COMMUNITY AND CONFORMITY

[Fortunately, the utopian impulse has its practical side. The endeavor to establish a new spirit in financial relationships, which this article describes, has close kinship with a series of undertakings in France just after the war—the Communities of Work. While the ideal of the French communities was "all things common," the association for sharing money discussed here by Woody Ransom is far less ambitious. Yet the motives are much the same as those which inspired the European communities. (See Claire Hutchet Bishop's book, *All Things Common,* Harper, 1950.) The members of the first Community of Work—Boimondau, a watch-case-making enterprise begun by a man who had tired of "capitalist" endeavor—lived by what they called their "Rule." This was a short declaration of general principles embodying a "common ethical minimum." One of these principles was: "The failure of any one of us in observing the rule will contribute to the education of all." The Sharing Plan has a similar provision: No member can be expelled. A condensed version of the Sharing Plan Agreement appears on page 8.]

THE purpose of this discussion is to present one view of the relation of our Plan (see page 8) to contemporary society. We are trying to develop an alternative to certain conventional American institutions and some of the resulting cultural phenomena. To justify the development of an alternative, it is necessary to examine the inadequacy of our present society in the area of individual human awareness, integrity, and thus happiness.

The most obvious symptom of sickness in our culture is perhaps the obsession with power based on violence, currently most clearly manifested in Viet Nam. What power is it that American leaders hold over their constituents to make them cooperate in an endeavor which the majority (in recent opinion polls) oppose? In a society perhaps technically the freest the world has ever known, why are the forces of conformity so strong and those of personal morality and independence so weak?

First, there are forces of legal persecution and Army conscription for protesters, complemented by money and status privileges for those whose behavior the Establishment approves. But such mechanisms are relatively powerless in America unless the ends for which they are used have at least tacit support from the great majority of the people, expressed by their failure to protest.

A second class of mechanisms contributing to cooperation with policies such as the war in Viet Nam consists of officially encouraged prejudices and unquestioned procedures—in short, the narrow conventional world-view which most people have accepted as reality. But on the whole these deceptions and distortions are quite transparent and it is difficult to comprehend why even ordinary citizens should be taken in—unless there is an underlying emotional reason.

This brings us to a third class of forces supporting conformity: the basic need of every human being for a sense of acceptance in some form of community, and the resultant fear of ostracism. Support for this general statement will not be detailed here since writers such as Camus and Marcuse have elaborated it, showing that an individual's very sense of identity hinges upon relation to community.

Because the *quality* of the sense of community offered to ordinary citizens within American culture is so unsatisfactory, most individuals feel subconsciously that it is in imminent danger of even further deterioration or total disintegration. They sense the abyss of psychic isolation on whose brink their very tenuous social relations leave them clinging. Consequently they desperately fear and repress any threat to this already insecure community,

which is the only one they know. They deny that there is anything significant missing from their social experience and even insist that their way of life is the best to be found anywhere. They especially insist that everyone against whom they are in a position to bring pressure agree. The citizens of a humanly unsatisfactory society cannot easily tolerate the visible existence of individuals or groups, at home or abroad, which have worked out or are trying to work out an apparently viable but somewhat unconventional way of life. The more personally unrewarding a society becomes, the greater the pressure for conformity both to accepted thought and to official policy.

If this formulation accurately describes what is behind conformity in the Western world, it seems clear that the only way to help people free themselves from its oppressive hold is to make possible a sense of alternative community— through arrangements which are not under the control of those who have an interest, material or psychological, in maintaining conformity. This is one justification behind our Sharing Plan and other "counter-institutional" undertakings.

