

## IMAGES AND ICONOCLASTS

THE climactic moments of history are reached when men become self-determining causes of the events and sequences of effect that shape their future. We may say this for the reason that we have no other way of describing developments which could not, so far as any one can see, have been predicted on the basis of past experience or some "conditioning" theory of behavior. Given, for example, a hypothetically perfect computer—the modern equivalent of a Laplacean ideal "mind," capable of anticipating all the future operations of a finite mechanistic system—and given the most skillful of programmers, it still remains inconceivable that the decisive changes in the life of mankind could be laid out in a broad time-table of future events, like the predestining grooves in an unheard phonograph record. What data, for instance, would you have had to put into the machine in order to predict the appearance of Mohandas K. Gandhi, as a force for socio-moral change in South Africa, during the early years of this century? How would you program for the flowering of the Age of Pericles, the birth of the Renaissance, or for the cluster of human excellences Americans recall with the expression, Founding Fathers?

On this view, then, we are entitled to say that the dramatic moments in history—the ones worth describing in some detail—are crises concerned with the nature of man. Some day, we may think of history entirely in these terms, and find as much importance in a book by Carlyle, a poem by Wordsworth, an essay by Thoreau, as in—say—the revolt led by Spartacus. Whenever a man says, "I am *this*, not that," and says it in a way that releases the new energies potential in "this," such that the inspiration spreads and similar declarations are made by other men, some kind of revolution takes place. Timing is of course involved. To be historically effective, the

declaration of identity needs to be heard in a context of exhaustion of the values men had felt in thinking of themselves as "that." They begin to say, "I will no longer live within the limit of those old definitions of my being." Or they say, in some appropriate vocabulary, "I am not a means to the ends of those people, or the ends they urge upon me—I am a means to ends of my own." When enough people say something like this, and say it with approximate agreement on what their ends are to be, the projection of a new historical epoch gains cultural expression and the forces of imagination begin to generate a constellation of causes. To relive American history, for example, you need to read the Deists, the Philosophes, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and the *Federalist Papers*. Add Arthur Schlesinger's distinguished essay on the vision of Crèvecoeur, some Walt Whitman, the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, some Emerson and Thoreau, and you are well on the way to understanding the positive moral forces in American history. The decline of these forces, and the redefinition of American man in terms of an avaricious exploitation of their material side-effects, is the critical side of understanding American history—important, but not the chief prerequisite to embracing a new vision.

What can we say about the present? It is conventional, these days, to write essays about the contemporary "image of man." The idea of self-identity is very much in the air. It may be, however, that all these image-making summaries and complications are beside the point—little more than Aristotelian charts of what men have been saying about themselves in recent years. No doubt the descriptions have a limited validity, since it is unmistakable historical fact that men do become, in some overt terms, what they say they are. The law of self-fulfilling prophecy works

here as elsewhere. Egotists gain a shallow self-confidence. Self-haters are not lovable, save to the rarely compassionate who see behind the self-hater a hidden potentiality for something more. All finite images are doomed from the start. Proud men who define themselves as better and more deserving than other men eventually generate contradictory definitions in others, and then, by some law of psycho-historical readjustment, a moral resolution takes place, either reducing the delusions or continuing them in some other form.

The interesting thing about the present, however, is the revival of a great Renaissance idea in modern thought. Underlying the Sartrean conception of human freedom, for example, is the idea that man *has no specific image*—a clear consequence of Sartre's contention that he is free from moment to moment. An act of choice is an act of self-definition, so that the image, whatever it is, is never fixed, but always a Protean reality. Disregarding certain logical difficulties of this view which obviously exist—we see that it is an account of man as by nature an image-maker, and unable, therefore, to remain the object of any particular image-definition. Something like this view also results from Camus' *The Rebel*. Whatever mold you make of yourself has by prior self-definition to be destroyed. No resting-place down here. The Augean stables are never clean. Prometheus may now and then be set free, but other vultures await on further peaks. You push the rock up the hill, but there are higher hills, other rocks.

What is distinctive about the musings of the existentialists? They may see only the desperate side of human potentiality, the merciless side of circumstance, but the solid, irreplaceable virtue of defining man *in terms of himself* remains. Existential insight may be incomplete, but it uncovers a timeless truth. It speaks to the timeless envisioner in man. That, surely, is why the existentialist spirit has gained a bulldog grip on the mind of modern man. There is a great power

here, even though we hardly know what to do with it. It is enough, perhaps, for the present, that it enables us to stand still in our ignorance, and to say that ignorance is something that human beings ought to be able to bear. An honest ignorance keeps us from thrashing around like maniacs. But there is more than ignorance. Existential truth also shows us the images we cannot embrace and remain men, and the roles we must not play. The courage to admit the human condition, lest a deluded self-righteousness turn us into something far worse than merely ignorant men, is a virtue that has been reclused in the West for centuries.

