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THE FUEL AND THE FLAME

IN a small group of people who had gathered to consider "contemporary philosophies," attention turned to the Existentialists. It was obvious that the speaker was much impressed by Existentialist views. The Existentialists, he said, have primary concern for the problems which arise from the fact of human existence, problems for which no solution—certainly no easy solution—exists. These, he said, are problems of meaning rather than problems of action. A difficulty which requires a certain course of action, such as feeding the victims of a catastrophe, or building a road through a jungle, or organizing human energies for some practical enterprise of general benefit—these do not touch the central issue. The central issue is the human condition—that aspect of man's life which ranges beyond the competence of mere ingenuity and ordinary resourcefulness.

There is the fact of death. There are other ills—they seem to be ills—which neither skill nor wealth diminish or increase. How are these to be regarded? It is the problems that cannot be solved, the questions no one can answer, which engage the attention of the Existentialists.

It was suggested, on this occasion, that the psychologists—the psychiatrists and the analytically oriented psychologists—sometimes regard the Existentialists as people who resist the process of "growing up." Why agonize over matters which are the constant stage setting of human life? A workable philosophy has to acknowledge some kind of limit to the knowable and waste no energies in straining after mysteries which are obviously outside the area of human experience. In this view, the stresses experienced by the Existentialists are a kind of growing pain which must be endured for a time while men move toward maturity; and when maturity is reached, they will stop, since nothing can be done about these matters anyhow.

This report, put together from memory of the discussion of contemporary philosophy, may not be entirely accurate. It doubtless fails to represent the Existentialists fairly; certainly, much more should be said about them; but whatever the case, so far as "accuracy" is concerned, a real issue has been defined, and since it is an issue involving the basic conflict between the philosophical point of view and the scientific point of view, it is worth further examination.

Wrapped up in the conflict is the question of man's role. It might be argued that the Existentialist movement is the first broadly free and spontaneous return of the Western mind to the problems of philosophy since the scientific revolution. Philosophy, in these terms, is the attempt of man to find some reference-point outside himself—or, at any rate, a point unaffected by the vicissitudes of his life—by means of which he can locate himself in a larger scheme of meaning. That the Existentialists seem to say that there is no such meaning is a detail. To declare the absence of meaning is equivalent to saying that the sphere in which meaning or its absence will stand revealed has been investigated. *Any* judgment about transcendental meaning is a claim to transcendental insight.

The point, here, is that the Existentialists find that there is no human dignity without an attempt at such judgments. They say, in effect: We are people who dare to look into the abyss; and we are also people who, having looked, and seen the abysmal nothingness, are resolved to live like beings who can look at nothingness without dismay. This is the quality of being a "man." This is the courage of a dark Promethean agony.

Why should they say that they see "nothing"? Others—the mystics, for example—have looked into the abyss and seen a great light. But the

Existentialists report no light. Shall we say that the Existentialists have contributed enough simply by daring to look, regardless of what they see? Shall we add that these men, despite their bleak philosophy, have somehow remained civilized, humane, and compassionate, in a world which is slowly going mad?

This, we might claim, is evidence that the Existentialists have the structure of a great truth—a truth which functions in life, even if the content remains obscure. Perhaps the very obscurity of the content is itself a tract for the times, needed far more than some blinding revelation.

There is something else to consider. The matrix of Existentialism is modern Europe, a place of genius, brilliance, intellectuality, and bloody horrors. War, prison camps, torture—these are the content, the background, of the European memory. In this setting appears the intellectual strength of the Existentialist thinker, a spirit of justice, of impartiality, and a love of truth—of the truth we can know. There is this honest intellectuality, confronted by the walled towers of distrust, of theological imposition and betrayal of the innocent, stretching back into the shadowy beginnings of European history. Why should the Existentialists see a light in the abyss? They have courage without a light—let us be satisfied with that, for now.

Now comes the diagnosis attributed to the psychologists. The diagnosis must of necessity be in the form of a judgment about "normal" mental and emotional attitudes. The prescription will have to be concerned with some kind of "adjustment," some kind of acceptance of what are commonly called the circumstances of life.

Elaboration of the diagnosis is not important. What is at issue is the question of norms. Obviously, thoughts about death can be pathological; but they can also be an expression of poetic or philosophic genius. It might be that failure in conventional "adjustment" or "maturity" is a prerequisite for the merest beginning of the philosophic life. It is possible that some species of the Promethean agony is organic to the rebirth of mankind to a better life.