But if counter-institutions are to improve the general society, we must not only develop alternatives and offer an example: we must also induce other people to follow them. By lending objectivity to our point of view, we may recognize what is at stake historically, and in turn increase our chances of success as a social experiment. One of the pitfalls into which "utopian" communal endeavors have fallen in the past is that of losing touch with the surrounding society, and also, eventually, with the social forces at work within the group itself. Members can become so involved with their fellows, all of whom are likely to be of a rather specific personality type, that each begins to assume that behavior in the special communal situation is representative of all humanity in all situations. With comprehension of social reality thus restricted, the ability to act and react constructively becomes impaired. The

quality of life within the community deteriorates, members withdraw, and the experiment fails.

While we must remain fully aware of external political events, we had best give a lower priority to the Plan's publicity than to the sustainment of a deeply rewarding social experience for the members. Our hopes can be fulfilled only through a deep feeling of freedom and voluntary participation on each member's part. Words come much easier than the things they stand for. Time which might be spent intoning "free and voluntary participation," we intend, therefore, to spend actively on guard against development of the group's own conformity pattern. Perhaps words like "freedom" should alert rather than lull us, and over-concern for "smooth-functioning" be the signal for drastic re-evaluation. It is far from clear what makes for a true feeling of freedom, but traditional mechanisms must not be used if traditional pitfalls are to be avoided. There is often a betraying momentum in these mechanisms.

Coercion is not a tool: subtle patterns of penalty or threat cannot really encourage cooperation within the group. And nothing arouses anti-group behavior or withdrawal more effectively than actual punishment.

Certainly there are many individuals in conventional society who desire and "need" punishment, who feel secure only when they receive it. But this is a response to the kind of conflict which arises in people who are members of an authoritarian community. They want to feel that they are accepted, but they also express in some form certain other basic human characteristics that conflict with an authoritarian culture. Submitting to or seeking out punishment sometimes appears to be the only way a person in such a situation can satisfy both needs. He is likely to commit some act which happens to be classified by convention as a "sin," and then, in order to preserve his security in the community, he must expiate that sin by receiving punishment—by paying his "debt to society."

Authoritarian society has thus created a frame of reference in which individuals are psychologically at its mercy: it first insures that almost everybody who retains even a spark of the human spirit must "sin," and then offers the only means of expiating that sin (since it is generally accepted that the Establishment and its official and unofficial agencies are the only embodiment of community). The result is an extremely strong tendency to unthinking obedience and conformity. Yet this pattern of control is never completely successful. Even the most unaware of individuals understands vaguely that in some way the deck is stacked against him, and consequently may develop recurring attitudes of frustration, bitterness, hostility, defeatism, and futility as responses to an anti-human situation. Even this, unhappily, plays into authority's hands, for people in such a state are ready material for highly charged irrational propaganda in support of aggressive, vicariously stimulating policies.

If we use a similar technique, hoping to generate our own "good" kind of conformity in an attempt to hold our counter-institutions together by social pressure, we will be offering a way of life essentially no different from the conventional.

The Sharing Plan Agreement has no rule, therefore, to be enforced through the threat of a penalty. There is no clause allowing for the expulsion of any member for any reason. Eventually the group will no doubt acquire a member whose participation becomes completely cynical. He may cease to contribute anything, express antagonism, draw his full percentage from the fund every year and use it for some abhorred purpose such as paying his federal income tax. This would obviously be very unpleasant for the other members. But in the long run the policy of eschewing penalties will aid the survival and spread of the Plan rather than threaten it. Even a destructive member might be able to return to positive participation after discovering that punishment is unnecessary for security within a nonauthoritarian community.

There are techniques other than direct coercion that conventional society uses to induce conformity. One of the most obvious is ideology. I make a distinction here between ideology and idealism. We in the Plan are all idealists in that we hold a vision of a better form of social life than that around us. But our approach is experimental in that we do not plan to institute an official version of exactly what shape the future society or individual thought and behavior within it should take.

Ideology, in contrast, is not experimental; it is doctrinaire. American society—with its emphasis on patriotism, "freedom" defined as synonymous with anti-communism and uncontrolled opportunities for economic exploitation, "states rights," "free enterprise," etc.—contains endless examples of policies justified by ideology whose social evil would otherwise be obvious to everyone. Suppression of individual freedom and development for the sake of ideological doctrine is even more blatant in communist societies.