This new iconoclasm is performing basic dissolutions throughout the conventional structures of thought. The façades of wornout certainty are coming down. The paths of conformity may still lead to the places where authority was once enshrined, but the temples are increasingly empty now. All but the dullest and most timid priests have deserted their posts. We are beginning to know in our hearts, as Michael Polanyi makes clear to our minds, that scientific "objectivity" can tell us only about things, and nothing about *man*. The impossible burdens of theology, long ago shaken off by independent and rebellious men, are now being put down even by theologians, and this historic decision is at last making visible an order of human responsibility which the old religions of the West consistently hid from view. Meanwhile an ancient schism—that between "science" and "religion"—is dissolving into questions which abolish the split in thinking. There is even a promise, given a decade or two, of the appearance of some non-institutionalized human beings who may be expected to illustrate to others what wholeness as a style of life involves in both interpersonal and social relationships.

There are these good signs, but there is also a great deal of work to do. For one thing, the old vocabularies of authority and belief need to be rendered into terms capable of embodying

existential meaning. What, actually, do these beliefs say about the nature of man?

A statement by Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk of the United Presbyterian Church, and a former president of the National Council of Churches, in the January *Annals* (publication of the American Academy of Political and Social Science), gives a concise summary of traditional Christian belief. Writing on "The Code of Ethics in Public Life," and contending that Christian belief is crucial to this code, Dr. Blake says:

The Christian doctrine of man combines realism as to man's selfishness and self-centeredness with an equal realism about the potentiality of man, of every man, to act morally at great sacrifice to his own interests.

In terms, then, of this Christian understanding of man, the possibility of a good life depends upon faith in God who is essentially moral and is also transcendent and objective. (One must hasten to point out that in Christian understanding, this God may not be thought of as one object among other objects. Language presents difficulties when describing God. Most theologians prefer to describe this transcendent God as the Subject in the universe rather than an object.) . . . .

A code of ethics in the Christian understanding is based upon the will of this transcendent God. In Christian tradition this is classically understood in terms of the doctrine of revelation. God, though absolute and transcendent, is thought of in the Judaeo-Christian tradition as a "living" God, one who discloses himself to men who are his creatures. The present fashion of Christian Protestant theology is to emphasize what is called "special" revelation, that is, God's revelation of Himself and His will in Jesus Christ, as against "general" revelation which has been traditionally understood in terms of revelation through nature, general history, and conscience. In both cases, the point is clear that God is, that He exists that He has acted, does act, will act, and that, particularly, he acts to make his righteous will known to men, whom he has created.

I put this in specifically Christian terms since no matter how secular a Western man thinks he may be, his way of thinking about ethics does rise out of Judaeo-Christian understanding of reality. Let me try to put my point in secular terms. A code of ethics must be considered absolute to be useful to Western

man, because in a hard moral decision he will not take the code seriously unless he believes it universally valid. Our traditional ground of universal validity is still, I believe, based upon faith in a transcendent source of right which is most easily described as God.

There are, of course, alternatives to this way of thinking. The most popular in Western civilization (excluding Marxism) is that of humanism which finds no ultimates (certainly no absolutes) anywhere but in man himself. It is my own conviction, as a professing Christian, that, theoretically, if not always practically, this humanism, however idealistic or unselfish, is nonetheless the greatest threat to man's morality or even to his survival and salvation.

Let me put it in another way: the ethical disarray in American public life, with which this whole volume is concerned [the whole issue of *The Annals*], stems, in my judgment, chiefly from the secular breakdown of the Judaeo-Christian conviction that God is and is, in fact, the God of that tradition.

Let us ignore the devastating philosophical criticism of this tradition, from Boethius to John McTaggart (in *Some Dogmas of Religion*), overlook this writer's obvious problem with his colleagues who call "God" the Subject, while he wants an "objective" Deity, and say, simply, that Dr. Blake believes sinful man has not within himself the resources to behave ethically, and that he has to have outside help; and that further, this help is available from no other source than the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The dignity of man is not enough. Indeed, the dignity of man becomes, through its alleged humanist inadequacy, "the greatest threat to man's morality or even to his survival and salvation."

This traditional view, if we read William Hamilton aright, is in direct contradiction to the new Christian—should they be called "Christian"?—thinkers of the Bonhoeffer school. As Dr. Hamilton says, commenting on Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*:

There is also, in Bonhoeffer's vision of the world come of age, a rejection of religion as salvation either by transmitting the individual to some protected religious realm, or even as protection from something that, without religion, a man might fall into, like

despair or self-righteousness. Bonhoeffer states that in the world come of age, we can no longer be religious, if you define religion as that system which treats of God or the gods as need-fulfillers and problem-solvers.

