

Saturday Review

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The Delegation of the Survival Instinct

SURVIVAL DEPENDS on the instinct for survival. Basic dangers must be sensed in order to be identified. One of the principal problems of modern man, however, is that he has delegated his survival instincts to the state and has therefore become increasingly incapable of comprehending fundamental threats to the species of which he is a part. He has no difficulty in discerning threats to the nation—the nation sees to it that he is fully alerted and mobilized—but he has hardly any response to the fact of overriding danger to life as a whole.

Primitive man had at least one important advantage over modern man. His response mechanism to surrounding dangers was superbly developed and in excellent working order. He may not have been capable of writing lyric poetry or of calculating a price-earnings ratio, but one thing he most certainly could do: He could sense and define a danger before it became full-blown. He didn't waste any time between the initial awareness of the threat and the defense.

Civilization was an interruption of this uncomplicated interaction between man and his environment. The more dependent man became upon group organization and upon social and collective techniques, the more de-individualized his instinct for survival became. The development of adroit and intricate tools and methods for collectivizing the response to danger blurred the individual's sensitivity to fundamental hazards. The group became the custodian of man's survival instincts. In so doing, it desensi-

tized man, at least to the extent that his basic allegiances and obligations were directed to the nation rather than to humanity.

Wisdom, however, is not collectivized at the same rate as is power. The absolutely sovereign state has been far more adept at developing its consciousness of self than its awareness of the human species and its needs. It has put muscle ahead of conscience. Paradoxically, the nation can survive only as it becomes integrated into a larger and more interdependent whole, one that bears some relationship to the totality of the human situation. But the energy and the momentum that are necessary to bring this about can only come from the people themselves, and it is precisely this kind of energy that is wanting because of the weakening of the instinct for survival.

The great failure of education—not just in the United States but throughout most of the world—is that it has made man group-conscious rather than species-conscious. It has celebrated man's institutions but not man himself. It has attached value to the things man does but not to what man is. Man's power is heralded but the preciousness of life is unsung.

The fragility of life is the dominant fact of life but this is not the central fact of education. Human pride is circumscribed. Pride is readily summoned out of national achievement but it does not readily extend to the human family as a whole. There are national anthems but no anthems for humanity.

The essential question, therefore, is whether modern man comprehends that

the fundamental threat today transcends anything now being starkly called to his attention, whether through headlines or discourse with his neighbors. This threat is represented by the fact that man is at war against his environment without knowing it. The weapons he has devised to protect the nation are actually environment-smashers, engines of mass suicide rather than useful devices of what was once known as war. Meanwhile, in a thousand other ways man is altering and cheapening the basic conditions on which life depends—covering the earth with asphalt and cement, making the sky an open sewer for his poisons and wastes, infecting his reservoirs and streams. Nothing is more precarious than the delicate balances of environment on which life depends. Nothing is so little respected or understood.

If the instinct for human survival is atrophying but not yet dead, where will regeneration come from? It cannot come from the group, however exalted the purpose of the group may be. The hope has to reside where it has always been—with the individual. The challenge here is supremely personal. It does not lend itself to easy superimposition or force-feeding. What the group can do—and it makes little difference whether the group is formally or informally defined—is to arrest its own impatience with the individual long enough to sustain his search for the regenerating truths. This is the only way the group is likely to get the truth.

—N.C.

Addiction

By Thomas John Carlisle

CONSISTENTLY Jonah chided his stupid and incredible

Creator
for His addiction
to mercy
as though
it were some
miracle drug.

A Deity ought
to be dependably
capricious
to keep
the natives in line.

A G-bomb
on an overpopulated
slum
would wipe out
delinquency
in a hurry.

Naturally Nineveh
would make a perfect
target
once he himself
was safely
outside.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Oeufs à la Croesus

I NEVER ENJOYED a trip around the U.S. quite as much as I did the one with Conor O'Brien in the March 12 travel issue. Only one complaint: two poached eggs at the Regency for \$1.10?

VIRGINIA GROCKI.

Chicago, Ill.