It is easy to point out the evils of ideology, but often difficult to avoid them. On the individual level, where does moral conviction end and fanaticism begin? On the social level, where do persuasion and guidance end and manipulation or pressure begin? In the Sharing Plan, all members are sympathetic to pacifism and most to some form of socialism. But even such humanistic goals can and have become the basis for a dogmatic and arrogant ideology. Only if we build the Plan in a non-ideological way can we hope to make progress toward real rather than imaginary versions of pacifism or socialism. If we see the Plan as a *means* toward a specific ideological goal rather than as a social end in itself, we will fail in all respects, neither improving our lives nor attracting many others.

In order to decide if he is willing to participate in our community on a non-ideological basis, each member must ask himself if he is prepared to take part fully (including financial sharing) with other members who do not share his

own ideology—his socialism or pacifism or whatever.

This line of thought brings me to a difficult problem that I approach with hesitation: the role and weight of personal friendship within the Sharing Plan. Although most of us are acquainted with each other, few are personal friends. While I am certainly not opposed to friendship within the group, I've noticed that conventional society tends to reduce all association based upon friendship to political and economic impotence. How many groups of friends form health insurance plans, emergency sharing plans? Very few. This is one of the most frightening achievements of our centralized society. Personal friends turn to existing agencies rather than to each other for help with economic problems, with the widely recognized result of individual alienation. The Establishment has sold the public on the almost exclusive efficacy of coercive power for social reform or good, and individuals have consequently lost faith in the simple alliances of small groups for economic and political security. Small groups, regardless of their original purposes, now tend to meet only the casual "social" needs of individuals and even these are being more and more "guided" or taken over by official, semi-official and commercial agencies. We hope our Plan can avoid this insidious trap.

To give a personal example of how one aspect of this phenomenon works and how our Plan may be able to overcome it: there are several members of the Plan whom I found personally unappealing at first. If I had been thrown together with them in a conventional social situation, or in a physically close community, my attitude could only have been cold, perhaps a bit hostile, certainly unconstructive; however, in our situation, as contributions and communications began to come in from them, my attitude underwent a change. Through the simple and isolated act of cooperation in an endeavor we all felt to be humanly important, I developed an appreciation for the valuable human being that

each one of these people, of course, is. My feelings thus shifted from dislike to appreciation and warmth. We are cooperating rather than competing, though we are not and probably will not become friends. In casting about for a word to convey this feeling, I can think of none better than brotherhood. If the Plan can achieve this in three months with a group of relatively unselected people, we have no need to rely on the promotion of a spurious, sloganized atmosphere of "friendship." An over-emphasis on friendship would restrict new members to those who happened to be personally appealing to all other members. This would make the group insignificant as a social experiment and even as a social experience. Exaggerated stress on friendship can stand in the way of brotherhood. We aim to develop as a movement, not as a social club with an unusual system of paying dues.

Returning to the anti-human mechanisms which conventional society uses to gain support from individuals, let us consider the unqualified value placed upon individual sacrifice for the sake of the predominant social unit—nowadays the nation. The number of martyrs and heroes which conventional society can produce through guilt is impressive. As in the case of distinguishing ideology from idealism, and idealism from fanaticism, the problem of separating the dictates of a healthy social conscience from an indiscriminate need to martyr oneself is difficult. How can one determine whether the desire to perform a dangerous action in support of one's community is based upon a realistic appraisal of the situation and a positive love for the community, or upon an unconscious need (arising from guilt feelings implanted by society) to sacrifice oneself for any approved cause? The second mode of action is bad simply because it is unexamined by the individual; he is too easily manipulated for ends he would not approve were he fully aware of them. Further, such unconscious behavior diminishes individual capacity for enlightenment, which is absolutely necessary for

an ongoing free community, and the success of our Plan.

