

essay could well end. Any attempt to list all the precepts, proverbs, fables (and their rationalized versions) which conscience picks to guide or to justify actions, would lead to an endless and formless recitation of the obvious and the inscrutable. And ultimately such a recitation would tell us nothing about conscience itself; that ego-tempered temperer of egos; that culturebound transcender of culture; that ultimate source of ethical ambiguities. . . .

It must be admitted that much of the obvious and the inscrutable is to be found in the other chapters of this volume. But there are exceptions, and one significant discovery is undoubtedly Boulding's Law—already revealed in "The Organizational Revolution" but here given fresh emphasis in connection with the "Dilemma of American Protestantism":

With growth in size of membership, it is quite possible that churches reach an ecclesiastical "point of diminishing returns." Adopting an analogy from the growth of biological organisms, Boulding suggests that as an organism grows it absorbs more and more of its environment, and eventually it uses up the more favorable parts of its environment, and the environment turns increasingly less favorable.

The principle that a big organization is the victim of its own success is very generally applicable in human affairs; and ethical problems are among those involved. It cannot be said, however, that the contributors to this volume have resolved the difficulties to which they call attention. The truth might be that excessive size is not an ethical problem at all, and that the cure lies more in deliberate decentralization than in moralizing about individual and collective responsibilities and attitudes. There is something unreal about a published discussion on "Bigness" wherein the index contains no reference to "Automation" or "Computer." For it is at least arguable that automation, considered as a trend in human affairs, is more important than Judaism, Marxism, or Fascism; and *much* more important than the contrasts still emphasized between the "public" and "private" sectors of the nation's economy.

It is on this last point that Harlan Cleveland is most impressive:

Note how contrary to existing mythology are the facts of the case. Mythology holds that government is responsible for law and order, and has recently assumed the additional function of succoring the weak and encouraging the fainthearted in the American economy. It is private enterprise which constitutes the cutting edge of our national economic growth—or so our mythology tells us. But

the way our national economy is actually working suggests that an equally good case could be made for the reverse of these propositions.

There is much in this and the preceding volume of interest and value. Yet some doubt must linger as to the real usefulness of these Conferences at which thought is so completely divorced from action. It is true that talking may help to create a climate of opinion favorable to this development or that. However, talk itself is more effective if

made to center round some actual proposal—if only a resolution to be made public. But the last paragraph of the last paper read before the last luncheon contains *nothing* as definite as that—nothing which would do much to assist the President or Congress. No active politician can be fairly expected to read nearly a thousand pages of moralizing. Would it not be preferable, therefore, to open the next Conference with some specific proposal, capable of acceptance or rejection?

## Rapture, Triggered and Untriggered

**"Ecstasy: A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences,"** by Marghanita Laski (Indiana University Press. 374 pp. \$10), aims to prove that mystical states differ in degree rather than in kind. Frances O'Brien has made a study of the beatific vision for the liturgical subjects that she frequently paints.

By FRANCES O'BRIEN

"EXTRAORDINARY to the point of often seeming as if derived from a preternatural source," Marghanita Laski defines the subject of her vastly documented, charted, and graphed volume, "Ecstasy," an empirical investigation of ecstatic experiences.

Miss Laski ventures far from the trails hacked out by William James and the few others who have attempted comparable analyses. "I do not find that I can equate my criteria for ecstasies with anyone else's criteria for mystical states," Miss Laski announces, and in her closely packed pages she explains why. She has evolved her own criteria plus an original and useful terminology. She classifies her subject under the broad headings of "intensity ecstasies" and "withdrawal ecstasies," with the former preponderant in the West, the latter in the East. She defines three stages: the "Adamic," the "knowledge" or "knowledge-contact," and "union" ecstasies. This scale, incidentally, corresponds to the classic Christian "Purgative Way," "Illuminative Way," and "Unitive Way."

The author began her investigations by asking sixty-three friends and acquaintances to answer a questionnaire, which opened with "Do you know a sensation of transcendent ecstasy?" Surprisingly, sixty answered in the affirmative. Miss Laski checked these experiences against literary and religious

examples, and concluded that "if prestige, style and overbelief are disregarded, the experiences of the questionnaire group must be judged as essentially similar to those of the religious."

An interesting and controversial innovation is Miss Laski's use of the word *trigger*: "... triggers are circumstances preceding ecstatic experiences and probably standing in a causal relationship to such experiences." As examples she gives nature, art, sexual love, religion, etc.

The speculative nature of trigger-response leaves it somewhat outside the area of scientific inquiry, and the situation is complicated by the fact that ecstasies can occur under non-trigger or even anti-trigger conditions. Miss Laski aims to prove that all ecstasies, secular and religious, differ in degree



—"Ideas and Images in World Art."  
The Buddha, by Adilon Redon.

rather than in kind. Secular experiences are her principal interest, but since she finds it necessary to "test" them by formal religious-mystical standards, she might have arrived at a deeper comprehension of what these standards are by examining more source material. She admits that her acquaintance with this literature is mostly acquired from compendiums, like the books of Evelyn Underhill. No mention is made of such required reading as "The Cloud of Unknowing" except for an oblique quotation from Underhill. Miss Laski might not be so "tentative" about withdrawal ecstasies if she had studied the "Cloud" in its entirety.