Suppose we try to avoid this ordeal, thinking only safe thoughts, banking on technology and various kinds of endowment policies—a proper military organization, an alert government, a careful screening of those to be charged with public responsibility—and purchasing a fu11 line of soporifics and preoccupations to keep us from brooding over insoluble problems—with adequately trained positivists to assure us that metaphysical speculation is a waste of time: suppose we do all this, and it should be *against our nature?* Nature will kick back. Nature always kicks back when given provocation.

Well, suppose some more. Suppose that the avoidance of legitimate growing pains is rewarded by Nature with the pains that belong to a refusal to grow—a pain that is without fruit, a travail without an offspring.

Look at the past fifty years of history: It has been a time of agony from guilt, not growth. Almost no one is free from the agony and the guilt. In some places there has been more agony than guilt, and in other places more guilt than agony, but hardly anyone has escaped. The arts, the novel—they tell of agony, guilt, and only a little heroism. Will anyone rise to say that this is too dark a view of our time? On the contrary, the brightest thing about our time is the fact that there are many men who dare to call it dark.

But there is something more. There are men who are beginning to say that we have misread the role of man, that we do not understand ourselves. This is a better diagnosis—one that complements, if it does not fit with, the conclusions of the Existentialists. Gardner Murphy, director of research for the Menninger Foundation, has written the following for the *Saturday Review* (Dec. 13, 1958):

> We are in no position to make final value judgments as to what is for the ultimate good or for the ultimate bad, but we are certainly in a position to say that man is not only finding more about how he is

made but, intentionally or unintentionally, is changing himself in the process. The potentialities of this process are radically new kinds of human nature. . . .

Nothing could be more pathetic, glib, and futile than to say of any specific human act, "That's just human nature." The person might in any case do the opposite, and we might with equal glibness say, "That's human nature." We do not know what human nature is. We have a limited glimpse only of certain historical and social expressions of it. . . .

What is needed now is a readiness for bold, even extravagant, informed and serious guessing as to potentialities utterly different from those that can be extrapolated from man's present and past behavior. Extrapolation is a timid process, usually the wrong method for basic changes. . . .

There is a possibility that a closer look at human nature, its roots, its ways of development, its forms of control, and the directions in which it is now moving may enable thoughtful members of our species to conceive of defining a culture in which such struggles as the cold war will become anachronistic, stupid, self-defeating, and profitless.

Here, surely, is a friendly and promising echo of William James' *Will to Believe,* repeating under circumstances of greater urgency what James held to be necessary for the full development of human beings.

One wonders if what was possible for Tolstoy may become possible for the Existentialists. He seems to have begun his philosophic reflections in a position something like that of the Existentialists. The difference, from one point of view, is that Tolstoy's pain was personal and moralistic with respect to himself, while the Existentialists are thinking impersonally, for their time. Tolstoy, at any rate, found his life barren, even evil. Pursuing his feeling to a point of self-analysis, he decided that his disgust for the world was a disguise for his own self-contempt. He had read into the world and the life about him his own deep dissatisfaction with himself. To find life good, he needed to change his own life—an undertaking at which he never claimed great success, but which he stuck to until he died.

So, the question arises: Is the abyss into which the Existentialists gaze a darkness made opaque by the useless pain of many centuries? Is nature truly a mirror, as Tolstoy found it to be? But modern Europe has no bloodier a history than other epochs, so why this special pleading issuing in special condemnation? Well, the distinction of European history, even as Hegel announced, might easily have been the achievement of a special self-consciousness. It was, as Vico prophesied, and Marx confirmed, a time when men took history into their own hands. It is quite reasonable that nature should be a mirror burnished by the self-awareness of those who try to use it.

Such speculations, of course, are of use only to philosophers, and not of very much use to those who are scientific philosophers. What, then, shall the rest of us do, while waiting to be overtaken by the Promethean urge?

Certain alternatives to the "adjustment" philosophy, to the "timid," extrapolation process of explaining man's nature, remain. There is the wide area of what is called psychic research. This is the cautious, "objective" investigator's substitute for a private mysticism. From the Existential point of view, psychic research is an endeavor to find some shadowy contrasts, some shoals of at least a lesser darkness, in the abyss outside the framework of man's everyday experience. Once in a while you hear of a man who can read another man's mind, or of someone who seems to be able to see through a wall, or into the future. And then you come across the view of a reputable scientist like Julian Huxley, who wonders if extra sensory perception may not be some kind of forerunner of an evolutionary surge belonging to the future.

It seems a pity to sully the purity of the Existentialist's assumptions with "data" of this sort, obliging him to admit the possibility of subtle relationships in consciousness with an otherwise alien universe. But an oblique approach is often better than a frontal attack. And if there are

reasons for believing in a universe of partial light, instead of total darkness, save for the pale flame of personal awareness, why not look at them? Perhaps we can have a dignity in the light as well as in darkness, so long as the light is not a contrived illusion, a device of the Grand Inquisitor.