I hope the reader understands that the case being presented here for freedom isn't expected to be air-tight. It depends on a faith that people are capable of sufficient enlightenment to combine in achieving a nonauthoritarian social milieu. We must encourage open evaluation and balancing by each individual of the stakes and the odds involved in any contemplated sacrifice on behalf of counter-institutions. (Completely self-effacing sacrifice is not something to recommend to *others*.)

Subjective factors involved in such an evaluation are obvious. Our new community must depend for its support on each member's deliberated estimate of the role played by the community in his own sense of identity, integrity and happiness. This is an area of decision in which conventional society requires just the opposite—not evaluation but unquestioning conformity. (Anyone who questions and deviates from the norm is odd or suspect, and one who presents apparently lucid support for his deviation may be regarded as subversive or simply insane!) Conventional society cannot really tolerate radical criticism because it depends for its existence upon procedures that individuals *would not accept if they understood them* and were free to choose alternatives. Of course, alternatives need to exist. If our Sharing Plan succeeds as intended, it should help to create both some understanding and one sort of alternative.

Some economic "sacrifice," actually financial investment for partly non-financial return, may well be necessary for the Plan's success. The application of the above discussion is that we must help "sacrifices" to be voluntary and enlightened by calling for examination of the goal to be attained and of the nature and extent of the price to be paid. No value is to be placed upon sacrifice for its own sake. Also the group must take no ideological stand *as a group* on issues which might involve sacrifice by an individual member

for the sake of some ideological goal which he may not share.

Further, there is no reason why any group should be anthropomorphized. Groups have no souls. Treating them as though they were human beings leads to conformity within them and to neglect of personal integrity and individual moral responsibility. Our society of corporations and bureaucracies and cults is full of examples of the perversions worked by this artificial and immoral approach.

To sum up: A basic aim of the Sharing Plan is to counteract the forces behind the social and human evils of existing society. The more profound force behind the obvious ones of direct coercion, economic and status bribery, mass indoctrination and ideology, is the force of conformity—unthinking acceptance of convention, authority, and the various "lines." The reason Americans are so prone to conformity and open to propaganda is that their sense of community lacks genuine roots. Consequently they over-react with fear and hostility to dissent. They are disinclined to consider ideas which envision ways of doing things that could result in a more humanly rewarding and therefore less conformist community. This blindness to alternatives in turn reinforces dependence on and support for convention. The result is a reactionary society.

Therefore we in the Plan are trying to develop an alternative form of community based initially on the Sharing Agreement, in an attempt to determine whether, and hopefully to present proof in concrete form that, it is possible to live in community with greater freedom from conformity and authoritarianism, and in the process to improve our own lives.

WOODY RANSOM

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THE SHARING PIAN AGREEMENT

[Below is an outline of the "Sharing Plan" entered into by a small group of (about sixteen)

acquaintances who met through activity in the peace movement. The plan has "radical" features, in comparison with conventional insurance plans, in that members individually choose their own "premium rates and within limits decide the extent of their withdrawals. It is an attempt, in the words of Paul Salstrom, a participant, "to share money without attaching strings—without there being a 'giver' or a 'receiver'." Publication of this Plan was not intended by its authors primarily as an invitation of others to membership, but rather to suggest the attempt of similar experiments elsewhere. This week's lead article is a discussion of some of the thinking which attended the formulation of the Agreement.]

1. To become a member, an applicant must be recommended by three members who know him personally, and not objected to by any member.

2. Each member may at any time pay into the fund as much of his "surplus" money as he may desire.

3. A member may withdraw within any one calendar year any amount of money up to a fraction of the amount in the fund at the time of his withdrawal equal to the reciprocal of the number of members in the group at that time. For example, while there are sixteen members, each may withdraw one-sixteenth of the fund per year.