There are thus no places in the self or the world, Protestants who listen to Bonhoeffer go on to say, where problems emerge which only God can solve. There are problems and needs, to be sure, but the world itself is the source of the solutions, not God. God must not be asked to do what the world is fully capable of doing; offer forgiveness, overcome loneliness, provide a way out of despair, break pride, assuage the fear of death.

This, we see, is far more than theological criticism or reform; it is a starkly existential declaration. Christianity is not seen as "necessary." Christians and others may offer their persuasions, but they have no "head starts, ontological or psychological."

We can see [Dr. Hamilton continues] what Bonhoeffer is doing and persuading us to do. He is undermining the traditional Christian confidence in language, argument, debate; in short, our assurance that we can persuade an indifferent world that it really needs God. . . . The communication of the Christian in our world is likely to be, at least for a time, essentially ethical and non-verbal. . . .

In short, the special pleading from the Judaeo-Christian tradition which Dr. Blake regards as essential to morality, salvation, and survival is precisely what the new, revolutionary theologians reject. Their stance, however, can hardly be described as an "evolution" of Christian thought. It seems to come, instead, from deep revulsion against any privilege obtained in special belief, and from a desire to participate without claimed or presumed spiritual advantage in the pain and sorrow of the world. These feelings are in part historical—arising from a sense of the impotence of the church as a moral influence—and profoundly ethical, seeking emancipation from traditional church practices such as worship, the sacraments, and prayer, and they look for spiritual realization in practical, secular achievements of human good. "True Christianity" is thus said to

be "an affirmation of the secular world in the style of the man Jesus."

One gathers that the religious emotion of these reformers has changed its essential polarity: from the transcendence spoken of by Dr. Blake, they are turning to an immanence of which "the man" Jesus is held to be the example and inspiration. It is as though these apostles of religious revival were repeating the declarations of the Renaissance founders of modern science to the effect that they would read the Book of Nature and let Aristotle go. The Christology of these reformers is sought in lived experience, not in transmitted doctrines. It may be some time, therefore, before the new Christians feel the need of the philosophical religion that was characteristic of the ancient world, both East and West.

In view of these developments, it seems unlikely that Dr. Blake's call to the traditional Christian belief will stir much response. The new spirit is existential, and whatever else it may be, an existential inspiration is *not* mediated by tradition. To those who do not feel it, it may seem rootless, dependent upon a radical daring that takes little account of the needs of other men. Yet the fact is that great changes in "ultimate concern" arise from a flow which begins at an artesian depth in man's nature, and this is always disturbing to those for whom the flow has not begun.

But what of Dr. Blake's criticism of the Humanists? Do they lack, as he says, a source of absolute commitment? Is his point worth looking at, even if his critical context seems irrelevant? Actually, the germane comparison may be between existential sources and mediated traditional sources of inspiration, and not at all between "Christian" and "scientific" accounts of the nature of man.

The Humanists are not without critics in their own ranks. In the May-June 1964 *Humanist* a reader observed that Humanism "seems to have become fatally infected with the kind of well-meaning impotence and ineffectuality which is

endemic to idealistic organizations." He offered this generalized statement of the problem:

We know that man has always believed in his gods in order to believe in himself. Our modern problem is that now, without his gods, and in the presence of a massive scientific dissection of his soul, his body, his universe and his fate, in the presence of a myriad of disturbing, degrading facts about his nature, man's belief in himself is beginning to disappear altogether.

It seems fair to say, if not exactly in company with Dr. Blake, at least parallel to part of what he proposes, that it is difficult to find in either modern humanism or any of the contemporary forms of traditional Christianity the kind of inspiration that moved John Milton to write *Areopagitica*, that armed de las Casas against the cruelty of Spanish bureaucracy, or that made Giordano Bruno say to his inquisitor-judges: "Perchance you who pronounce my sentence are in greater fear than I who receive it." Humanism is indeed without a heroic element; and it lacks as well the psychological subtlety it possessed in the days of its birth in the fifteenth century. Its high spiritual vision succumbed to the over-simplifying explanations of scientific "reality," and its philosophic conception of man gave way to the mechanist theories of the emergent evolutionists.

Where are the heroes, today, who act in behalf of mankind? Whom can you name, besides Gandhi? A man, alas, disturbing alike to conventional humanists and conventional Christians!

And yet, if Humanism is answerable to such criticisms—to the comment, say, made a year or so ago by Colin Wilson and even, in some sense to the charge of Dr. Blake—modern Humanism is nonetheless undergoing transformation along with all the other persuasions of our time. We take from the March-April *Humanist* some scattered passages from an article, "A Humanist Attitude," by Tolbert H. McCarroll and Hal Lenke, to illustrate the new temper in humanist thought. There are here more questions than answers, more

wondering than surety, and, at least in abstract form, an open matrix for growth into deeper faith:

The overriding symptom of our time is that men live in tribes, not in community. Sects, cults, pressure groups, limited interest factions, dissonant separations, are embedded in the mentality and the institutions of our age. There follow inhumanity, dehumanization, loss of selfhood, and the deterioration of hope. It is insularity that we are opposing; it is connection we are asking for.