She demolishes some witless assumptions, such as the theory that ecstasy is a phenomenon of sexual repression, pointing out that while sexual love appears to be a common trigger in the questionnaire group, sexual ecstasy remains a rare experience. As for D. H. Lawrence and his claims, she concludes, judging from his writings, that he never knew ecstasy at all.

It is too bad that the seriousness of her subject inhibits Miss Laski's delightful sense of humor. In the chapter on drugs, she finds that ecstasies and mescaline experiences have almost nothing in common, and muses: "I should have thought that for anyone seeking the Beatific Vision (which was, before Mr. Huxley, granted only to Moses and St. Paul) there were surer and pleasanter ways of attaining it than by taking mescaline." But her gifts for levity and satire are largely wasted, more's the pity. "In ecstasy," she reminds us, "there is no fun whatsoever."

For serious students her book merits serious study. The lay reader should find it far-out and fascinating.

**FRASER YOUNG'S  
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 992**

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 992 will be found in the next issue.*

QRZGPEG RQ SDG APCGK-  
BKCZG BGHKBSCG.  
EDGQSGBSFP.

*Answer to Literary Crypt No. 991*

*We call our rich relatives the kin  
we love to touch.*  
—EDDIE CANTOR.

## Individuals Joined to Mankind

**"Men and Nations," by Louis J. Halle** (Princeton University Press, 224 pp. \$4.75), attempts to apply the philosophy of Plato to the facts of political life. James K. Feibleman is professor of philosophy at Tulane.

By JAMES K. FEIBLEMAN

**T**HE PARADOX of Plato's current reputation is that although his writings enjoy an immense popularity—there are in print some thirty-two separate paperback editions—the acceptance of his philosophy is out of fashion. Most philosophers teach Plato, but few, except Whitehead, have followed him recently. Many thinkers in other fields, however, do attempt to apply his thought. As a matter of fact, the disagreement as to what exactly it is that Plato meant can be matched only by the profusion of ways in which his philosophy has been applied. But such is the power of Plato that it is difficult to use his philosophy in any way that will not yield at least some valuable insights.

Platonism, Louis J. Halle says, is not one philosophy among many but philosophy itself. He has attempted to apply this philosophy to the facts of political life, oddly enough without considering that Plato himself did so in two of his longest dialogues: the "Republic" and "The Laws."

From Plato's philosophy Professor Halle uses only the famous theory of the Ideas. According to this theory there are two worlds: an abstract world of intelligible objects corresponding to our thoughts, and a concrete world of sensible objects appearing in space and time. Although we live in the world of sensible objects, it is the intelligible objects that count. The sensible objects only approximate imperfectly the perfection of the intelligible objects, and that is what gives rise to all our difficulties.

When the optimist said that this is the best of all possible worlds and the pessimist added that he was afraid that the optimist was right, they were talking about two different worlds. The optimist had selected his from the Platonic Ideas, and the pessimist had located his within the world of actuality. And so we live in one world and plan in accordance with another. How are we to know when we have the

correct ideals? We test them, Professor Halle says, against conformity with existential reality and also against the imperfections of that reality. But do these not come to the same? As Professor Halle himself insists, "in either case we must consult the existential reality."

What the author presents is a Platonic political philosophy in individual terms. He wishes to reconcile the two worlds of the individual and mankind rather than those of the individual and the nation. Professor Halle does not recognize the reality of nations, which are for him aggregates of real individuals. Here it would seem he turns against Plato unwittingly, and refuses to accept the challenge of social organization, of government, and of man himself as a political animal. There is indeed considerable evidence that, despite Professor Halle's enormous respect for Plato, he is unfaithful. Yet although Plato went to considerable pains to design the ideal city-state in his Republic, Professor Halle assures us that the actual states—France, for instance—are only ideas. The individual French people are real but not "France." France is merely the way in which the French picture themselves.

Very possibly Professor Halle has allowed the two uses of "idea" to confuse him, for an Idea in the Platonic sense turns out to be unreal when it is an idea in the psychological sense—that is to say, when it is a thought in the mind. Platonic Ideas are the objects of thought, but for Professor Halle they turn into the thoughts themselves—and back again. It is almost a nominalistic interpretation of Plato that we are given, and Paley, the eighteenth-century English divine and moralist, who said that nothing really exists but individuals, is quoted with approval almost as often as Plato, who said that nothing really exists but Ideas.

Professor Halle finds Plato's philosophy useful in explaining many political difficulties but not very helpful in proposing a solution. Perhaps the Platonic world of perfection is farther away than is ordinarily supposed, and all our plans and ideals are but approximations suggested as well as measured by the advantages and limitations to be found in actual practice. The concepts by means of which we dream of perfection do not always enjoy the perfection of the Platonic Ideas.