4. If a member requests funds exceeding the amount provided for above (in provision three), the secretary will, with the requestor's consent, circulate the matter to the membership. Any member may then withdraw part or all of his own percentage to meet his fellow member's need.

5. When assistance is needed in addition to or instead of money, members are urged to notify their fellows directly or through the secretary. This is perhaps the heart of the Agreement.

6. Major decisions are to be made unanimously, including changes in the rules or the investment of funds.

7. The secretary will report to the membership periodically. A monthly newsletter is also circulated.

REVIEW
RANDOM THOUGHTS ON WORDS

A SMALL book combining two essays on the use of English by writers—*Philosophy of Style* by Herbert Spencer and *The Philosophy of Composition* by Edgar Allan Poe (Pageant Press, 1959)—contains occasional provocatives which may press the reader far beyond the limits of either "style" or "composition." Even though you find little "philosophy" in what Poe has to say, and, with Lafcadio Hearn, regard the word "style" as practically without meaning, the book may illuminate a number of deep questions, or at least get you into them. This is true in particular of Spencer. Early in his discussion he calls attention to the force of stubby Anglo-Saxon speech, as compared with inflected words derived from Latin:

> . . . that frequent cause of strength in Saxon and other primitive words—their imitative character, may be similarly resolved into the more general cause. Both those directly imitative, as *splash, bang, whiz, roar,* etc., and those analogically imitative, as *rough, smooth, keen, blunt, thin, hard, crag,* etc., have a greater or less likeness to the things symbolized and by making on the senses the impressions allied to the ideas to be called up, they save part of the effort needed to call up such ideas, and leave more attention for the ideas themselves.

Language, Spencer remarks, is a kind of machine for communication, and he adds that "whatever force is absorbed by the machine is deducted from the result." It follows from the fact that the "reader or listener has at each moment but a limited amount of mental power available," that simplicity and effectiveness of utterance are vital to good writing or speaking: "the more time and attention it takes to receive and understand each sentence, the less time and attention can be given to the contained idea; and the less vividly will that idea be conceived." Having laid this basis, Spencer continues:

> The economy of the recipient's mental energy, into which are thus resolvable the several causes of the strength of Saxon English, may equally be traced

in the superiority of specific over generic words. That concrete terms produce more vivid impressions than abstract ones, and should, when possible, be used instead, is a current maxim of composition. As Dr. Campbell says,

> "The more general the terms are, the picture is the fainter; the more special they are, the brighter. We should avoid such a sentence as:

> "In proportion as the manners, customs, and amusements of a nation are cruel and barbarous, the regulations of their penal code will be severe."

> And in place of it we should write:

> "In proportion as men delight in battles, bull-fights, and combats of gladiators, will they punish by hanging, burning, and the rack."

> This superiority of specific expressions is clearly due to a saving of the effort required to translate words into thoughts. As we do not think in generals but in particulars—as, whenever any class of things is referred to, we represent it to ourselves by calling to mind individual members of it, it follows that when an abstract word is used, the hearer or reader has to choose from his stock of images, one or more, by which he may figure to himself the genus mentioned. In doing this, some delay must arise—some force be expended; and if, by employing a specific term, an appropriate image can be at once suggested, an economy is achieved, and a more vivid impression produced.

Curiously, at this point Spencer drops the subject, leaving untouched the problem of achieving a sense of reality for those orders of abstraction with which the writer may be primarily concerned. Is there no counsel on how to obtain "impact" at these levels? This is a strange Nominalist indifference on the part of the man who gave the idea of "the Unknowable" currency in Western thought.