The disease of this era is the failure to recognize that we are each part of something more complete. Yet, in a very real sense, we are divorced from history as man has known it for thousands of years; we are on the verge of a new history. The rebellion of modern man has found form in the humanist revolution. . . . Each one of us must enter the fray. Our antagonist is not one of us, nor is it some inchoate dialectic. It is both human and mechanical, a natural and synthetic enemy. We strike out against limitation. Those who fight imprisonment and restriction often find that their shackles, whether institutional, spiritual, imaginative, or ideological, are more illusory than substantial. Man imputed power to the walls he conjured around him, but they had no strength of their own. It is for us to strain at the walls of disbelief until they give way to human capability. . . . Even being radical is not the answer if it stops with the shallow vehemence of radicalism as it shows itself today, mainly in those young people who form what is called the new left. No group has a better chance to change the world. Their indictment of the society they inherited is sharp and fervent, exemplified in the songs of Bob Dylan. But they labor within a mystical framework which has not yet been extricated from the irrelevant romanticism they denounce. For many it is difficult to accept that they are related to anything which has contributed to the society they repudiate; they do not want to be identified in any way with an evil system. . . . although there is talk about building a "new morality," they do nothing but tear down an old morality. . . . The urgency which besets social campaigns has eliminated rebellion as a viable style. There is a new fatalism of revolt which sees the Establishment as too remote and too entrenched to be influenced by the efforts of men and women. . . . Going on a protest march should not be alternative for the less theatrical but more profound task of doing the most that an individual can to change the world. It is often more convenient to discharge a moral outrage at the depravity of the power elite or the naïveté of the masses than it is to divest ourselves of

romantic attachments to existing armed conflicts, and to enter the harder, continuing campaign.

What can the individual do? How can we translate what should be into what is? The major challenge is to discover what can make a critical and productive contribution. This often means we must work where no one else is working, or at least inject into others' work a sensibility to which they have not previously had access.

The question, whether change is possible, is moot, for change occurs constantly. The appropriate question is, how do we invest change with humanistic dimension. Men must act on the best hypothesis available, with the most fruitful techniques they can devise.

These criticisms are searching, the generalities pertinent, but the vacancies wide. We have the rhetoric of leverage without any citing of the fulcrum and no tangible pry. Nonetheless, the outline of a method is here. An authentic revolution is more than platforms and slogans. It is more than alienation and revolt. It is a seeping into the interstices of the common life of a new spirit and a new idea of man, and a formation of living intentions at the very roots of existence. It involves a philosophy of affirmation which automatically or casually sheds the irrelevant and moves irrevocably toward fulfillment. It is a credo of the essentially human, a feeling about the nature of man long before it is a social doctrine or a theory of history. It generates without virtuosity the sweep of uncompromising resolve. For us, it represents the kind of a movement of the human spirit which has its ends in its beginnings. As yet, we have only the skill to define the abyss that it will have to fill.

## *REVIEW*

### "THE ANARCHISTS"

MANY MANAS readers, we suspect, will want to acquire the anthology of this title, edited by Irving L. Horowitz (Dell, 1964), During the present time of protest and protest movements which so many find difficult to understand, we are here supplied with evidence that "anarchism" is not a doctrine forwarded by neurotics to bring on a social disorganization paralleling their own disorders, but an affirmation of a highly idealistic faith.

The most articulate of the earliest anarchists (neglected by Horowitz) was Lao tse. Lao tse taught faith in the Tao instead of faith in government—which meant, in psychological terms, that he was convinced that "man is possessed of an abundance of natural virtue." The *Tao Te King*, has these passages:

In the highest antiquity, the people did not know that they had rulers. In the next age they loved and praised them. In the next, they feared them. In the next they despised them. . . .

He who tries to govern a kingdom by his sagacity is of that kingdom the despoiler; but he who does not govern by sagacity is the kingdom's blessing.

