

## A NEW KIND OF RATIONALIZATION

THE rationalizing capacity of the human mind is so completely the arbiter of our values, our ideas about good and evil and about progress, that simply to acknowledge this fact may seem too iconoclastic in its effects for us to bear.

If you say to yourself, "I have a dream about what is good," instead of declaring, "This is my (the) truth about the good," what will happen to your self-determination? Is anything accomplished in the world without passionate belief? An obvious side-question has to do with our far less hesitant questioning of truths adopted by other men, although the doubts which come in this way are soon diminished by fairly persuasive arguments. For one thing, many people agree with our opinions. We share a consensus with other men. We may differ in details, but on the main outline there is unity. Then, too, there is virtue in standing behind one's views. A man must have opinions, and defend them, or he is not much of a man. So, from the reassurances of side-taking (there are many good and very *intelligent* men on our side) and the popular idea of self-reliance, we get encouragement to disregard the demands of self-questioning.

But isn't this defense against questioning only another instance of the vast accommodating power of the rationalizing process? Suppose it is: What then? Well, the question can be turned against itself. Isn't such criticism a kind of rationalizing, too? After all, these matters eventually get settled in practice. And the truths we believe in are working, aren't they? So truth, more or less in this fashion, is settled by democratic consensus, and the affairs of the world muddle on.

A philosopher, on the simplest of definitions, is a man less easily persuaded that he knows the truth. For reasons by no means clear, he feels

compelled to seek answers to questions that do not trouble other men. A reformer, you could say, has what he is convinced is a better rationalization of the world and human affairs than the one in operation, but a philosopher is skeptical of *all* rationalizations, not being able to pass off doubts that are commonly ignored.

We have here an explanation of the unpopularity of philosophers. Remaining dissatisfied with the rationalizations—the systems of explanation—which are accepted by the great majority, philosophers are agents for the spreading of uncertainty; and uncertainty, in a world that depends on positive beliefs for the orderly conduct of its affairs, is regarded as an upsetting and even subversive force. This was the great offense of Socrates against the Athenian community. As he explained in the *Apology*, throughout his life he was pressed on by what he felt to be his mission—to question the rationalizations of other men. The Oracle had declared that he, Socrates, was the wisest man in all Athens, and the only sense he could make of this assertion was that he was wise because he relied more upon his own uncertainty than upon the presumptions of truth by other men. It was his endless questioning of these presumptions which finally brought him to trial, condemnation, and death at the hands of his fellow citizens. As he says in the *Apology*:

This inquisition [his energetic questioning of others] has led to my having many enemies of the worst and most dangerous kind, and has given occasion also to many calumnies. And I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise; and by his answer he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said, He, O men, is the wisest, who, like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing. And so I go about the world, obedient

to the god, and search and make inquiry into the wisdom of anyone, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show him that he is not wise; and my occupation quite absorbs me, and I have no time to give either to any public matter of interest or to any concern of my own, but I am in utter poverty by reason of my devotion to the god.

Now it is clearly a fact of the human situation that men, in judging such philosophers as Socrates, are wiser in hindsight than in foresight. Confronted by a man who questions their belief in time of crisis, they wish only to get rid of him. After a lapse of centuries, however, we may admit, with pride (because he was a man like us), and with admiration (he stood up alone against his enemies), that he was right.

So history, it is fair to say, is on the side of the philosopher —at least, a questioning philosopher like Socrates. And since men try to take some account of history in their political rationalizations, we have reserved a place in our social order for free Socratic questioning. But it is also evident from history that this reservation tends to disappear in its hour of testing. So it must be admitted, therefore, that stable political rationalizations and Socratic questioning are in the long run an operational contradiction in terms. Nearly all the reconciliations of serious questioning of popular rationalizations have taken place, calmly and securely, many years later. Philosophical mistakes are seldom recognized after an hour or two. Oxbow Incidents achieve dramatic unity in another time-scale.

The issue, from the Socratic point of view, concerns not so much who is "right" as admission of the possibility that the popular rationalization may be wrong. For example, Henry Steele Commager in the *Saturday Review* for Dec. 18 lists the distinguished Americans who opposed the entry of the United States into the Spanish-American War (among many others they included Carl Schurz and Samuel Gompers, E. L. Godkin of the *Nation*, Felix Adler of the Ethical Culture Society, Jane Addams, David Starr Jordan,

Andrew Carnegie, and William Jennings Bryan), and adds this comment:

We need not decide now whether those who protested this war were right or wrong. It is sufficient to remember that we honor Mark Twain and William James, regard Jane Addams as one of the greatest American women, and still read Godkin, and that Bryan is somewhat better remembered than William McKinley. Those infatuated patriots who now assert that it is somehow treasonable to criticize any policy that involves Americans in fighting overseas would do well to ponder the lessons of the Philippine War.