Feeling this difficulty, some writers achieve a higher gear of allusion by evolving an elaborate code of related symbols. As Gabriel Rossetti has shown, the Fideli d'Amore poets (Cavalcanti, Dante, etc.) borrowed and adapted the systematic allegorical method of the Persian mystics to their philosophical purposes. And an American scholar, Bernard Stambler (in *Books Abroad,*

May, 1965), describes the complex symbolism used by another such group:

> Another tradition of allegory, stemming from Pythagoras, was connected with the Eleusinian mysteries and Orphism. This is a double allegory, of things as well as of words—an allegory of the relation, or difference, between the world of hidden and invisible reality and the world of appearances but also the further allegory involved in the need to speak of sacred things with different degrees of indirectness to outsiders and with different degrees to the initiate. The final developments of Greek allegorical theory and practice—combining all the traditions just mentioned—are to be found in Plutarch, certain Stoic philosophers, and such eclectic- or neo-Platonists as Maximus of Tyre or Plotinus.

But however suggestive the conventions developed by mystics, the free creation of a great writer illustrates even better the capacity of the mind to generate meanings by a kind of counterpoint in words. Take for example this passage from Dostoievsky's *Notes from Underground:*

> Dreams were particularly sweet and vivid after a spell of dissipation; they came with remorse and with tears, with curses and transports. There were moments of such positive intoxication, of such happiness, that there was not the faintest trace of irony within me, on my honour. I had faith, hope, love. I believed blindly at such times that by some miracle, by some external circumstance, all this would suddenly open out, expand; that suddenly a vista of suitable activity—beneficent, good, and, above all, *ready-made* (what sort of activity I had no idea, but the great thing was that it should all be ready for me)—would rise up before me, and I should come out into the light of day, almost riding a white horse and crowned with laurel. Anything but the foremost place I could not conceive for myself, and for that very reason I quite contentedly occupied the lowest in reality. Either to be a hero or to grovel in the mud—there was nothing in between. That was my ruin, for when I was in the mud I comforted myself with the thought that at other times I was a hero, and a hero was a cloak for the mud: for an ordinary man it was shameful to defile himself. It is worth noting that these attacks of "the good and the beautiful" visited me even during the period of dissipation and just at the time when I was touching the bottom. They came in separate spurts, as though

reminding me of themselves, but did not banish the dissipation by their appearance. On the contrary, they seemed to add a zest to it by contrast, and were only sufficiently present to serve as an appetizing sauce. That sauce was made up of contradictions and sufferings, of agonizing inward analysis, and all these pangs and pinpricks gave a certain piquancy, even a significance to my dissipation—in fact, completely answered the purpose of an appetizing sauce. There was a certain depth of meaning in it. And I could hardly have resigned myself to the simple, vulgar, direct debauchery of a clerk and have endured all the filthiness of it. What could have allured me about it then and have drawn me at night into the street? No I had a lofty way of getting out of it all.

Here the reader may ad lib interpretation in various directions. There is the obvious content of a treatise on self-deception and man's astonishing capacities for rationalization. But there is something more: the sense of heroism, never brought to fruition by this character, is felt to be not entirely *sham.* Dostoievsky makes oblique statement of the *Deus est demon inversus* view, for the fact is that men *have* arisen from the depths to heroic action; and we see also the wonder of the ranging power of the imagination preserved even in failure a power that could move to heroic effect with the backing of the will. This, indeed, is the promise given tacitly by the artist, since to contain the gamut of human possibility for both good and evil is in principle to rise above it; and this intimation, delicately shaped by the writer's alchemy, is accomplished with *words.*

COMMENTARY
THE SEASON'S TIDINGS

A HOUSE, Le Corbusier has said, is a machine for living. And language, according to Spencer, is a machine for communication. For a long time, when we wanted to obtain a sense of reality for the universe around us, we spoke of the world-machine.

Small wonder, then, that we heap great burdens on the word "organic," which is felt to contain the promise of blessed mysteries. This in an age when thinkers prove their hard-headedness by "buying" ideas, and idealists display tough-minded realism by "selling" their dreams.