During the revolutionary period of this century, anarchism became synonymous with a violent opposition to the political order, and Webster lists as synonyms of *anarchy*: "lawlessness, disorder, tumult, rebellion, riot, insubordination." But were Thoreau or Tolstoy, Godwin or Camus, simply men disenchanted with human existence? In any event, they were also individuals of high ethical aspiration. Although Prof. Horowitz is not himself an anarchist, he has obviously been moved strongly in this direction by C. Wright Mills. In his introduction, Prof. Horowitz articulates the principles underlying the thought which runs throughout the essays comprising the book. From Denis Diderot to Paul Goodman, there is much more of affirmation than negation. Here the editor comments on a fundamental anarchist assumption:

If man is really good, then the purpose of life, in contrast to the purpose of politics, ought to be the restoration of the natural condition of human *relations* at whatever level of human *development* thus far achieved. This is not exclusively a matter of internalizing felt needs, but no less, a form of shedding that which is superfluous and unnecessary. Intrinsic to anarchism is an asceticism and an ascetic mood. One finds the anarchist as a historical figure to be a person very close to "natural" values and "fundamental" living conditions. Their attitudes toward matters of food, shelter, sexuality, and the generalized expression of human needs in the social economy are simply that all needs can be satisfied once the "natural laws of society" shed the impediments of civilization.

The anarchist image of life is in terms of a moral drama, a drama in which individuals are pitted against social systems. It is little wonder, then, that the anarchist has an apocalyptic attitude toward social classes. Abolish class relations, and the natural man will come to fructification. The absurd byproducts of the class system—oppression of the poor by the rich, impoverishment of the many on behalf of the few, etc.—will give way to the new dawning. Just how this process will install an economy of abundance and distributive justice becomes a matter for future generations to discuss.

Prof. Horowitz is obviously involved in a dialogue with himself regarding anarchism. In his concluding chapter, titled "A Postscript," his admiration for the affirmative aspects of the anarchist spirit is clear:

The anarchist's taste for spontaneity as a revolutionary quality of higher integrity than organized political revolution reveals the extent to which the qualities of charisma, moral stature, are exalted among the anarchists. Spontaneity is romantic and apocalyptic, allowing for the fullest display of personal heroism.

This adherence to spontaneity of political action strongly flavors the nature of personal heroism, since the heroism this entails is not merely an illustration of the "laws of history" but a directly personal and lived experience. Revolution conducted by parliamentary means or party apparatus cannot command the same romanticism of heroic rebellion. This is further glamorized by extreme risks and dangers. The individual's highest faculties are sharpened in such a confrontation. In this sense anarchism adopts a therapeutic view of revolution.

The appeal of the outsider as such to the romantic imagination certainly finds the modern anarchist mood an attractive one. He does not accept social norms since they are manmade and arbitrary. Communist revolutionaries have gone to great length to adopt publicly acceptable norms in an effort to court popular acceptance. For the anarchist this is an extreme hypocrisy, and he could not compromise the romantic outsider to this extent. What in the political realm emerges as antipolitics, so in the personal realm marginality is also a virtue. The outsider's posture is of course not unique with the anarchists and certainly not confined to them. But it is a necessary feature in anarchism. It affects political activity to the extent that practical coalitions are forsaken as compromises with norms.

The anarchist feels very positive about the future if for no other reason than that consciousness, anarchist consciousness, becomes a moral force advancing science and morality. Perhaps then the social psychology of the anarchist rests on the idea of self-consciousness acting as an improving force in the evolution of man.

What kind of man is yearned after by the sufferers of modern industrial society? He is generous insofar as there is abundance. His "Apache" qualities are most fired by attempts to impose exploitative relations. His social world is in a state of permanent revolution, and change continually refreshes his life. His skills and ingenuity are embodied in the whole product he creates for the common good. Very important to social balance is the like mindedness of the community. He wants to restore a truly "Christian" being with little covetousness for material things. Ideas are freely exchanged without threatening the "powers that be." His contribution is heard and is part of the overall community decision-making. Competition based on invidious comparisons by class or nation is outmoded. He has a possibility of living an existence in keeping with his nature. Spurious power conflicts do not command him to take arms against strangers. His critical capacities are not blunted but welcomed. These ideal qualities enable the seeker to envision a realizable man since these are universally longed-for qualities and in part, men from time to time exhibit them.

It is interesting that Prof. Horowitz finds reason to identify Thomas Paine, co-author of the American Declaration of Independence, as an "anarchist." Paine's positive faith was perhaps

best expressed in the words: "An army of principles will penetrate where an army of men cannot. . . . It will march on the horizons of the world and it will conquer."

This suggests a passage in W. Macneille Dixon's *The Human Situation*. A philosopher and professor of English literature, Dixon understood well the dynamic tension which must exist between any government and the urges of the individual human spirit:

Something appears to have gone amiss in our moral code. Renunciation, resignation, we have heard of their values and recognise their values. But how dispiriting, how slavish as a panacea for our ills! Mankind in these days appears in need of more rather than less life, of resolution, high-heartedness, and the star of hope in the heavens. If you desire to serve rather than desert the world, you must avoid the attempt to quench the flame of life, to destroy the energies nature has implanted in the race. You take the wrong path. You should make use of them, divert or deflect them to nobler ends, harness them to the chariot of your ideal. And not till we have rid ourselves of the monstrous notion that the sole human motive is self-interest need we hope to lay the foundations of a sane moral philosophy.

