizance of vision—his own, if he is blessed; another's, if he is modestly susceptible—and step by step he begins to alter "his little statues of perceived reality." And so, from day to day, the dimensions, patterns, and structures of his "assumptive world" undergo change. The horizon stretches out, his conceptions of causation—his notions of "Karma," to use a recently revived term of promising use—are expanded and deepened. He begins to develop another sort of faith.

REVIEW

THE PROGRESS OF THE ARTIST

WHY is one drawn to the reading of poetry? For the same reason, surely, that one is led to writing it. There are feelings or thoughts which cannot be put into words except in some form of poetic utterance. They have restless, acrobatic meanings which require octaves to display their reach. Shall we say that a truth worth repeating always has octaves of content? That the sport of ideas which run up and down the scale brings a certain delight?

And the pleasure a great poem gives—does it grow out of having echoed a truth or a harmony without pressure from an "ought"? Invoking no conscious flight from wrong or pursuit of right? If this is so, then poetic vision is somehow beyond good and evil. Yet admittedly there is much we need to know that is not beyond good and evil.

A poem has genesis in it, and also fulfillment. This seems like saying, with Keats—

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Yet we know, for all their charm, there is something missing in these verses. Or is the sense of something missing due only to the diminished meanings we have for words like beauty and truth?

In his *History of English Literature*, Hearn begins his discussion of Keats by remarking that the romantic poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Byron—left classical subjects severely alone. Explaining, he said:

This was natural, because the school of Pope had made the classical subjects wearisome and disgusting. But that was not a reason, after all, for refusing to recognize the beauty which the Greek world still had to offer. Now what Keats did was this. He taught English poets how to return to classical subjects by successfully treating those subjects in the purely romantic manner. . . .

The classical poets, remember, knew a great deal more than Keats about classical subjects from a

merely pedantic point of view. Most of them had been Greek scholars;—all of them knew Latin. But Keats never studied Greek at all and all the Latin that he knew was what a student of medicine could learn in a few months. He read Greek authors only in translations; and the translations were very bad. About Greek mythology he learned a little only from Lemprière's Classical Dictionary. This dictionary is today of little value. But it had a great many pictures. It was from these pictures chiefly, if not altogether, that Keats learned to know more about Greek life than any other English poet before him. Is not this a very wonderful thing in literature, the story of this poor sick boy divining from the pictures in an old classical dictionary the spirit of Greek life? Looking at those pictures he may have thought to himself, "How beautiful and gentle must have been the soul of the people who worshipped the Gods like these! How wise and yet simple and yet true must have been the minds that conceived the beautiful stories about them! How very fair and good must the world have appeared to such minds!" And you know that one result of these boyish studies was the matchless *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. This is the most perfectly Greek poem in English literature. It is the most perfect because it is the most human. Greek life was more human—more natural, more emotionally sincere than any other life of any other western civilization; and Keats felt that. Other poets had tried to show their learning of Greek texts, but Keats, instead of troubling himself about texts, went straight to the question, "How did these people feel and think and worship their Gods and love their families?"

We are to say, then, that Keats got all this into his poem, and that Hearn was able to read it there, with the help of a few biographical notes. But we shouldn't say, "got all this into his poem," because somehow it grew there, not from a lot of looking at engravings in an old dictionary, but from the sense of meaning that sprang into his feelings and mind by reason of the entire range of his brief life's experiences. The pictures were focus and trigger. Poems are visions, then, and not didactic instructions. A vision, moreover, always completes itself. It has the symmetry of living things.

While reading Hearn we kept wishing for examples of the writing he was considering—he has no room for them in a single volume on

English literature. Then, by accident, we came across a worn paperback edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (two volumes, available in paperback) which seems a perfect companion to Hearn. One needs Hearn—as one needs a knowledgeable friend to take you through a great museum, the first time you go there—as a guide and counselor in the world of literature. The time may come for total independence, but at the beginning a friend like Hearn—or Harold Goddard—shows you how to experience literature on a human scale. Soon enough you become free to use the scale by yourself. At the start an anthology is also a great help.

In the *Norton Anthology*, incidentally, we found a passage in one of Keats's letters which could be taken as an explanation of what is missing in "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." This letter, written in 1819 to the poet's younger brother and his wife, then living in Louisville, Kentucky, becomes a philosophic treatise. It starts out with a criticism of romantic poetry, pertinent here (we are shortening and condensing it, while fixing his indifferent spelling):

Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind: very few have been influenced by a pure desire of benefit to others—in the greater part of the Benefactors to Humanity some meretricious motive has sullied their greatness—some melodramatic scenery has fascinated them. . . .