The world of the Existentialists, after all, is not something they invented. It came to them, ready-made, from the manufactory of nineteenth-century physics, with philosophic decor by Bertrand Russell and other earnest atheists. This world is a product of science, it is true, but it is also a by-product of the polemics of the war between science and religion. There may be other ways to look at the world. The Greeks, with no Jehovah to displace from authority, thought of the world as a kind of living animal, and the planets, instead of clots of dead matter held in orbit by an unreasoning rule of mechanics, they called the *movers*, or *theoi*. No principle is violated by these ideas, no real science is offended. It is just another mood in looking at nature.

"We do not know what human nature is," says Dr. Murphy. Well, we do not know what matter is, either, as Karl Pearson made quite plain, many years ago. You may say that it is energy, bound up in patterns, but what, again, is that? And what is Life?

From all these uncertainties, one thing is clear: This is an open world, for one who tries to be a philosopher. Here, indeed, is a debt to science, for science has opened the world to philosophy, and will keep it open, perhaps, to the end of time.

It is to the Prometheans that we owe the spirit of unending struggle against these uncertainties, and the example of an uncompromising determination to find answers to the questions no one has been able to answer in the terms of public truth.

What shall we do about the Prometheans—with them, for them? We know what we have done about them. We have praised and worshiped them, cursed and damned them, burned them at the stake, exiled them, and, in our time, written plausible, dispossessing and disposing papers about them. They are fools, of course, according to some standards. They do not fit in with the ordinary kind of "maturity." Their longings are at war with middle-of-the-road philosophies, their dreams beckon to incomprehensible mysteries. Their ranks—they have of course no ranks—are spotted with pretenders and traders and quoters.

Sometimes they are wreckers. They know how to make a bull-dozer out of a song. They are capable of Olympian laughter, Modest Proposals, angry revolutions, and quiet marches to the sea to make salt. They are an ultimate frustration to the designers of Utopias and to Federal Prison Directors. Their imitators are authors of parodies, cults and confusion.

They are the men who carry forward the thread of wonder, infecting the young with an unearthly love of the infinite. Fundamentally, they are men who find the world of the imagination of greater reality than the world of law and fact. They cannot help it. It is an endowment of nature—their nature. Which world will you live in, where do you wish to survive? Whose dreams will you violate, the poets' or the merchants'?

The great changes in history come from the bursting of the imagination of the Prometheans, which spreads over the earth like a tidal wave. Expecting them to do things in an orderly fashion, according to some humanitarian timetable, is like wanting to unionize the men who have been touched by madness.

To hope to provide for such people is like trying to make a formula for having "intuitions," or for putting the arts on a paying basis. If there is anything to distinguish our time from earlier ages, it is that we cannot give the Prometheans badges with which to identify themselves. There is no holy ground, any more; it is all holy, or none of it holy.

In ancient times, by some fidelity that cannot be understood today, men knew how to arrange their earthly concerns according to Promethean archetypes. Each labor was the image of some transcendental transaction. The arts could then all be classical. There were no professional liars, in those days, no priests in commerce and no captains in industry. Nothing had to be done in reverse, to make a point. No bog of inverted motives obliged the truth-seeker to deny any association with the bottlers and labelers of "truth." Augustine and Calvin were not yet born, Wilhelm Reich an unimaginable phenomenon.

Fortunately, the Prometheans are bearers of fire. It is the kind of fire which will ultimately burn away all that is irrelevant to the role of man and the drama of his life.

REVIEW
ACTIVE "PACIFISM`'

LYLE STUART'S publication of Jim Peck's *We Who Would Not Kill* (1958, the Polyglot Press) will, among other things, throw light on an area of interest familiar to many readers of MANAS. As the complexities of atomic war-scares increase, many liberals of other than pacifist background are displaying a constructive curiosity concerning pacifist argument and the stand taken by the "conscientious objector" to war, no doubt on the theory that any and every alternative to a nuclear arms race is worth exploring. Since Mr. Peck may best be described as an "anarcho-pacifist," in contradistinction to members of religious groups which take a doctrinal stand against war-participation, we encounter in his book a freshness of viewpoint which stimulates thought, and which takes us, in at least partial sympathy, on a tour of Peck's development, from his first compulsion to propagandize against war to his participation in the well-publicized 1957 protest-trespassing of the bomb-test area in Nevada. (He later joined the crew of the *Golden Rule.)* Peck has always thought for himself, so that his arguments cannot be conveniently classified and disposed of. Moreover, as an "actionist," he has been able to demonstrate just how worried and angry the custodians of military policies can be, if openly challenged by a single individual.