And something seems to have gone amiss with our ethics if the brightest proposal it can at the moment offer as a shining goal is either to turn ourselves to stone, as the Stoics advised or accept some kind of human ant-heap or beehive as the model for the future human commonwealth, a recommendation to go back to the insects for our instruction—a miserable, an ignoble *Wiederverthierung*—and achieve a harmony by the enslavement of the individual.

## *COMMENTARY*

### PHILOSOPHY AND CONDUCT

ONE of the interesting things about human beings is the fact that their practical moral sagacity is often superior to the quality of their abstract thinking. There is no doubt a play, a reciprocity, an osmotic interchange between generalized philosophical thinking and a man's day-to-day decisions about what is right. But there is no one-to-one relation between them. If there were, education would be a cinch. Morals would have no mysteries, and symbols could not be made into a source of both good and evil in human behavior.

Metaphysics is the discipline by which we have opportunity to correct flaws in our abstract thinking. The correction of practical thinking is more difficult, since it deals with particulars. Here the subjective flow of intuition becomes the judge, the problem being to determine which principles apply, and how to apply them. Eugene Carson Blake (quoted as a Presbyterian theologian in this week's lead) calls such decisions the "relative" aspect of ethics, and points out the moral error in absolutizing principles beyond their competence to rule. He says in his *Annals* article:

A good example of this is the typical white American attitude towards the racial demonstrations of Negro civil rights groups. With few exceptions, white people absolutize the principle that law should always be obeyed and that police power should always be respected. It is obvious that this is, in fact, a principle upon which rest both justice and the order of our democratic society. To allow anyone to flout law generally and to carry on a vendetta against police is to destroy civil order. And justice can never be established apart from order. Nevertheless, it is clear that order as it is, in fact, maintained in a number of northern cities (not to mention the states of the deep South) perpetuates indignities and injustices on people of color that will permanently alienate them as a group from our society unless rapid change towards full justice and dignity is achieved.

The responsibility for the riots of last summer in Los Angeles and Chicago rests ultimately not upon the criminal elements among the Negro population, much less upon the Negro community as a whole, and

still less upon the nonviolent civil rights leadership of the nation. The real responsibility for such riots rests upon municipal leaders (and the white majority that supports them without question), who absolutize civil order, conveniently forgetting for the moment the absolute demands of civil justice.

Well, what about this "conveniently forgetting"? Is it just "human nature," or is it human nature plus institutionalized rationalizations which, in time, construct out of self-righteousness and prejudice partisan bastions of "order" and the "public good"?

Does the morally flawed structure of a society of human beings bear any relation to the theology shared by the people (the "majority") who make it up? Would, for example, a policy of *apartheid* have developed among white men who had decided to follow the tough, Spartan rules of Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

If we make "atheism" responsible for the crimes and cruelties of the communist societies, to what shall we attribute the sins of the theists? How shall we split the accountability for evil between the familiar scapegoat of "human nature" and its overlay of culturally imposed traditions concerning what a man is and is responsible for, and where his highest resources lie?

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### WHAT EVER BECAME OF PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION?

[This report of an address by Harold Taylor, presented to the American Association of School Administrators during its 1965 meeting, indicates the tendency among teachers to continue their own education, regardless of tiresome and partisan "school-of-thought" debates. Plainly evident is a desire to cut through, reach beyond, such vague labels as "progressivism," etc. The report was made for the benefit of teachers to the Instruction Office of a Southern California high school.]

PROGRESSIVE education reached its apogee during the depression of the 1930's when the economy lay in ruins and our society turned to the schools as instruments of social change. It reached its perigee in the near panic in some circles which followed the 1957 launching of Sputnik with demands that the schools "get tough" and "eliminate the frills." But the movement never died out and now it is undergoing a renaissance.

One of the original card-carrying progressives, Harold Taylor, former president of Sarah Lawrence College, took note of the revival when he spoke to the Education Writers Association during the 1965 meeting of the American Association of School Administrators. The observations of Taylor, who is now vice-chairman of the National Committee for Support of the Public Schools, are confirmed by a new publication of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, titled *The Elementary School We Need*.

Taylor's thesis is that just as the depression of the 1930's posed the challenge which brought the progressive movement in education to its peak, so the war on poverty of the 1960's has produced the circumstances that make its revival inevitable.

"It is no accident," Taylor told the education writers, "that the President's war on poverty is

going to be fought mainly on the battlefield of education. The struggle to achieve civil rights and the right to live without unnecessary suffering begins with the right to a good education. . . . Educators who hope to solve these problems will turn into progressives in spite of themselves.