I go among the fields and catch a glimpse of a stoat or a fieldmouse peeping out of the withered grass—the creature hath a purpose and his eyes are bright with it—I go amongst the buildings of a city and I see a Man hurrying along to what? . . .

I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard of have had hearts completely disinterested: I can remember but two—Socrates and Jesus—their Histories evince it—What I heard a little time ago, [Thomas] Taylor observe to Socrates, may be said of Jesus—That he was so great a man that though he transmitted no writing of his own to posterity, we have his Mind and his sayings and his greatness handed to us by others. It is to be lamented that the history of the latter was written and revised by Men interested in the pious frauds of Religion. Yet through all this I see his splendour. . . .

I am however young and writing at random—straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness—without knowing the bearing of any one assertion of any one opinion. Yet may I not in this be free from sin? May there not be superior beings amused with any graceful, though instinctive attitude my mind may fall into, as I am entertained with the alertness of a Stoat or the anxiety of a Deer? Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel—By a superior being our reasonings may take the same tone—though erroneous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry; and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—for the reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth—Give me this credit—Do you not think I strive—to know myself?

A little suddenly, perhaps, we turn to a poet who came upon the scene more than a half century later—not so great, perhaps, as Keats, and one with deeper reason for self-reproach—Oscar Wilde, another romantic who wondered about the reaches of his art, and of being. His *De Profundis* reveals something of the reveries which made him say, in the poem, "Helas":

To drift with every passion till my soul
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play
Is it for this that I have given away
Mine ancient wisdom and austere control?
Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll
Scrawled over on some boyish holiday
With idle songs for pipe and vielay,
Which do but mar the secret of the whole.
Surely there was a time I might have trod
The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance
Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God:
Is that time dead? lo! with a little rod
I did but touch the honey of romance—
And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

The moral energy of the Romantic movement, surely, came from such apprehensions that beyond the "honey of romance" are, somewhere, "sunlit heights" that justify heroic flights of the imagination. The Cosmos, these poets believed, is *intelligible*. They hoped through poetry to divine at least a dialect of that universal language which unites "the mind of man and the universal mind in nature," as Macneile Dixon has said. Science

studies the alphabet of that language; poets make its words and lines and set them to song.

But a poem, however great, gives no steady light. Expecting a steady light from something said may be a species of delusion. And since, in poetry, only the first time counts, repetition does not increase the light. Its inspiration dies in ritual. Alas, we do not know how to consolidate the vision of poetic insight. Being poetry, it allows no interposed foundation to connect it with the solid earth. And so, after a cycle of romantic verse—after vision has been reduced to cultural fashion—poetry must find fresh inspiration. Its very impermanence, perhaps, instructs us in the nature of things.

When the assumptions of an age grow unstable, and when the superstructures of hope and possibility become brittle and dry, the truth—it was, of course, only a becoming truth—that was in them ebbs away. Then other forms and directions of the quest embody high human longing. Thus art, like reason, is dialectical in its movement, but the arbiter of the course of poetry is that inner reaching after transcendent fulfillment, which, curiously enough, must like Anteus continually touch the earth in order to remain strong. But in making this touch, there is the constant hazard of tarrying on boyish holidays. For the poet there are sirens on every rock and Dionysian revels each midnight of the year. A Narcissus hovers over every Pierian spring, waiting to be adopted, while Pegasus never waits for the poet beyond the appointed hour.

COMMENTARY

THE OBLIGATIONS OF POETS

Is it only the exceptionally distinguished poet who embraces the full responsibility of his creative art? Wendell Berry, novelist, essayist, and poet, wonders about this in the Spring 1975 *Hudson Review*. It seems to him that many present-day poets have segregated their work in a world of words. He regards this as an evasion of the poet's calling:

For one thing, the subject of poetry is not words; it is the world, which poets have in common with other people. It has been argued that modern poets were forced to turn inward by the disposition of their materialistic societies to turn outward. But that argument ignores or discounts the traditions that have always bound poetry to the concerns and values of the spirit. This ancient allegiance gives poets the freedom, and perhaps the moral imperative, to turn outward. . . . In relation to the world, the specialization of poetry is exactly analogous to the specialization of religion. Putting exclusive emphasis upon a world of words has the same result as putting exclusive emphasis on heaven: it leads to, and allows, and abets the degradation of the world. And it leads ultimately to the degradation of art and religion. Renunciation of the world may sustain religious or artistic fervor for a while, but sooner or later it becomes suicidal.