A calculated self-defeat seems revealed in such intellectual proceedings—a plain linguistic admission that the forces we oppose are in possession of the tools and dynamics which really work. It is as though, while we confess a fondness for the heroic image of Jesus in the dungeon cell, we are already writing his speech of forlorn submission to the Grand Inquisitor. What else is there to do? The vision of free men has its place, but in a world of contracts, prudent exchanges, and the machinery which gets things done, one must know and play by the rules.

It is for this reason that the heraldings of Christmas bring also a tragic reminder of the absolute dilemma of all Christendom. It marks those celebrations of which the dissolute man in *Notes from Underground* is capable. Beneath it all is pain.

Yet there have been, in the past, other conceptions of universal process, other meanings for growth, other renditions of the Word. Christmas is itself a universal testament to the periodic renewal of the forms of life—the neutral yet ceaselessly active matrix of all human undertakings. It reveals the law of fresh beginnings. The matrix is there, and each year makes its voiceless declaration of subtler laws, energies, and rules; and the Christ of our tradition, appropriate to Dostoievsky's tale, is there as a

silent, enigmatic presence. He could not speak then, nor can he now, having been silenced by the age, yet the presence remains.

So it remains for men to prepare a language in which the breath of life can enter. It remains for them to begin a dialogue in the depths of the Tao, within themselves, which will one day become clear and simple utterance, making the language of life also the language of man.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ART AND THE CHILD

THERE is a knowledge arising from the practice of the arts which might be described as gnomic intelligence—we sense its verity without understanding how it was gained. It follows, therefore, that for people who mean by truth some kind of demonstrable "certainty," and who regard concepts and logical thought-processes as indispensable in establishing it, there is a "magic" in the verisimilitudes reached by the artist.

A vast region of investigation is implied by saying this—a region, as it happens, by no means currently neglected. But the research that is going on—as represented, for example, in the Vision + Value series (published in six volumes by George Braziller) edited by Kepes—is only the merest beginning of such work. This is preliminary research which, unlike conventional scientific inquiries, should carefully avoid the precise definitions which would only short-circuit the project by achieving empty formulas. Conceptual definition discourages the kind of effort that is needed. As Lindenfeld and Marin said in their discussion of "open field" teaching:

> If the concept comes *first*, the students will apply it like a "title" to their experience without ever letting the experience itself emerge—and their knowledge will tend to remain "abstract," without roots in personal experience. But if the experience or condition comes first, the concept becomes personally meaningful; it becomes a tool of understanding.

We understand this well enough in relation to practical affairs—like swimming or riding a bicycle. "Lectures" are not of much value here. You have to get into the water or climb on a bike. Then, after paddling around, or taking a couple of falls, a little verbal advice may help.

Usually, people are unable to see this point in relation to "art"—partly because of all the nonsense talked about it. When they shy away from what they regard as an art activity, they explain their disinclination by saying that they have never been

any good at it, but they probably mean "Who needs it?" They are repelled by the cultist mood surrounding the practice of art in our society—so emphatically rejected by Robert Jay Wolff in a recent *Frontiers*. The "acceptable" thing, in terms of external convention, is to dabble in these attitudes by becoming a "patron," after you accumulate the money for a little conspicuous consumption. Whoever heard of a wealthy businessman trying to become an artist *himself?* Buying it, apparently, is better than doing it. And criticizing it is more sophisticated than practicing it.

For all these reasons, there is not much value in a frontal attack on the question. What everyone needs is some kind of doing, and since these pages cannot be transformed into a theatre for that sort of action, we might attempt discussion by parallels and analogues. If, for example, you happen to have some kind of frequent contact with artists in a business or professional relation, you finally discover—although it may take years to do so—that the artist deals with the symbolic meaning of form in space. Commercial art is art in which the businessman provides a space with certain limits and tells the artist what meanings he wants to emerge from the forms the artist puts into relation in the space. The "art" is involved in the capacity of the artist to feel the appropriateness of the forms he creates to the meanings intended, within the space allowed. If he is successful, the result will be in some sense convincing. The meaning may be subtle or overt. It may appeal to an appetite, a vanity, a fear, a longing, or some obvious practical need. Commercial art can have its splendor-within-limits, and once in a great while it may transcend its limits, quite unknown to the businessman, his customer, and perhaps to the artist.