"It is only by the application of progressive methods to the immense problems of the culturally deprived and the economically disadvantaged that we can hope for any real solution. By the necessities of the war on poverty we will once again be forced to face the problem of the individual child, to deal with each child in his own terms where he is, what he is, what he is ready to do, how he can best be taught, how he can achieve his own intellectual independence.

". . . The philosophy underlying the progressive approach to education is one of progress and development, whether in individual human growth or in the case of whole societies. Full growth of the human intelligence cannot be achieved unless the conditions for that growth exist, and, accordingly, education must take account of the entire complex of factors which affect the life of the child. On the other hand, if a society is to advance to higher levels of quality, it will do so only through advances in the quality of its educational system. Education must therefore take on a social dimension, and the school and college must be considered to be instruments of social change and agents of cultural and social growth."

Taylor made it clear that in discussing progressive education and its prospects he was excluding one segment of the movement which came to be stigmatized as "life adjustment." Many who marched under that banner, Taylor said, confused "a kind of Chamber of Commerce over-all boosterism and customer-is-always-rightism with what was imbedded by progressives as a way of teaching respect for the individual worth of other persons and of learning to live and be useful in a democratic society. The progressive concept suffered very great damage at the hands of

teachers who accepted the cheery message of the middle class that togetherness is more important than critical thinking. . . . The trouble came from teaching bland adaptation to one's environment rather than . . . the reality of its defects and virtues."

What happened in the name of "life adjustment," Taylor maintained, was a distortion of the root values of the progressive which involve "a belief in progress, a willingness to take risks, to act boldly, to experiment, to open up new paths, and to make the worth of an idea depend on how it works in action rather than how it looks on paper or whether it matches accepted dogma." He added: "Progressive education is part of an entire social and philosophical movement. It is not simply a set of educational techniques practiced by wild-eyed romantics to encourage basket-weaving, demand feeding, bad spelling, playing on the recorder, youthful disobedience, and general sloth."

One of the early discoveries of the progressives, now assuming new importance, Taylor pointed out, is that intelligence is not a universal attribute of the human race parceled out in measured doses when an individual is born. Nor can it be measured by one test for all to determine an intelligence quotient. As the progressives demonstrated, the social and physical conditions in which the child lives, the amount of affection he receives, the encouragement of teachers and parents, the opportunity to learn and use a wide vocabulary, intellectual and aesthetic stimulation in the environment, the mental and emotional health of the child—all these are involved in the development of intelligence.

"It was a simple step from these discoveries," Taylor continued, "to the conclusion that teaching academic subjects through conventional texts and conventional methods which ignored differences in the life experiences of young children was an enormous error. . . . The truth in all this has recently exploded into public consciousness by the circumstances of the Negro protest movement and

the realization by a wide sector of the American public that poverty, whether physical, cultural, or emotional, imposes on the young child an irrevocable handicap from which he can be released only by progressive methods of education which take account of his total situation."

Critics of progressive theory and practice, Taylor said, have chosen to ignore that it is precisely in the area of learning fundamentals that progressives made and are making their greatest contribution to the educational system.

## *FRONTIERS* The Uses of Symbols

IN his recent *Nation* (Jan. 17) discussion of the Vietnam war, Howard Zinn found explanation of the moral contradictions of American policy in "the corruption of means, the confusion of ends, and the easy reversibility of moral indignation which is aroused to violence by symbols." The accuracy of this diagnosis makes one wonder what might be involved in curing people of their susceptibility to manipulation through symbols.

Since the use of symbols is practically the essence of man's mental life, we can hardly eliminate this process. The capacity to abstract, generalize, and then to symbolize is employed in every act of the imagination; all science is based upon it; the very idea of *principles* becomes possible through it; and the contrast of the ideal with the actual, producing the tension in which human striving takes place, is dependent upon it. The problem, then, is not to find some way of abolishing symbols, but to learn how to use them without becoming subject to the delusions they so easily support. Carried to extremes, the assigning of substantial reality to symbols is insanity; and in society, when cultural delusions are ratified by a symbolism that is accepted by the great majority, people often move in patterns of behavior which seem a collective madness to others whose mental life is based on different identifications of value.

What is wanted, obviously, is some kind of practical ends-means test, some tough-minded criterion of human good which people learn from childhood to preserve and apply as the inviolate rule of their moral life. Since a major application of this test will be to the demands of ideological or political loyalty, it cannot be taken from the assumptions of political thinking. And "conscience," whatever this term means, does not seem to be good enough. In all too many cases, conscience is not aroused until the wrongs in mass human behavior turn into hideous enormities, and even then an energetic spray of symbolic exhortations is often sufficient to cover them up. We have a way of submitting to the view that "anything goes" so long as it can be given symbolic justification.