When Peck, still under twenty-one, first decided to agitate against war, he put his own money into a leaflet enterprise. He and a collaborator prepared five thousand copies of a pamphlet which they personally distributed, attacking war psychology in general, and, in particular, the collaboration of large business interests with advocates of a belligerent foreign policy. (As Peck later points out, distributing leaflets in the 1930's was not particularly dangerous, whereas now, if one wishes to avoid official trouble, he had best do his distributing from a high place during a brisk wind on some dark night.) Evidently, some of the determination of men like Peck derives from their conviction that a failure to oppose war policies will hasten the decline of civil liberties.

Peck went to prison when he was denied status as a "legitimate'? conscientious objector to World War II, and in Danbury Federal he continued his activities. Striking up acquaintance with other war objectors, he undertook to protest jimcrow practice in mess hall, unnecessary loss of privileges of reading and writing for those who protested jimcrow, etc. Some quotation will illustrate the tempo and content of much of the book. The following describes the viewpoint of another war resister, the artist, Lowell Naeve:

> Naeve, an anarchist, was an unusual character. When he was a boy he built a contraption to play several musical instruments simultaneously and got billed in a vaudeville show. Tired of school, he left home and made his way first to the west coast, then to Mexico City. Odd jobs enabled him to eat and paint.
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> He returned to the United States in time to clash with the draft law. Opposed to any kind of regimentation, he refused to register and was sent to Danbury for a year. In jail he refused to work and spurned his goodtime because he would not sign papers.
>
> Several months after his release he was hitch-hiking in a snowstorm. Stricken with acute stomach poisoning, he tried to find shelter in the next small town and was told that the only place to stay was the seldom occupied clink. Next morning the constable asked for his draft card. Since Naeve would not carry one, he was arrested and sent to New York where he was released pending trial.
>
> Murphy and Taylor were then conducting their hunger strike in Danbury and Naeve wanted to join them. He reasoned that the quickest way to get back to Danbury was by sitting on the steps of the Federal courthouse in Foley Square.
>
> "I propose to sit on these steps day and night until the government acts one way or the other," he told reporters.
>
> The government acted typically. FBI agents arrived, took him to an upstairs office and arranged for his transfer to Bellevue Hospital where an attempt was made to prove he was mentally deranged. Naeve started a hunger strike in protest. For several days he

was straitjacketed in the psychiatric ward, a filthy place. Dr. Evan Thomas then managed to get him out. This time Naeve wound up with the usual three-year sentence but when he reached Danbury, the Murphy-Taylor strike had ended. He was all set to begin a work strike but agreed, at our suggestion, to work a few weeks so he could quit in protest against jimcrow. The meetings, votes and other group procedures were new to him but he quickly caught on.

Murphy and Taylor, after attracting some uncomfortable publicity for the prison by going on a hunger strike against segregation, were later removed to the strip cells of the Springfield, Ill., federal prison for the criminally insane. But Taylor, although he had lost seventy pounds during the strike, retained enough energy to secure effective documentation regarding prison brutalities—documentation which he succeeded, somehow, in smuggling out to the same Dr. Evan Thomas, a leading figure in the War Resisters League. Here, as in other instances, the unbreakable determination of an imprisoned conscientious objector led to investigation and change of policy.

Believe it or not, even a man in prison sometimes wins his point! After 135 days of striking at Danbury the warden gave in, told the strikers that from then on "the inmates may sit anywhere they please in Mess hall," thus making Danbury the first Federal prison to abolish jimcrow at meals. Peck feels that this and other campaigns against discrimination constituted one of the most important contributions of the CO's of World War II.

Peck and his friends were indeed an ingenious and a hardy crew. As a result of another strike against unnecessarily punitive policies, Naeve and Peck again found themselves in semi-isolation. But instead of losing their spirit, the members of this group again demonstrated that you can't keep good men down by intimidation:

> Lowell Naeve fabricated a perfectly shaped guitar from water, oatmeal and newspapers, his only tools being old razor blades and sandpaper.
>
> After considerable experimentation he had found that the water-oatmeal-newspaper mash dried into a hard, gray, durable substance. So instead of eating his oatmeal in the morning, he used it to make a guitar. The instrument was shaped around a form of wadded paper. After drying, Naeve cut it in half, removed the form and glued the two halves together. Long hours of sanding and chiseling produced the symmetrical shape he wanted. Finally he gouged out the four holes for pegs and the two S-shaped sound holes. The prison authorities let him get strings from the outside.
>
> Another product of Naeve's uneaten breakfasts was a globe two feet in diameter upon which he molded the continents and painted the oceans, lakes and rivers. Using more cereal he built up the principal mountain-chains. To complete his work he lettered the names of the world's chief cities and all the home towns of his fellow strikers.
>
> Naeve also made two drawing boards and several picture frames from the oatmeal mix; The frames were gray, with a rough surface, and quite attractive. Some were so good that he planned to use them in exhibits after his release.
>
> Max Ratner, who was interested in architecture, fasted enough mornings to build a model house out of oatmeal and paper. He also made ashtrays for us.
>
> Dave Wieck kept busy rewriting his manuscript on the structure of the United Mine Workers.