But it will be said, as it is always said, this war is different. Whether history will judge this war to be different or not, we cannot say. But this we can say with certainty: a government and a society that silences those who dissent is one that has lost its way. This we can say: that what is essential in a free society is that there should be an atmosphere where those who wish to dissent and even to demonstrate can do so without fear of recrimination of vilification.

Pointing out that the dominant forces in the Southern states were by the 1840's entirely convinced of the righteousness of slavery, Prof. Commager recalls that as civil war loomed the South adopted a policy which closely resembles the course recommended today to muzzle dissent:

Teachers who attacked slavery were deprived of their posts —just what Mr. Nixon now advises as the sovereign cure for what ails our universities! Editors who raised their voices in criticism of slavery lost their papers. Clergymen who did not realize that slavery was enjoined by the Bible were forced out of their pulpits. Books that criticized slavery were burned. In the end the dominant forces in the South got their way: critics were silenced. The South closed its ranks against critics, and closed its mind; it closed, too, every avenue of solution to the slavery problem except that of violence.

Most searching of all are Prof. Commager's observations addressed to those who claim that protest against the war in Vietnam gives comfort to the "enemy" and therefore prolongs the war. This objection, he shows, has meaning only if it be assumed that by no possibility is the war a mistake; further, one effect of vigorous American dissent concerning the war could easily be that the Vietcong would "interpret it as a sign of the

strength of our democracy— that it can tolerate differences of opinion." And this, as we keep saying, is the main idea we want to get across—that democracies are better than tyrannies.

Prof. Commager also points out that if the critics should be right—and how can this possibility be denied?— silencing them will only magnify the wrong by hiding it. He continues:

. . . if "government, or those in positions of power and authority, can silence criticism by the argument that such criticism might be misunderstood somewhere, then there is an end to all criticism, and perhaps an end to our kind of political system. For men in authority will always equate their policies with patriotism, and find criticism subversive. The Federalists found criticism of President Adams so subversive that they legislated to expel critics from the country. Southerners found criticism of slavery so subversive that they drove critics out of the South. Attorney General Palmer thought criticism of our Siberian misadventure—now remembered only with embarrassment—so subversive that he hounded the critics into prison for twenty-four year terms. McCarthy found almost all teachers and writers so subversive that he was ready to burn down the libraries and close the universities. Experience should harden us against the argument that dissent and criticism are so dangerous that they must always give way to consensus.

Now the similarities of what Prof. Commager is saying to the work of Socrates are plain enough, but what about the differences? Well, for one thing, Prof. Commager is talking about the uncertainties proper to questions of national policy, while Socrates was talking about individual views concerning right and wrong, and it was his intense seriousness on these questions, coupled with relentless criticism of conventional opinions, that made him disliked by the political leaders of his time. During his trial, he heaped ridicule on his accusers, showed contempt for the motives of his judges, and after being convicted, instead of suggesting a moderate penalty, he invited the court to subsidize him for the rest of his life, as a public benefactor. You could say that he was so intent upon exposing the folly of an unexamined life lived on unquestioned assumptions that he

tormented the very weaknesses of his society into becoming the instrument of his death, using for provocation the scorn of his uncompromising moral intelligence.

Throughout his life Socrates maintained that the social community should give attention to the care of the soul, which meant that politics, like philosophy, ought to make disciplined inquiry into the nature of the good, and he was especially critical of Athenian democracy on the ground that it cared nothing for the spiritual health of the people, but measured national greatness by wealth and empire. In his trial, he made a *public* issue of this claim, and so he had to die.

It could be argued, in fact, that Prof. Commager today gains a hearing for the right to dissent because of the moral splendor of Socrates' insistence, to the death, on the importance of open and forceful criticism of what one believes to be wrong.

Why is it so difficult to maintain a rationalization of the good life which includes Socratic questioning? Why, in times of national emergency, is there so strong a tendency to suppress and silence the men who express doubt, who ask embarrassing questions, who strive against the pressures of the hour to give expression to what they believe is right?

There is only one answer to this question. It is because men have not the *habit* of Socratic questioning of themselves. Their allowance of dissent is only a kind of window-dressing. They do not expect, when they provide for dissent, that it will ever find *them* wrong. And so, when it comes, they feel little obligation to take it seriously.

What we are saying, we suppose, is that a bill of rights is not enough. A Hyde Park escape valve is not enough. The rationalization of parliamentary democracy as the means of creating a form of society which is both orderly and free is not enough. The lessons of history, which make

us honor dissenters who are recognized to have been right after they are dead, are not enough.

Well, could there be a rationalization which does not merely "provide for" Socratic questioning, but is actually based on it? Is it even conceivable that a social order could be founded on such universal uncertainty? One thing seems clear: Any attempt in this direction would have to be preceded by the systematic development of the Socratic spirit in the people as individuals. We don't really know how "uncertainty" would work in a society, because through history we are familiar, mainly, with the corporate *mistakes* of peoples who were persuaded that they could not survive or act to any good without suppressing their uncertainties.