Well, that is the problem, and in our time war is its extreme case. The roots of this moral self-deception doubtless lie deep in the mystery of human identity and related ethical and moral issues which Western man has for centuries elected to resolve in expedient terms. We have only deficits in our thinking when we look for help in finding the human being behind his ideological and other objective identifications; it may be that exploration of these deficits must now occupy our serious artists and writers for a considerable time, until some deeper perception of the nature of man gains persuasive currency.

Meanwhile, an increasing awareness of the self-deceptions we indulge through symbolization is certainly in order. One skillful exposé is provided by David Bazelon in *The Paper Economy* (Random House, 1963), a book reviewed by John S. Keel in *Etc.* for September, 1965. Mr. Keel's summary makes it clear that the American cultural self-image (constructed largely in economic terms) is producing a dangerous crisis—"shaping up as a consequence of an obsolete ideology and a system of 'paper' values which are preventing the nation from making effective and efficient use of its great power and productive capacity." The reviewer observes:

On one hand [Bazelon] notes the remarkable build-up of technology, based on science, which has provided vast possibilities for the human mind to refashion reality in terms of human needs, wants, and values. He notes also, however, that we are trapped by ways of thinking and by institutions, by "paper" symbols and semantic reactions that have developed from a long historical experience with scarcity. Bazelon's method of analysis seems to include an implicit abstraction differential as well as a system of dating and indexing. He reminds us that . . . Capitalism (1965) is not Capitalism (1929) is not Capitalism (1880) is not Capitalism (Adam Smith 1776).

At the abstraction level of ideology . . . Bazelon finds a realm of Big Symbols—The Free Enterprise System, The American Way of Life, Supply and Demand, Private Property Free Market, Founding Fathers, Competition, Balance Sheet etc.—plus a demonology, which includes the Federal Government and other Outside Influences. All these formulations, he suggests, bear little or no relation to referents in

concrete experiences of contemporary life. "The only existential meaning of *enterprise* is what businessmen generally happen to be doing at the moment, and *free* is merely the accompanying demand that they be left alone to do it."

Bazon notes the "allness" involved in this notion: "Everything good is claimed for the free enterprise system and everything bad clearly lies outside of it. So it cannot seriously pretend to be a description of reality. It is more a moral thing and consequently makes for good screaming, but poor discussion." . . .

Bazon cites the view of a well-known business organization: "The free market is self-coordinating and self-regulating, without master plan or central direction." He demonstrates, however, that (1) the whole trend of economic science in the last forty years has cut away at the plausibility of this notion; (2) the present situation is not *free* competition but *managed* competition with administered price (bearing no relation to the theoretical conditions expressed in classical economics); (3) centralized federal government has largely underwritten the "success" of the contemporary business economy by a variety of means.

There is undoubtedly a great deal of truth in this analysis—how much, we leave to critics better qualified to make exact measurements. What concerns us here is the obvious possibility of substituting another and to some more persuasive set of symbols for those now under criticism. In such a transaction, no one might profit. For example, the image of a total welfare state, after the model, say, established by Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward*, is sometimes offered as the foundation for an economy based upon the "abundance" to be provided in over-flowing measure by the cybernetic revolution. The moral emotions which support this vision are admirable, but the failure to consider, first, the availability of Bellamy's Christ-like administrators, along with the basically educational approach to all human problems which has somehow been made to prevail, is almost as disturbing as the delusive ideology explored by Mr. Bazon.

What, it may be asked, would differentiate this total welfare state of the future from the present methods of more limited welfare now applied to the "poor," beyond the fact that practically *everybody*

would become subject to them? Following is a closing passage from a *Nation* (Feb. 28) article, "Poverty, Injustice, and the Welfare State," by Cloward and Elman, in which this comment appears:

Public housing, for example, now employs many kinds of professionals. If management finds the behavior of a tenant objectionable, he may be required to accept some form of therapy upon pain of eviction. Professionals have thus become new agents in an enveloping fabric of bureaucratic control of the poor and are, if only unwittingly, part of the problem that needs correcting. When an unwed mother makes application for public housing in New York City for herself and her children, to cite a further example, she is routinely referred to what the Housing Authority calls its "social consultation unit." There professionals employ their higher skills to make a determination of her "suitability"—not her need—for residence in a public project. Thus the rights of the poor are jeopardized as much by those who find legitimacy for their practices in the sciences as by those who find it in scriptures.

Much as we admire the vision of *Looking Backward*, and despite the obvious shortcomings of our present arrangements—which seem almost certain to get worse—we are constrained to quote a little-known statement from Bellamy. Interviewed by B. O. Flower, editor of the *Arena*, he said: "If I thought socialism would not ensure full freedom for the individual and foster intellectual hospitality in the realms of ethical, scientific, and philosophical research, I should be the first to oppose it."

In other words, we have to solve the problem of the ends-means test before we can pretend to grasp the real meaning of any of the big, ideological abstractions. This seems so important that hardly anything else deserves serious attention.