The last chapter of *We Who Would Not Kill* describes Peck's experience in Nevada, participating in the program of a pacifist "actionist" group. They trespassed on the testing area with placards reading "non-violent action against nuclear weapons." Though Peck at that time was married and had two young sons, he volunteered to be one of the eleven who committed themselves to enter the installation—"an act of civil disobedience," he writes, "which we felt certain would result in arrest and, possibly, a prison sentence. Under the vast powers granted the Atomic Energy Commission, the prison sentence could be indeterminate in length." While the eleven men who received suspended sentences could hardly have expected to *stop* the tests, they did make it possible for hundreds of thousands of Americans to know that some of their fellow citizens felt strongly enough about the nuclear

arms race to sacrifice personal comfort in the interests of educative publicity. Peck concludes:

> I remain an active pacifist because I feel a strong responsibility to do so. After going to jail for my beliefs, demonstrating for them after I got out—and all the while seeing the world drift closer toward a suicidal third world war—I simply cannot settle down and forget about it all.
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> Even though I have the good fortune to be happily married, I frequently cannot sleep nights because of some new development in the terrifying world situation. The development of the hydrogen bomb and of intercontinental ballistic missiles makes one wonder whether the human race hasn't gone completely berserk.
>
> It seems to me that today the question of world survival, aside from any other considerations, should make more people become pacifists. As for the World War II COs, all of them with whom I have talked—including those not presently engaged in pacifist activities—adhere to their anti-war position. There is some difference of opinion among them as to what tactics to follow in the event of a third world war. Some will again publicly announce their position and will go to prison as a result. The viewpoint of others is well expressed by a CO who commented: "Next time they're simply not going to find me."

We Who Would Not Kill is, as the publisher puts it, "an inside story" of the activities of an unusual group of "unusual men." The publisher's summary concludes: "Jim Peck leans not upon religion nor political cause. He is an individual, unlabeled, guided in every step by his own inner convictions. His life is an uncompromising search for a better life for all men. His book is a prologue to peace." Millen Brand, who writes the preface, provides another testimonial:

> There have been many channels leading to my personal sympathy with non-violence—my Pennsylvania German family ties and my great affection for friends among the plain sects; my admiration for those who have worked as conscientious objectors in hospitals for the mentally ill, helping them with sensitivity, understanding and courage; and my own growing conviction that, in an age of atomic warfare the only possible way through is to refuse to kill. Sympathy is usually as much as one gives to such a belief, but a few selfless individuals refuse to stop there, and go from conviction to action. Jim Peck is such an individual. His book, *We Who Would Not Kill*, is an important means of conveying to others the determination and the psychic incentive of those who resist war, of those who fight the fight of non-aggression. It may turn out that their campaign against violence is the one true sanity.

COMMENTARY
THE EDUCATIONAL DILEMMA

THE sound good sense of Hannah Arendt's proposals concerning education makes striking contrast to the sound good sense of the proposals of other times. We must not, she suggests, oblige the child to participate in our particular set of delusions. The young, as they grow up, ought to be free to think for themselves without prejudice from the past. Therefore, she says, "We must decisively divorce the realm of education from the others, most of all from the realm of public, political life, in order to derive from it alone a concept of authority and an attitude toward the past which are appropriate to it but have no general validity."

But what of the view that the young can learn of the world about them only by "participation" in its works? The education which became the target of John Dewey's analysis and attack was an education maintained in solitary isolation from any sort of practice. The young, it was argued by the Progressive enthusiasts of the days of the *Social Frontier*, can hardly remould the world closer to the heart's desire unless their education charts the course to be followed.

Miss Arendt's answer to this is plain enough: Who are we, that we presume to make charts for others? Hers is the wisdom of a disenchanted age, perhaps, but it is also something more. It marks the end of an epoch of high confidence in preconceived notions concerning what is good for man. The confidence, now, is in man himself, instead of in our plans for his improvement.

Elements of dilemma remain, but a view of education which has no dilemmas would probably be the most misleading one of all.

All activities related to the idea of knowledge or truth share in this dilemma. In religion, for example, earnest men oscillate between the idea of a "pure" religious quest, unconfused by mundane ends, and the "social action" sort of religion which insists that a spiritual equilibrium which is attained in the presence of massive injustice is no more than a kind of spiritual selfishness, unworthy of the followers of Christ.