This is of course a common problem. The chief complaint of men with special knowledge of technical problems is that they are unable to make their knowledge effective for the public good because of misguided popular certainties. *Knowledge for What?* by Robert Lynd reports extensively on these frustrations. The counter-complaint, which probably has an equal validity, is that the public good is too important to be turned over to the narrow intelligence of specialists. "War," as Clemenceau said, "is much too serious a matter to be entrusted to generals." By this means we submit to the impasse: the specialists are biased and the generalists are ignorant, so nothing can be done.

But history, we must note, has another contribution to make. It not only shows us retrospectively how often the doubters and dissenters have been right and prevailing opinion wrong. Today, history has immediate lessons, too, and they are becoming so impressive as to turn honest men into something like Socratic philosophers within their own generation. Let us consider our own immediate past. Think of the certainties which have been shaken during the past fifty years. First, there have been the massive shocks to human confidence and sensibility brought by two terrible world wars. During this

period there has been a virtual inversion of the moral influence of the great scientific movement—from a liberating enthusiasm to a source of revulsion and a fear of what-next in the way of nihilistic destruction. There has been an accelerating disintegration of the Western forms of religious belief, reaching a kind of climax, within the year, in the open questioning of the idea of God by contemporary theologians. Meanwhile, the frustrations to simple-minded economic individualism brought by technology in haphazard collaboration with the Welfare State are well known. Then, on the international scene, what is called the "revolution of rising expectations" points to inevitable change in the balance of power in respect to non-white populations. Add to all this the indefinable dissatisfactions felt by vast numbers of the middle class—the sense of being stopped and shut out that afflicts so many of the brightest college students, and the alienation characteristic of intellectuals—and you have a total of both tangible and intangible forces generating uncertainty that can neither be calculated nor contained. We know that this total is large enough and pervasive enough to affect human attitudes in all parts of the United States.

Beside it may be set another total—by no means as impressive in cumulative strength, yet possibly representing forces of a more decisive character. We are thinking of the new essences of human individuality now seeping into the interstices of old forms of thought, displacing ancient denials, outlawing habitual inhumanities, and generating human associations that resist the brittle rationalizations of the past—that bend and give, but do not break, because of the life that is in them. With the decline of old systems has come a new faith in man—expressed, as it should be, by individuals. The hope of the future, indeed, lies in these solitary communications of wholeness and integrity, for they represent the transcending synthesis on which a new kind of rationalization must be based. Every fissure, every failure, every intolerable contradiction in the old rationalizations makes a fresh opening for these declarations of

the human spirit. Every doubt or uncertainty at last conceded creates a channel for another kind of affirmation of the uncoerced potentialities in man.

But how, it may be asked, can a handful of courageous individuals alter patterns of behavior and response which, however sorry their effect on human beings, have the rutted authority of centuries behind them? This argument, while strong, may not be as strong as we think. We need not give so much credit to the controlling power of the old rationalizations. There are sources of affirmation—even springs of rebellion—within every conformist, especially the reluctant conformist. The Oracle, as Socrates pointed out, spoke for the possibilities in all human beings. How much of the dark consensus in our systems of failure comes from the inability of men to articulate what they feel? History has many instances of unexpected response to high challenge on the part of apparently submissive populations. The records of educational experiment bear witness to the capacity of a single imaginative teacher to *change the polarity* of a class of children and to help them develop an *esprit de corps* which lifts and releases even laggard members of the group. The way to begin is to begin. What happens in a single individual can happen in a modified way in a group, and what happens in the group can happen, modified again, in the mass. The postulate, in the rationalization for this kind of human development, is that you allow experience to demonstrate how much can be done.

We need a Buddhist (Look inward, thou *art* Buddha), Jamesian (see his essay "The Energies of Men"), Thoreauvian (see "Civil Disobedience"), Emersonian (see "Self-Reliance"), Rogerian (see *On Becoming a Person*), Maslovian (see *Religion, Values, and Peak Experiences* and *Eupsychian Management*), and finally a Gandhian rationalization which is founded truly upon the dignity and promise of human beings instead of upon some scheme of calculated limitation which

depends upon low, backward-looking estimates of human beings for its order and success.

What further encouragement can we find to help us believe that this general program, based upon affirmative instead of negative judgments of man, would really work? Well, first of all, it is in conformity with fact and nature. Since it refuses to prejudge human beings, since it will not rely upon statistical averages, it acknowledges the differences among men, as any educator must, and thus leaves freedom for spontaneous human response. It does not declare any denigrating cynicisms about "human nature," and thus avoids the doom of self-fulfilling prophecy. It finds its order on the proposition that human beings are individuals and will progress, therefore, as individuals, and it rejects all generalizations which ignore this primary truth about man. By this means long suppressed moral energies become available for the common good. "Moral Man and Immoral Society" is a title with a profound truth in it—a truth issuing from the fact that the socio-political rationalizations of the past have either been founded on the weaknesses of men, instead of upon their strength, or they have fallen into compromises which amount to the same thing.