It becomes plain that the serious poet has high and engrossing responsibilities. Mr. Berry is not alone in emphasizing the extraordinary demands of the poetic art. T. S. Eliot once listed the poet's obligations, as he saw them:

. . . the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.

Someone said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we *know so* much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know. . . .

Some can absorb knowledge, the more tardy must sweat for it. Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum. What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should

continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves ENTRANCE TO LIFE

IT seems no extravagance to say that there is now a book which tells how the human races of the future ought to be born. *Birth Without Violence* (Knopf, 1975, \$7.95) by Frederick Leboyer—a French obstetrician who has delivered 10,000 babies in the way he describes—is really the story of how unfolding consciousness and intelligence come into being before our eyes—in the form of a baby. The reality of the baby's individuality and awareness is the point of view throughout. The writer seems a bit imaginative here and there but why not? More may be learned from being imaginative than in any other way, when the inquiry is into matters so filled with mystery. Actually, the reader will soon feel inclined to trust both Dr. Leboyer's wisdom and his imagination, which are closely related. In the final section he replies to questions:

"These children, born in silence and love—what becomes of them? Are they different from the others?"

"It's hard to say. You have to see them."

"And. . . ?"

"Do you remember we said that when the baby is born it wears a mask which hides it, disfigures it, makes it ugly: the mask of tragedy—brows knitted, corners of the mouth turned down. But then there is another mask. A mask of gaiety, of joy—a mask of comedy."

"How marvelous. . . . But this has nothing to do with what we have been discussing."

"And why not?"

"We've been discussing birth and newborn babies. You're showing me a child six months old."

"Six months old?"

"Infants don't smile before two months. One and a half at the earliest. As for laughing out loud . . ."

"That's what people say. But this baby isn't even twenty-four hours old!"

"I can't believe it!"

"I admit it doesn't happen very often, at least not yet. But . . . do you know that there's still another mask? Or rather a *real* face without any mask at all?"

"I don't understand."

"Our emotions are states of mind—impermanent, always changing. We cherish certain of them, others we fear. But in reality they are all one. Laughter and tears are very close to one another. And this great joy which so astonishes you in one baby is ultimately no more remarkable than another baby's sorrow. It is still only a mask."

"But what can be left when the child is *without* a mask?"

What is there when both pain and joy have disappeared? Is there nothing at all?

"Almost nothing. Yet look. . . ."

It seems a violation of the spirit of this book to do much more than quote from it. The things doctors do when bringing a child into the world have attention, but almost as technical asides. The living consciousness of the newcomer is the theme. The doctor writes his story from inside the baby. The pictures—dozens of photographs—show both the joys and the terrors of birth. Why do babies express fright and pain? Why delight? These are the questions which occupy most of Dr. Leboyer's text. Birth, he thinks, is a time when the *baby's* sensibility should have total consideration. You whisper in the delivery room. The baby's hearing is acute, and human voices should be kind and inviting when he appears. He is losing his warm, embracing, and supporting home. The first task is to make him welcome. Touch him only with tenderness. *Don't* hang him from his feet to make him cry. He does not have to weep his way into the world. This is a superstition, and Dr. Leboyer proves it time after time. He can make his primordial sound, the heralding of his entry, joyfully as well as in outraged protest. *Don't* cut the umbilical cord immediately. Wait till it stops throbbing, till it dies of itself. Then you don't destroy a still vital organ but remove only a useless appendage. These acts of consideration make the child know that he is understood, that he has come among friends and lovers. Later we carefully give evidence of this. Why not at the beginning?

When the baby is taking his first step, the parent lends a steadying hand. After a little, when the secret of equilibrium has been learned, the child becomes self-supporting:

The hand can then be withdrawn; the child has no more use for it. But what if the mother withdrew her hand while the child was still taking that first step? You might think that in this way she was hastening the child's progress, encouraging its instinct for independence. The odds are that she would be accomplishing the opposite: discouraging, not encouraging her baby.