But "social action" sometimes degenerates into an endless sponsorship of "programs" and activities which have no transcendent inspiration nor ideative quality. And this, surely, is bad, for religion must have *some* transcendental quality.

So, the dilemma remains. We might say that the role of education, in a time like the present, is to make plain the reality and importance of this dilemma, and the need of each man to resolve it for himself.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

SOME of the most provocative remarks of the year on education appear in an article by Hannah Arendt (originally a lecture she delivered at Bremen on May 13, 1958). Printed under the title, "The Crisis in Education," in the Fall *Partisan Review*, this article provides another example of Miss Arendt's capacity for pointing up subtle issues and making them constructively arguable.

The keynote of Miss Arendt's theme is that "the problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forego either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition." And now for the—at first glance—most puzzling conclusion:

> That means, however, that not just teachers and educators, but all of us, insofar as we live in one world together with our children and with young people, must take a radically different attitude toward them than we do toward one another. We must decisively divorce the realm of education from the others, most of all from the realm of public, political life, in order to derive from it alone a concept of authority and an attitude toward the past which are appropriate to it but have no general validity and must not claim a general validity in the world of grownups. In practice the first consequence of this would be a clear line drawn between children and adults, no attempt would be made to educate adults or to treat children as though they were adults. Where this line falls in each instance cannot be determined by a general rule; it changes often, in respect to age, from country to country, from one civilization to another, and also from individual to individual. Moreover, in our civilization we must be aware that professional training in universities or technical schools, though it always has something to do with education, is nevertheless in itself a kind of specialization. It no longer aims to introduce the young person to the world as a whole, but rather to a particular, limited segment of it.

As to what should be the aims of education, Miss Arendt has this to say:

> Basically we are always educating for a world that is or is becoming out of joint, for this is the basic human situation, in which the world is created by mortal hands to serve mortals for a limited time as home. Because the world is made by mortals it wears out; and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming as mortal as they. To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must be constantly set right anew. The problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting-right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured. Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which, however revolutionary its actions may be, is always, from the standpoint of the next generation, superannuated and close to destruction.

This is almost mystical language, and Miss Arendt's points may seem obscure. However, the value of such "extra-dimensional" thinking is especially evident today, when the lines of battle between disagreeing educators are so fuzzily drawn. When Miss Arendt explains why "education must be conservative,', she does *not* mean that the educational assumptions of a bygone epoch are still applicable. We simply don't have "a clearly defined regard for the past," for we do not, today, live in the atmosphere of Roman-Christian civilization. As Miss Arendt says, "We are no longer in that position: and it makes little sense to act as though we still were and had only, as it were, accidentally strayed from the right path and were free at any moment to find our way back to it."

The sort of "conservatism" which Miss Arendt recommends has more to do with a spirit of reticence concerning "molding" the minds of the young than with anything else. We need, in her opinion, fewer "schools of thought" in education, but we cannot hope to escape the confusion of differences of opinions as to systems through the final "triumph" of one of them.

Instead, Miss Arendt recommends, educators of all persuasions must learn to do less pushing and forcing in regard to the child's "adjustment"; the fact is that the child moves into a very much unadjusted world, and his temporary sojourn in the schools, including the universities, produces the greatest benefits when regarded as an interval during which a student may develop his own, and therefore "new," ideative orientation. Finally, according to Miss Arendt, we must face the question of "whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us."

From this viewpoint, it becomes easy to consider many of our past dispositions of thinking in religious, political and educational matters as involving dangerous oversimplification. A religion reduced to certain cardinal dogmas helps to produce a population wherein articles of faith are indistinguishable from required canons of behavior. Oversimplification in political theory can lead to the extremes of Marxist interpretation—or to the more ludicrous interpretations of an "Americanism" which visualizes the citizens of the United States as the conscious custodians of a positive philosophy. Similarly, in educational circles, both the "Neo-classicist" and the "new educationist" derivatives of Progressivism resort to oversimplification and to the either-or classification which foster partianship without increasing understanding. The "crisis in education" is simply a focus of the many different crises in the modern world, and we incline to agree with Miss Arendt that the most important task for the educator is to provide a temporary isolated context wherein the thought of the young can roam without present commitment.

In the light of such discussion it becomes easy to appreciate the full extent of the damage worked by political interference with institutions of learning. The epidemic of loyalty oaths in state universities a few years ago was, in part, symptomatic of a general failure to recognize the need for autonomy in the world of teachers and students. The important "authority" is not political at all; it derives instead from recognition of intellectual or ethical excellence. A civilization advances only as its culture progresses, and culture progresses only as an increasing proportion of the citizenry comprehend something of the working of great minds and their cosmopolitan attitudes.