There is still another reason for encouragement—probably the most important one of all. It is that today, in this last half of the twentieth century, we are beginning to take an irreversible step in human awareness. A kind of self-discovery is going on from which there can be no retreat. We are, for one thing, objectifying the very process of rationalization and finding ourselves nonetheless present, looking on. This, we might say, is an awakening to the Self which has no parallel in history save in the obscure revelations of the mystics and certain metaphysical philosophers. This awakening is coming to us in an almost public way, and is slowly shaping the assumptions of any future philosophy of man. The indispensable ground of human freedom lies in this discovery. One restatement of the Socratic position—and there are many such restatements,

today—was well put in MANAS two weeks ago, in a quotation from J. F. T. Bugental, who said:

. . . once we recognize the process nature of human experience and the infinite potentialities of human thinking and discovery, we give up hope of an orderly and completed system of thinking. But having given that up, we are begun on an intellectual adventure which has within it high excitement and genuine potential. Many of us will find the ambiguity and inexorable incompleteness of this approach to be threatening. Certainly I experience these feelings myself. But I know too that once we change the conception of the enterprise in which we are engaged to that of exploration in an infinite system, once we give up the hope of making the ultimate and definitive discovery and recognize that our transaction with our experience of the out-there is a creative, artistic one, there is more to be gained than we have lost.

Well, what about "practical" considerations? We do not see how anything could be more practical for human good than this new rationalization based upon individual possibility. It is an educational rationalization of effort which relies on freedom and creativity instead of external control. It rests upon reality insofar as the ideals we proclaim about human beings are real. Implementing it depends upon use of our freedom, not upon loss of freedom, through some form of the social contract, to external management or manipulation. It awaits no tired suasions of the political consensus, but comes into being wherever a man or a small group gives its vision and energies birth. It changes the source of action for human good from "they" to "we."

## *REVIEW*

### "THE CHRISTIAN AGNOSTIC"

THERE is an interesting parallel between the spreading influence of England's Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson, on the Anglican laity and the impact of England's most popular Methodist preacher, the Reverend Leslie D. Weatherhead. Both Robinson and Weatherhead are convinced that literal interpretation of orthodox articles of faith denies the true spirit of religion. In the first chapter of his book, *The Christian Agnostic* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1965), Dr. Weatherhead bluntly prophesies: "Not for much longer will the world put up with the lies, the superstitions and the distortions with which the joyous and essentially simple message of Christ has been overlaid." For both Weatherhead and Robinson, the great mistake and evil of organized Christianity has been recourse to authority, in a self-deluding righteousness demanding oversight of the minds of all beings less illuminated than the clergy's. At the outset Weatherhead justifies his use of the word "agnostic":

This book contains no sneer at the creeds and ancient statements of what some men used to believe. But they were written down to rebut current charges, not to impose formulae on future generations. Though not as important as loving, believing certainly matters. It matters so much that, if it has any relevance to the business of living, it must be born in the individual mind, not thrust by church authorities on others. Our young Davids cannot fight Goliath in Saul's armour.

This book is not an attempt to remove from the Christian religion all those things which the modern man finds it hard to believe, and to present, as it were, a theology easier on the mind, tailored to fit a nuclear age. Certainly I would not be any party to softening the stern challenge of Christ, as long as I was sure that the stern words really were Christ's and not the bad temper of His reporters.

The thoughtful layman often feels, however, that the churches are far more concerned to defend a hoary tradition than to follow the moving light of new

insights and understanding; far more concerned to defend historic language than to discover truth. . . .

Unless we can break out of the prison of old-fashioned expressions, creeds and formularies, we shall never be free to find the far more glorious truths which are inherent in the Christian religion.

I am sure we can only re-commend Christianity to the thoughtful men of today by a restatement which admits a large degree of agnosticism, eliminates magic, dispenses with imposed authority, and abolishes, from our conception of God horror and cruelty which would degrade a man, let alone God.

For Dr. Weatherhead, in other words, agnosticism is an expression of reverence and of humility. Concerning the origin and nature of man, the nature of God, etc., his opinion is that one need be neither skeptic nor dogmatist, while to *seek* truth regarding "all crises of the human spirit" is to assume responsibility. Dr. Weatherhead finds himself communicating with laymen who have grown to the point where they must think for themselves, and who inwardly reject the "must believe" insistence of formal articles of faith.

