

The Higher Sanity and Its Competitors

Tom Swift invades the book stalls with the latest rage in popular psychomechanics guaranteed to oil the friction out of our human relations and tune up our egos until, like components of an efficient moon rocket, you and I are also "A-OK." But for all this flashy traffic in psychiatric fashions, the curing of souls remains what it has been since time out of mind: a religious labor, the age-old vocation of priests and shamans. The thin skin of scientized jargon we have stretched over this venerable art scarcely hides the body of implied metaphysical commitment beneath. To prescribe sanity, we must first risk saying what is humanly normal. And to say what is humanly normal, we must know—or assume we know—what the nature of the human animal is. Scratch a therapist, find a philosopher—though perhaps a philosopher in spite of himself.

Age of Faith . . . Age of Reason . . . Age of Anxiety . . . and how is the age that opens before us to be remembered? Can there be any doubt? The Age of Therapy. When all the ailing souls came home to be healed, and sweet sanity inherited the earth.

But whose sanity? There are many. And behind each there stands the prospect of a different humanity, a different reality. To enter the deep psyche is to enter an intimate battleground where the future of our society is being contested.

This is not a fact that enjoys much visibility in the psychiatric profession—except at the dissenting fringe. Psychiatry is the modern world's way of talking about the deep nature of man as if we were talking medicine, never morality, never metaphysics. So we dissect the heart's unease into symptoms and complexes, taking comfort in the clinical ring of the diagnosis. Perhaps, if we finally associate enough pills and potions with professional treatment, sanity may even come to look like no more than a pharmaceutical concoction.

Even among psychiatry's innovators and mavericks, there are many who go no further than to advertise dazzling forms of emotional engineering. Each year another therapeutic

What I have suggested in the preceding chapters counsels a profoundly conservative approach to therapy: conservative in Paul Goodman's sense that these days nothing is more radical than to be a "neolithic conservative" out to save the forest and the river, the village and the old crafts. So I am concerned to save the craft of therapy by divorcing it from the scientific self-image that makes it so shallow a trade, and returning it to its source in religious culture where it can alone find the metaphysical insight that does justice to our nature. In what sense is the sanity I speak of "higher"? In that it builds its model of normality on the visionary awareness whose origin I have attributed to the Few, encouraging us to see our human identity as a rich potentiality that can be completely unfolded only by an etheralization of life. With such a model before us, we might even come to recognize that unfolding as an evolutionary movement of our species by which we approach a goal transcending time and matter—a goal that, once perceived, enlivens in us that subtle energy of the personality which our ancestors called "spirit."

For the modern mind, this higher sanity is bound to be

Movement from "secular humanism" to "visionary humanism"—meaning, based on the occult [more than the Eastern, and rather than the biblical] heritage—is Theo. Roszak's thing, best put in his seventh book, UNFINISHED ANIMAL: THE AQUARIAN FRONTIER AND THE EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS [Harper/75]. What this means for counseling, he tries to say beginning on p.182 (below). I agree that people are dying of spiritual malnutrition, but prefer the biblical food. "Theotherapy" must point to the presuppositions on "sanity" in current secular psychotherapy.