IF YOU ARE EAGER to discourage foreigners from traveling in the United States, then I would suggest that you print more menus from the Hotel Regency.

Most Americans would find breakfast prices at the Regency exorbitant, but as natives we would have enough know-how to find good food at good prices. Think of the dismay of a well-to-do European upon reading that coffee costs 60 cents! He would throw up his hands in horror and go to Spain or Italy. You should have counteracted the Regency menu with one from a normal restaurant where coffee is 15 cents and refills are free. Regency prices scare me, too, and I am by no means poor.

NINA C. OSWALD.

Los Angeles, Calif.

Dissenters' Dilemma

I WOULD LIKE TO COMMEND Mrs. Alan Horwitz and her letter to the editor, "The Dissenters" [SR, Mar. 19], for stating clearly and concisely the dilemma that faces the young men in our "free" society—the "ever-present possibility of service in an army carrying out a policy that is abhorrent to them," particularly those who dissent for reasons "of conscience and from a background of historical and political awareness." Her question seems more than reasonable. I, too, would be glad to see this matter discussed in SR. It is a real and serious question and is of deep concern to many of us.

EUNICE H. TROWBRIDGE.

New Britain, Conn.

MRS. HORWITZ asks some questions which, I'm sure, are troubling a great many seriously concerned people. . . .

May I pose a hypothetical situation? Suppose your community, living in reasonable peace and mutual concern for the welfare of all, was suddenly overrun by outsiders bent on taking it over, by terror and intimidation if necessary. Some local intransigents might join them but for the rest of you there is one of three choices. You can bar your doors against them, hoping they will of their own volition either go away quietly or become friendly and cooperative; you can make a deal for your own protection and let others take care of themselves; or you can resist their unlawful invasion and take the consequences.

I believe we Americans are mostly people of compassion, good will, and peaceful intent, yet if we blind ourselves to the ultimate goals of a political and ideological system. . . . We kid ourselves and contribute to the things we most deplore.

IRENE PRATER DELL.

Carl Junction, Mo.



"My wife doesn't understand how I feel about reapportionment!"

Don't Say It

IT IS FOOLISH for a nonverbal type to write a protest about one of the high priests in the temple of words, but I must protest the assumption of verbal primacy by Stephen Spender in his article "The Age of Overwrite and Underthink" [SR, Mar. 12]. I will agree that for writers the word is the most important means of exchange, but for some others of us it is not.

The greatest confusion that I can see in communication today is the substitution of the word for the thing itself. Mr. Spender's solution will only encourage this confusion. It is not true for all of us that ". . . all human experience aspires to words." Words may be a part of experience, but the translation of experience into words can also be destructive of experience, particularly when we live in a culture that is as word-ridden as ours.

The problem in education today is that we have molded our system to force our young to translate all of their learning into words. In so doing, they are soon taught to distort the nature of their experience in order to verbalize it.

If I experience a tree, I may describe that experience with the word "green" or "growing." But the effort to find the words to describe the experience will limit my experience of the tree while it is happening. I find the nonverbal aspects of my relationship to my wife and children more important than the verbal ones. None of the

reading that I have done about music and painting has changed my appreciation for the one and my lack of appreciation for the other. Certainly in choreographing a dance I have found that an early verbalization of intention has been damaging to creative flow.

I believe that the sloppiness of many people in various disciplines in communicating what is primary about their work is a habit of thinking in another category than words. I'm sure that Beethoven thought in tones. Dr. Oppenheimer rightly feels that there is nonverbal knowledge that is extensive, complicated, and conceived in terms that do not admit to verbal translation. If a non-dancer asks me what I teach in my dance classes, I invite him to take a dance class and find out.

MARK RYDER,
Professor of Dance,
Goddard College.

Plainfield, Vt.

Report on Disarmament

ARTHUR H. DEAN may not be optimistic about the chances for disarmament in the immediate future, and I'm not, either, after reading his article "The War on Weapons" [SR, Mar. 19]. But it's good to know that capable men like him are in the front lines.

R. C. PERRY.

Los Angeles, Calif.