Dr. Weatherhead's reflections have led him to one clear affirmation: that the inspiration the first Christians derived from Christ came as faith that "death" is a transitional phase of experience and not the terminus of mind and soul. Quoting William Barclay, who says that the symbolic meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection is a "message of rebirth," Dr. Weatherhead comments:

The idea of rebirth is an essential part of the Gospel and was certainly part of the message of Jesus, but the modern layman can well do without St. Paul's obsession about sin and the imagery of being washed in blood. We must seek another interpretation of the Cross.

. . . The important truth in the resurrection story is that the essential ego of Christ survived death. Christ's resurrection does most powerfully support our *hope* of survival. It proves that there does exist another plane of being and His reported promise, "I go to prepare a place for you," is better evidence of our survival than is His own resurrection. To the earliest Christians, Christ's resurrection proved that

in spite of all appearances, and though evil still had immense power, it had no final power, . . .

From the crudities of apologetics which literalized and materialized the story of "death and resurrection," Dr. Weatherhead turns to what is sometimes called the "lost chord of Christianity." As Dr. Weatherhead points out, the idea that rebirth for all men is natural—rather than supernatural—is found in the thinking of the most learned Christian fathers. The doctrine of reincarnation, as much a heritage of Greek as of Eastern philosophy, was anathematized by Christian authority only after Constantine had appropriated Christian symbolism and wedded it to the authority of empire. Quite possibly, Weatherhead's discussion of reincarnation in Christian context explains why his sermons characteristically drew congregations of 3,000 people, his popularity having little to do with his position as president of the Methodist Conference of Great Britain and minister of London's City Temple. While fewer than ten per cent of Britain's population attend church regularly, Dr. Weatherhead attracted multitudes with his invitation to share in philosophical thinking.

*The Christian Agnostic* summarizes his approach to "the hypothesis of rebirth":

It seems quite a shock to some people even to contemplate such a possibility, but it seems a very reasonable idea to me and it would be unspeakable arrogance on the part of us in the West to dismiss without examination an idea current since the sixth century B.C., and held tenaciously by all Buddhists and Hindus, that is by about five hundred million people many of whom are deep thinkers, saints, mystics and profound scholars.

Presumably we should all agree that if there is a life after this one, then this one is intended as a preparation for the next. And there are some tests we can only undergo while we in habit a body of flesh. Will we be able, by dying, to evade the challenge of mastering these tests? It seems to me that such an arrangement would be as unjust and unsatisfactory as allowing the medical student who failed his first anatomy examination to proceed to the operating theatre; to allow the divinity student who could not pass the entrance examination to a theological college

to take over the work of a church and preach in the pulpit, or the failed law student to plead in the court.

My own conclusion is not that reincarnation is proved, or that it is an essential part of Christian belief, but I do find that the evidence makes it probable, that Jesus never denied it, that there is nothing in it which is out of harmony with His teaching, and that it was probably part of the thought-structure of all the contemporary minds of His day.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," may indeed be a law that runs back for the sowing to lives before this and for the reaping to lives after this. This is the fundamental basis of the Eastern idea of karma. The matter is not usefully thought of in terms of rewards and punishments, but of causes and effects, and refers to good as well as to evil happenings in our lives.

If every birth in the world is the birth of a new soul, I do not see how progress can ever thus be consummated. Each would have to begin at scratch and pass away from the life of the earth seventy or eighty years later. How can there be progress in the innermost things of the heart? We can pass on *some* wisdom and, in outward circumstances, those who follow us can in some ways go on where we left off. They will not have to rediscover electricity or atomic energy. But they *will* have to discover, for example, each for himself, the vital supremacy of love and how to master selfish desire. . . .

How can a world progress in inner things—which are the most important—if the birth of every generation fills the world with unregenerate souls full of untamed animal tendencies? There can never be a perfect world unless gradually those born into it can take advantage of lessons learned in earlier lives instead of starting at scratch.

One wonders why men have so readily accepted the idea of a life *after* death and so largely, in the West, discarded the idea of a life *before* birth. So many arguments for a one-way immortality seem to be *cogent* for a two-way life outside the present body.

An actor in his lifetime plays many parts and wears many costumes. I don't want to be "identified" with one part, let alone one costume called "my present body." I am a very different person—in body, mind and spirit—from the man I was a score of years ago. I want to be the player who has been made a better actor by every part that he has played. . . .

## COMMENTARY DILEMMA RESOLVED

FIRST, the dilemma. We have it, in quotation, in two forms. In his book on William Blake, Marc Schorer puts it this way:

The mystic and the revolutionary are opposed in principle for the revolutionary wishes to alter institutions in order to produce a better human situation; the mystic assumes that the human situation is good enough for what it is supposed to be.

Our other version happens to be a comment on rebellion in the North of Ireland after partition was accomplished in a treaty between the South and England (ratified in Dublin in 1922). We found it in a delightful little book, *Morning Papers* (London: Gaberbocchus Press Ltd., 1965), by George Buchanan, poet, journalist, and novelist, who was then a youth in Belfast and saw the shooting in the streets. Mr. Buchanan mused:

"Work with what you have," the law for poets, is not a law for extreme nationalist revolutionaries, who are fixed on what they have not. If there were less belief it might be better. It's the unbelievers who are gentle, not the believers.