FRONTIERS

Repercussions

CHILDREN . . . AND OURSELVES, in MANAS for May 14 of last year, printed a sixteen-year-old, high school girl's essay on civil disobedience, written to fulfill a requirement of a course in "American Institutions" she was taking at Menlo-Atherton High School, in Menlo Park. After a couple of months had passed, the editors of MANAS noted with some pleasure that the essay had been reprinted by *Peace News,* the British weekly. *Peace News* also reproduced a photograph of Kathryn Larson, the writer of the essay, making a pleasant addition to the printed word.

We thought no more about the matter. Then, some weeks ago, we received a batch of clippings taken from the Redwood City *Tribune.* Miss Larson's essay had apparently found its way to the desk of George Sokolsky and his high disapproval of what she said in it was spread around the country in his King Features syndicate column. The *Tribune,* which covers Menlo Park affairs, found the matter newsworthy.

What was in the essay? First, a definition and a brief history of civil disobedience, with attention to Thoreau and Gandhi as exemplars. Then, Miss Larson expressed the view that the horrors of atomic war make non-violent defense of the United States the only intelligent course. In the event of Soviet attack, she proposed, Americans should practice civil disobedience against the invaders.

It was the prospect of non-violent means of defense against invasion which aroused Mr. Sokolsky. "This young lady," he wrote, "has of course never been in a war in which no prisoners are taken because they are too expensive to feed." He continues, proposing that the physical atrocities of the recent war, and the mental atrocities of brainwashing, lie outside of Kathryn Larson's experience. He suggests that her teacher should not have given her an "A."

Mr. Sokolsky's attack was not without fruit. An irate inhabitant of the school district served by the Menlo-Atherton school wrote to the Redwood City *Tribune,* demanding that parents and taxpayers of the area have "a full disclosure of the facts and explanation from the teacher who brought about such an unbelievable attitude of surrender."

The newspaper treated this "challenge" with considerable intelligence. In the same issue (Oct. 31, 1958) as the letter from the outraged taxpayer, it printed a news story about Kathryn Larson's essay. While Miss Larson and her family had moved away from Menlo Park, and could not be interviewed, the *Tribune* obtained statements from the teacher, Horace Aubertine, and from Roy Kepler, of Kepler's Book Store, who came into the story by having been one who talked to Miss Larson before she wrote the essay. The teacher explained that the grade was given on the basis of how well the essay was put together, and not as approval or disapproval of its conclusions. The teacher added: "After school I discussed with Miss Larson her opinions and explained to her that her opinions were completely against the fundamental ideas and concepts of the American people."

Mr. Kepler said that Kathryn Larson deserved the A because her work showed that she had been thinking for herself. He also pointed out that a number of Americans, among them himself, shared the views expressed in the essay on civil disobedience.

On Nov. 4 the Redwood City *Tribune* printed an editorial on the tempest jointly caused by Miss Larson and George Sokolsky. After summarizing the contents of the essay and Sokolsky's objections, the editorial continues:

> On the heels of these developments comes a letter from a Tribune reader calling for somebody's scalp.
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> Let us say right here that we have not read the theme. But from the sections quoted it appears to be a standard pacifist statement, one subscribed to by

many Quakers and other groups whose sincerity is above reproach. Similar methods were used with success by Gandhi.

What we object to is, not the reaction—which is to be expected—but its violence. Why does Sokolsky, the widely syndicated, nationally famed writer, train all his ponderous artillery of sarcasm and scorn on a teen-age girl's high school theme?

Does it bother him so very much to find that our young people actually have thoughts of their own and do not unanimously follow the popular line?

The case is another example of an unfortunate trend in this country toward a kind of ideological brutality. We are no longer content to merely reply to our minority voices. We begrudge their very sound. We seem vengeful toward them, and we act irritated and indignant that they dare make themselves heard.

Sneering intolerance of minority opinion is a symptom of mob psychology. On the eve of the American Revolution some British redcoats fired on an unarmed crowd in Boston Common—the first shots of the war. Who took the job as their defense attorney? John Adams. We have come a long way since then.

This editorial, which was headed, "Is It Wrong To Disagree?", is reassuring evidence that a high quality of journalism may be preserved in small towns, even though it seems to be dying out in large cities (exceptions both ways, of course).

The next day (Nov. 5) the *Tribune* printed a letter from Roy Kepler which gave the incident an informing and suggestive context. Kepler wrote:

You report that her [Kathryn Larson's] teacher, Mr. Aubertine, told her that "her opinions were completely against the fundamental ideas and concepts of the American people." If this is accurately quoted, then one must ask which ideas and concepts he has in mind.