All of this is equally true of the umbilicus. By not immediately cutting the cord, we let the mother accompany her infant's first steps into the world of breathing. She goes on breathing for them both until her child is safely established in its new domain.

The book is also a restoration of ancient knowledge:

The Greeks, as we know from Hippocrates, believed that it was the child who demanded to be born.

They believed that when pregnancy reached its term, the child was beginning to lack for food. Feeling its life threatened, it was forced to abandon the dark cavern which had been its home, until then, to search for the way out—using its feet to propel itself forward, to force its way toward freedom.

We have laughed at these old wives' tales, only to discover . . . that all this is perfectly true!

We have discovered today that the stimulus that sets labor in motion comes from the child, just as the Ancients said it did. And now we know that the child actually does struggle to be born.

The acceleration of its heartbeat indicates both the enormous effort it is making and the terror it feels. And an alert mother, conscious of what is happening within her body, recognizes the exact moment when both she and the child are both beginning their desperate exertions.

If the child is the one who inaugurates the process of the birth—and if, as Dr. Leboyer seems convinced, the presence of a human being should be recognized as an emerging, self-propelled intelligence—it seems at least possible that the primary unit of consciousness—a soul—an ego, or a "monad"—is also the initiator of the very process of conception. Why could not the strong attraction of physical love have its origin in the commanding impulse of a center of consciousness wanting to *live*? There is no reason to ignore this possibility. Considering it gives a somewhat different complexion to the endlessly argued question of when

the foetus becomes a "living human." If we think of birth in this way, there is no magic moment when the infant comes to "life." The consciousness had life before birth, and even, perhaps, an ancient history, as the reincarnationists—of whom there are a great many millions—consistently maintain. In their view, a body does not miraculously give life to a soul, which then has its beginning. What happens is the other way around.

Birth Without Violence is a book about the awareness of the new-born—the incredibly sensitive awareness of tiny babies. Dr. Leboyer explains that babies should be born in a room where the light is not overwhelming, since babies are *not* blind at birth: we blind them with sudden illumination. And sound, too, comes upon the baby all at once in amplified form, unless we are careful. Without the defending shield of the mother's stomach—

The young ears are suddenly vulnerable. Nothing protects them any longer from the world's uproar. . . .

Poor little creature! What a fate, to be born and to fall into our hands, victim of our ignorance and cruelty.

It has been blinded and deafened.

What about the sense of touch?

Its skin—thin, fine almost without a protective surface layer—is as exposed and raw as tissue that has suffered a burn. The slightest touch makes it quiver. . . .

Surely this man is right when he says:

The baby knows everything. *Feels* everything. The babe, sees into the bottom of our hearts, knows the color of our thoughts.

All without language.

The newborn baby is a mirror, reflecting our image. It is for us to make its entrance into the world a joy.

FRONTIERS

Good Ideas, Poor Language

ALVIN TOFFLER, who has a way with words, has written a new book intended to explain the futility of attempting to go forward into the future with the motives and means of the past. There are a lot of good things in this book—titled *The Eco-Spasm Report*—and only one thing wrong with it. He talks about existing national and global policies—where they break down, why they must change, and into what—all as though "we" (his readers, or the population as a collectivity) could tomorrow go out and change all these bad ways of doing things into good ones. He doesn't, of course, actually think this will happen, but he writes as though it might, or ought to. And the implication that he has an audience of effective, unified, and powerful people ready to act gives the book unreality. It becomes a brilliant display of Alvin Toffler's undeniable insight, but not much of a help to the rest of us. The rhetorical pretense is weakening.

Yet the book does have value. It consolidates general recognition that somehow, sometime, the world is going to have to change its direction. Spreading this mood around should help to reduce somewhat the resistance to change.

The book has two parts: First, an explanation of what the author means by Eco-Spasm; second, his recommendations for change. Eco-Spasm is the name of our present condition:

The eco-spasm or spasmodic economy describes an economy careening on the brink of disaster, awaiting only the random convergence of certain critical events that have not occurred simultaneously—so far. It is an economy in which powerful upward and downward forces clash like warring armies, in which crises in national economies send out global shock waves, in which former colonial powers and colonies begin to reverse roles, in which systemic breakdowns aggravate economic disorder and economic disorder intensifies and accelerates systemic breakdowns, in which "random" ecological and military eruptions hammer at the economy from different directions, in which change

piles upon change at faster and faster rates, creating tensions never before experienced in high-technology societies.