The Negro co-op workers of Mississippi, described in this week's *Frontiers*, are satisfying both ends of this equation. They are acting politically, having registered to vote (under normal conditions, this would hardly be "revolutionary," but the attitude of Southern whites tends to make it so), and fixing on "what they have not"—their elementary rights as citizens; and at the same time they are working with "what they have"—becoming craftsmen to earn a living with their hands.

The way these co-ops are brought into being, and the arousal of the human potentialities which have turned the Poor People's Corporation into a going concern, remind us of what Haniel Long said about Nunez Cabeza de Vaca (in *The Power Within Us*):

He helped when he had no means of helping, and gave when he had nothing to give. In his emergency Nunez slides out of theories and

prejudices which unfit one to live on. . . . Nunez was remarkably flexible; he had what seems unlimited courage, unlimited strength. To him life itself was not different from hardship and danger, life *was* these things, and they are what make life good. His plight was hopeless, but he set in motion a train of thought and action which saved him. . . .

Whenever something good is made out of nothing, the transcendent capacities of human beings are at work. And in the case of the Mississippi co-ops, there is a special bonus for white America. These people are slowly but surely undoing the wrong done to itself by the South in the years before the Civil War—described by Henry Steele Commager on page 2.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### WHAT IS A GOOD CHILD?

RALPH POMEROY, who teaches in the Department of Dramatic Art and Speech at the University of California at Davis, has sent us this prose-poem:

A person, you say you are a person. You *are*, or you want to be and somehow, in spite of the others, will be. All right, fine, let's say that.

But what does that mean: a person, the one that *will be*, the you who's doing the saying? A person, what is that but one among the others? A person, each one to the others, arrives like a foreign import, a box, a crate, a carton with the contents mainly unknown but guessed at constantly, constantly, and marked (if others can read) FRAGILE. HANDLE WITH CARE.

What about the others? HOW would you have them find you? With the box delivered and unpacked, the wrappings thrown aside, would you emerge as a radiant and productive orb? They find you otherwise: a glancing prism, a medium of exchange, a corridor of mirrors.

You would be a dancing point, all light and music, moving with grace and gusto. They find you a scrawl across the document, a vote, an upraised hand, an outshouted voice, a dent in the helmet.

You would be, in that moment of your disclosure, a generator of magnetic currents. They find you a particle in a force-field, a brief bit blown from the surge of fathomless sources.

You would be yourself, always. They find you themselves, sometimes.

How do you read it now, this person you say you are? Is it the awaited arrival or the delayed echo? Isn't it legible (if others can read) as either *Welcome* or *Farewell*?

And does any box arrive quite intact? Isn't each somehow mishandled, its legend lost or misread, its contents damaged in transit?

So each of us arrives, borne up and guided by the tidal sweep, in the chop and slap of the surf, in the America of experience. Each arrives, a person to himself, mainly unknown, unread, one and only one

among the others, and guessed at, guessed at constantly.

But marked.

These thoughts, clearly, are addressed, not to the "child" or adolescent temporarily in some stage of development, but to the human being within the child. This recalls an article by Morris L. Haimowitz in *Human Development—Selected Readings*, called "What Price Virtue?" Mr. Haimowitz questions the demands often made of the obviously "imperfect" child by parents and teachers:

Every parent wants a good child. The problem arises when we try to make more specific what we mean by "good."

Is a good child a popular child? Which means other children like him? For early Americans, popularity was not an essential trait. The conception of freedom was much more important; men were free to disagree with one another, free to be unpopular, to do what their conscience told them was right. Current research of adolescents shows a majority agree with such statements as these: "Want people to like me more." "Want to gain (or lose) weight." "I try very hard to do everything that will please my friends." They feel a need to be popular, which often involves, giving up one's own taste, judgment, intelligence and wisdom for the whimsicalities of the mob.

Is a good child an "average" child? This means he has the abilities, tastes, interests and talents of the average person, with some people better, some less good no matter how these may be measured. This means to many that if he is not average he is a screwball.

A similar theme occurs in Edgar Z. Friedenberg's recent *Coming of Age in America*. This author examines how, in the "average" high school, parents and teachers have combined their efforts, however unknowingly, to crush competence, independence, and self-esteem. In other words, by fostering social virtues the high schools teach little more than what may be called "the high school style." And this, as Richard Kostelanetz remarks in reviewing *Coming of Age* in the December *Progressive*, "probably explains

why . . . so many high school leaders comfortably become high school teachers."