If he is suggesting that either pacifism or civil disobedience has no roots in the historical development of this country then he should be urged back to his books.

For example: President Eisenhower is from an Old River Brethren Family; Vice President Nixon is a Quaker; General Hershey, director of the selective service system, stems from a Mennonite family. In short, all three of these men come from Christian pacifist backgrounds.

Incidentally, General Hershey's job is to administer a system of military conscription: Conscription is an un-American concept of alien (French) origin which in the nineteenth century brought to America many refugees from European militarism and conscription.

As a matter of fact, there are many—and often contradictory—"American" ideas and concepts; and which are fundamental is a matter of dispute. Thoreau was an American, and his essay on civil disobedience stands as a classic in the field. William Lloyd Garrison—now an honored American—was a leading Abolitionist. But, should we admit it? He was also a pacifist. The American Civil Liberties Union, now a much-honored organization, was first conceived by its founder, Roger Baldwin, while he sat in a prison cell where he was confined during World War I as a conscientious objector.

The United States, we are told almost *ad nauseam* by many politicians, patriots and others, trusts in God; it is usually associated with the Christian God. Mr. Aubertine (and others) should read the Sermon on the Mount; it may come as a shock.

But I don't want to be too critical of Mr. Aubertine, since in his statement he was acting prudently as a teacher who could feel the hot breath of outraged inquisitors on his neck. No doubt he was aware of the letter from Mr. Oliver Dibble, Jr., to your newspaper asking that the school trustees should investigate the matter and seek "an explanation" from the responsible teacher "who had brought about such an unbelievable attitude of surrender."

It was Mr. Dibble who had read George Sokolsky's syndicated column decrying Miss Larson's essay. Mr. Sokolsky, in his remarks, had said among other things that Miss Larson "has never met human beings who are brainwashed."

Mr. Aubertine—with another old American custom in mind—may have felt that he detected in Mr. Dibble's letter the implication that unless he could turn away such wrath gently and diplomatically, then Miss Larson might be treated to the sight of a brain-washing American style: one which a number of American teachers, and others, have already sadly experienced.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Aubertine and the staff at Menlo-Atherton High School could, and should, be proud that their school allows (and gets) intelligent, original thinking untrammelled by fears of official disapproval. Of course, not everybody agreed with

Miss Larson's essay. God help us when we are all required to adopt a forced unanimity.

One suggestion before Mr. Dibble or others become too exercised about Mr. Sokolsky's excerpted report and misinterpretation of Miss Larson's essay: Let them read the whole of the essay before they judge or jump to conclusions about it. They will find that, far from being a document of surrender, it is one of high courage and humanity.

It is difficult enough, one must admit, to imagine a world in which non-violence is the rule instead of the idealistic dream. It is difficult even to credit the historical achievements already attributed to the power of non-violence. There are probably many reasons for the human reluctance to take non-violence seriously as an instrument of national defense. One reason, doubtless, grows from the fear that if it should not "work," then "those people" will be able to do *anything* to us that they feel like doing. They would, of course, if non-violence were to be undertaken in such a spirit. Non-violence is first of all a state of mind which has its own kind of invulnerability. It involves a kind of moral elation which enters as a substantial reality into every calculation.

Then there is the subterranean feeling that what power *we* have could no longer be used arbitrarily. A man likes to say to himself, secretly, "If I want to be unreasonable, nobody is going to stop me!" The moral strait jacket nonviolence seems to promise is not exactly welcome to all departments of our being.

But beyond these considerations may be a basic fact—that we tend to think of non-violence in isolation from all the other things which are consistent with it as a policy and which would be its necessary supports. Sooner or later, people are going to have to stop cherishing the things that they get—and hold—with violence. This is the real key to peace. We think of a non-violent struggle as between half the world armed to the teeth, and the other half standing around with patient but firm expressions and olive branches in their arms. We know that's silly, so we say it won't work.

People have to stop *caring* about their prestige and their colonies (if they have them), their balance of trade and their superior standard of living. They have to stop caring about the things people fight wars over. They can do this only as they come to care about other things. And then the idea of killing people, of bombing cities, and of fearing that others who want what we've got will commit such crimes—will become ridiculous. We won't have things—at any rate, we won't have too many of them—that people can take away from other people in war. Non-violence is a temper which naturally accompanies the feeling of people who do not quarrel, who are not aggressive because they are not interested in the bitter fruits of aggressiveness. It is a temper and a mood, and not a Production which people called pacifists would like us to get in on.

But you have to begin somewhere. Has anyone a better suggestion than the one the pacifists are making?