The first few chapters illustrate this analysis with numerous examples. The middle chapters are meant to show, by imagined "scenarios," where continuing as we are will take us. The final chapter presents Mr. Toffler's recommendations: what we ought to do.

He has five proposals: *First*, we must control, reform, and use the multinational companies, which already have worked out the techniques of world economics. Their managers must be made to see the importance of long-term policies in behalf-of the common welfare. *Second*, we need to think in "super-industrial" instead of merely industrial terms. The old industrial formulas no longer work. Industry must learn to do "more with less," take into account the increasing occurrence of shortages of critical materials, including food, and to plan worldwide balance of resources so that a disaster in one area will no longer reach out to paralyze regions far beyond its borders. Interdependence has now superseded the market economy as an expression of Natural Law. *Third*, transform employment policies, discarding the assumption that men are always employed to produce goods, adopting the view that various labor-intensive services should absorb an increasing proportion of available manpower. Canada, Mr. Toffler points out, is already doing this with its Local Initiatives Program. *Fourth*, recognize that problems are local and regional, needing on-the-spot remedies:

The diversification of society, its shift from industrial homogeneity to super-industrial heterogeneity, is one of the fundamental processes of our epoch. It writes an end to the ability of governments to control or regulate national economic life from the center.

Fifth, inaugurate what Mr. Toffler calls "anticipatory democracy," by which he means a lot of local and regional planning in which all take part:

If we wish to improve our capacity for shaping the future, we must begin now to move away from industrial-style planning—which is still the only style with which most planners and politicians are familiar. We need, in short, to shift from industrial-style planning to super-industrial futurism. Futurism differs from planning, if one wishes to make that distinction, by reaching beyond economics to embrace culture, beyond transportation to include in its concerns family life and sex roles, beyond physical and environmental concerns to include mental health and many other dimensions of reality.

There is this concluding paragraph:

. . . if eco-spasm tells us anything, it is that we cannot escape the future by turning our backs on it. Foresight is uniquely human and it is essential for survival. Without this ability to imagine alternatives tomorrow and to select among them, there could be no culture, no civilization. . . . Under conditions of high-speed change a democracy without the ability to anticipate condemns itself to death. But an anticipatory government without citizen participation and, indeed, control may be no less lethal. The future must neither be ignored nor captured by an elite. Only anticipatory democracy can provide a way out of the contradiction in which we now find ourselves.

Sounds logical. What shall we do tomorrow?

This question reveals a pervading weakness. In one place Mr. Toffler accuses industrialist nations of "Maginot line" thinking because they try to prop up employment with aid to the manufacturers of goods. But who is this author appealing to? How are we going to accomplish all the psychologically difficult and politically unlikely things he recommends? We are to do it, one must suppose, by getting the government, the State, to wheel into action. But the State, as this book shows—it shows it from beginning to end—has become almost totally incompetent to cope with the sort of problems that are emerging. Surely to write about planning for the future in terms of state authority and political administration is also Maginot-line thinking.

The beginnings will have to be made elsewhere, and then, when new methods have proved themselves in small-scale practice, the state will laggardly follow along, because it *has*

to. Indeed, Mr. Toffler in one place warns that we must give the state less and less to do, in practical, problem-solving terms. This has far-reaching implications which ought to be developed. He also suggests that "incentives be placed on the rapid development of low-energy and resource-conserving products." That is a fine suggestion, but its practical meaning might be more clearly recognized in what E. F. Schumacher has been encouraging and implementing for the past ten years or so. By research and in the field, Dr. Schumacher has been *proving* the value to developing countries of low-energy, resource-conserving, low-capital, labor-intensive technology and industry. (See his *Small Is Beautiful*, a Harper paperback.)

The language of collectivism is really what is wrong with *The Eco-Spasm Report*. But one thing said by Mr. Toffler deserves special notice:

The United States has never been quite as heavily over-centralized as most other industrial nations. And, as a result, has an opportunity to make an easier, more peaceful transition to decentralized, regionalized economic policy. It should seize that advantage.

This is very much to the point. American society is not yet tightly organized in inescapable technological coherence. There is still space to move around, a chance to innovate. Yankee ingenuity, while weakened, might still come to life. A book about the people who are personally doing in their own way what Mr. Toffler recommends—dozens of such books—would be of great service to us all.