Mr. Pomeroy also recalls some paragraphs from a paper called "The Courage to be Imperfect," by Dr. Rudolph Dreikurs:

I have chosen today only one aspect of psychological importance to present to you for your thought and consideration: the subject of "The Courage to be Imperfect." In this one subject and topic it seems that a number of basic problems facing us come to the fore. In this subject and topic we deal with our culture; we deal with the need for a re-orientation in a changing culture; we deal with the basic problems of education; and, finally, we have here an area where we may even learn eventually to deal more effectively with ourselves.

We can well see that perfectionism is rampant today. A great many people try so hard to do right and to be right. Only a few psychiatrists are perhaps catching on to the implications of such a desire which has highly depreciated our fellow men, our society.

I have found many, many people who try so hard to be good. But I have failed yet to see that they have done so for the welfare of others. What I find behind these people who try to be so good is a concern with their own prestige. They are good for the benefit of their own self-elevation. Anybody who is really concerned with the welfare of others won't have any time or interest to become concerned with the question of how good he is.

Dr. Dreikurs turns to an interesting phenomenon—what he calls a "psychological mechanism"—which makes concern with mistakes so dangerous. The psychologist knows that people tend to move in accordance with their expectations; *i.e.*, to some extent man not only becomes what he wills to be, he also becomes what he is afraid he may become. This is discovered by most youngsters when they first try to learn to ride a bicycle. Under way, with an almost free path ahead except for one tree, somehow or other, boy, bike and tree end up together. He is drawn to the tree by apprehension, which is simply negative expectation. In Dreikurs' words, "We move ourselves in line with what we anticipate, and it is

therefore anticipating the danger of mistakes that makes us more vulnerable." Further:

Most people who make mistakes feel guilty, they feel degraded, they lose respect for themselves, they lose belief in their own ability. And I have seen it time and again: the real damage was not done through the mistakes they made but through the guilt feeling, discouragement, which they had afterwards. Then they really messed it up for themselves. As long as we are so preoccupied with the fallacious assumption of the importance of mistakes, we can't take mistakes in our stride.

Now let's see what consequences these facts have on education and on living with oneself. It is my contention that our education today is very largely what I call *mistake-centered*. If you could enumerate the various actions of a teacher in a class and could enumerate for every hour and every day what she is doing with the children, you would be surprised how many of her actions are directly dealing with mistakes which children have made. As if we were obliged to primarily correct or prevent mistakes.

I fear that in the majority of tests given to students the final mark does not depend on how many brilliant things he said and did, but how many mistakes he made. And if he made a mistake he can't get a hundred regardless of how much he has contributed on other parts of the examination. Mistakes determine the value. In this way we unwittingly add to the already tremendous discouragement of our children.

It seems to me that our children are exposed to a sequence of discouraging experiences, both at home and at school. Everybody points out what they did do wrong and what they could do wrong. We deprive the children of the only experience which really can promote growth and development: experience of their own strengths. We impress them with their deficiencies, with their smallness, with their limitations, and at the same time try to drive them on to be much more than they can be. If what we want to institute in children is the need to accomplish something, a faith in themselves, and regard for their own strengths, then we have to minimize the mistakes they are making and emphasize all the good things, not which they could do, but which they *do* do.

## *FRONTIERS*

**". . . with a good deal of pride"**

TODAY, in Mississippi, the poorest state in the union, there are nine producer co-ops making goods for the general consumer market. The workers in these co-ops are Negroes, many of whom lost their jobs (not very good jobs, to be sure) with white employers because of their participation in the Civil Rights Movement. In 1964, a plantation operator in Ruleville, Miss., told a worker who had registered and attended voter registration rallies: "Get off the place and don't come back. You're messed up in the voter registration and I don't want to have anything to do with you." This is typical. Also working in the co-ops are strikers associated with the *Mississippi Freedom Labor Union*. Then there are people like the seven maids who quit a hotel because they thought they were underpaid at 39 cents an hour.

These nine Mississippi co-ops are providing livelihoods to some 150 previously unemployed people. They are producing quality leather and suede pocketbooks, hats, belts, tote-bags and pouches, patchwork quilts, carpet bags, childrens' and adults' clothing, stuffed toys, and miscellaneous items for wear and household use. By means of intensive training programs, intelligent coordination, and help with marketing by some outside people, these workers have learned the necessary skills and have become economically independent. They are making attractive products at prices so reasonable that the goods are easy to sell, either by mailorder or in stores, anywhere in the United States.

The agency which acts as catalyst and coordinator of these efforts is The Poor People's Corporation, a non-profit, non-share corporation chartered by the state of New Jersey. The following is from a PPC prospectus inviting financial help:

The purposes of the Corporation are to provide technical and financial assistance to low-income groups in Mississippi who want to develop worker-

owned and operated cooperatives of various sorts. The program is a logical extension of previous organized attempts to break through the barriers of white supremacy. But the economic and psychological gains are less glamorous, and receive fewer headlines, than the Marches and the Sit-ins. As with any new business, there is much hard work involved, and a great deal of learning. PPC began without government or foundation help. PPC now seeks financial and technical assistance to meet specific needs, so that it may adequately respond to the growing confidence and faith being shown in its objectives by the poor people of Mississippi. . . . Training programs are available under the auspices of PPC, and are carefully coordinated so far as marketing of products is concerned. Skilled experts and craftsmen are working with the program, both in Mississippi and the North. . . . All contributions are put in a revolving fund which is disbursed by a vote of the Corporation membership at its quarterly meetings. A member is any person in Mississippi who is involved, or hopes to be, in a PPC co-op or training program, and has paid the 25 cents yearly dues. Funds disbursed to co-ops at membership meetings are in the form of long-term, interest-free loans.

At present the products of the nine producer co-ops are marketed by Liberty Outlet House in Jackson, Mississippi (P.O. Box 977, Jackson), also a co-op, established by the Poor People's Corporation. The Outlet House, which is managed by Bill Hutchinson, helps the producer co-ops to get organized and renders technical assistance. A main problem in the early stages is to enable the workers to relate their efforts to the practical requirements of producing goods for the market. This is being accomplished largely by the guidance of Jesse Morris, who understands how to structure the program so that it fits the needs of the workers and at the same time fits the "outside world." The success of the general plan is measured by the fact that four out of the first six co-ops helped by founding loans to begin production last August, have needed no further financial assistance, although they are dependent on Liberty Outlet House for sales and technical counsel. Outlet House issues a well-designed catalog folder with product illustrations and prices, and the response in orders from both mail-

order customers and stores indicates high potential of growth for the entire program. (At this point, however, Liberty House adds only for postage and handling overhead, so that its functions need pump-priming support in order to expand.) The New York office of the Poor People's Corporation (5 Beekman Street, New York, N.Y. 10038) is run by Ellen Maslow, who purchases supplies (fabric, thread, etc.) for the producer co-ops and coordinates offers of various kinds of much-needed technical help. In a progress report dated Dec. 7, 1965, Miss Maslow said:

Craftsmen are needed, especially in sewing and needlework, leather and wood, to train co-op workers, experts in design and production are needed as consultants; people everywhere are needed to distribute our sales catalog and stimulate sales, and to raise funds; subsistence salaries are needed for Doris Derby (coordinator of the Training Program), Bill Hutchinson (Outlet manager) and volunteer craftsmen; a panel truck, a station wagon or micro-bus is urgently needed since co-ops have to be visited for training, consultation, and pick-up and delivery of finished products; also needed is financial support for the New York and Jackson administrative offices; and, of course, publicity.

The budgets are modest, and all salaries (for the few paying jobs) are at the legal minimum of \$1.25 per hour. Other services, such as legal aid, accounting, etc., are obtained on a volunteer basis. Informative releases are available concerning economic conditions in Mississippi, budget requirements, future plans, and immediate needs. The latter change. For example, there is a particular interest, now, in sales for the products of a new co-op in Prairie, Miss., not listed in the catalog. These are stuffed toys (\$3.00) and "very cute little girls' dresses" (\$3.95). Miss Maslow will gladly answer letters of inquiry (provided she can borrow again the typewriter she used to send MANAS the information for this article). Other current needs are for people skilled in weaving, stained glass, or in almost any activity which might lend itself to forms of production possible in Mississippi. Liberty Outlet House needs a man who knows electrical repair, and there is the hope

of starting a diaper service (only one, now, for Negroes in all Mississippi). Following are some basic facts about the co-ops:

Each co-op must be a legal entity, and provide at least ten jobs, within a reasonable amount of time. A workshop must be rented or built, so that work can be done cooperatively, rather than as home industry. Each co-op is autonomous, and makes its own internal decisions, although technical assistance can be asked of PPC at any time.

Given the economic situation in Mississippi, worker-owned co-ops seem the only alternative for unskilled, economically and socially vulnerable Negroes. Co-ops provide an independence which is essential for people who are struggling to help themselves, in a hostile environment. Negroes must be their own "bosses," or they will continue to suffer reprisals when they act contrary to the desires of the white supremacists. (One woman in one of the co-ops always sews standing up, so she can look down the road. Reprisals may come.)

Developing jobs on a sound basis in southern states will counter the mass migration to urban ghettos which has been occurring for years. This migration is undesirable all the way around. No one gains from it except the southern white.

There has been protest all over the country that federally subsidized anti-poverty campaigns leave the poor out of the planning. PPC demonstrates the ability of the poor to make good decisions, and to interpret their own self-interest intelligently.

In a letter replying to some questions about PPC, Miss Maslow said: "We're in business, with a good deal of pride. This is not a 'charity,' or a 'buy pencils' campaign for the blind. The co-op workers have worked very hard to learn new skills, and to change their lives accordingly. A person buying one of their products is getting a good product at a good price. The spirit of the co-op workers is the really inspiring thing. . . ."