The non-commercial artist (a curious way of getting at the best of the subject!) chooses his own space and invokes his own meanings, which may come before, with, or after the forms he develops.

The *art* lies in growing the forms in the space according to some living feeling of what is right and good. The "magic"—and there is a magic in it—begins to operate at the instant that the artist somehow becomes himself the space and achieves a pregnancy with the as yet unborn forms. He has to

abstract himself and *do* this. He has to go into a little trance. Wherever a work of art has taken place, some kind of identification of the man with the life of a form within limits has been made. One kind of wholeness has produced offspring. Art is not tinkering, or cutting up, or "finding" or "collecting"— it is always *growing* something, and the means may be both incidental and accidental, or as deliberate as possible so long as the life-with-growth process is not harmed. Artists understand one another because of the universal similarity of this process, regardless of the medium or art.

Now for children, apparently, this kind of creation is wholly natural, spontaneous, and indeed the "way" of a child's life. It is for this reason that artists are such enthusiastic admirers of children. They have wonderful secrets in common.

At issue, here, of course is the question of "reality." The adult for whom this capacity of the child—and the artist—is lost beyond even memory suffers from an inability to generate in himself the kind of momentary wholeness which is absolutely necessary for intelligent encounters with the wholeness of experience. He lacks the self-healing or unifying capacity of the artist. He tends to suffer from the *always-more* neurosis of an acquisitive and endlessly activist society. He can never say to himself, and mean it, *sufficient unto the day. . . .*

Making wholes out of the incomplete raw materials of existence is the work of the human being as well as of the artist. To make a whole is to live in a wonderful interlude—a space of timelessness which intersects the rush of hours and days. *Joy* is an emotional correspondence of this achievement. The "peak experience" is another reference to such climactic completion, and—if we dare to use the language of the mystic—to the conjunction at some level of the finite with the infinite.

Children seem to accomplish this effortlessly because, by the surcease from subdivision which is the very nature of childhood, the child lives without much awareness of either time or finite goals. Play is the child's existential aspect of work—a value realized, from the adult point of view, "at the expense of its finite significance."

We have said nothing about the danger of counterfeits and perversions in art. Obviously, whatever can be symbolized can also be misrepresented; and whatever is precious can be defiled by the cash-in drive. This is another side of the problem, but not a side with which children can be expected to cope. Perhaps we shall learn certain fundamental lessons about both ourselves and children when we are able to grasp with more understanding the kind of transformation that takes place in human beings in adolescence, the time when comes the capacity to measure and value the finite as a thing in itself, along with consciousness of the use of abstraction, which permits us to generalize the elements of the finite and to make a kind of philosophy out of our knowledge of manipulation. Growing up, looked at in this way, means becoming able to transpose the polarities of experience—to relativize the timeless through limited and conditioned symbols, and to absolutize the relative, by assuming that the joys of infinity may somehow be captured and tamed by furiously adding to our collections of things. We don't *have* to do this, but we think we can, and so, apparently, we do. Diagnostic words like "compulsive" no doubt have their origin in the strange reluctance of human beings to find content in an existential balance in their lives. And here, also, perhaps, is some thread of explanation of the secret longing of adults to become children again, and of the attraction of the "primitive," which we often assume to be rude, coarse, and even cruel, since a reductive kind of wholeness is reached by this means.

FRONTIERS
Beyond Tolerance

TOLERANCE is a good word to look behind because of its various contexts and dependencies. Three American scholars who share this view agreed to collaborate on a small book on the subject, and the result—*A Critique of Pure Tolerance,* by Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr., and Herbert Marcuse (Beacon Press, 1965. $2.45)—is worth reading. Mr .Wolff teackes philosophy at Columbia, Mr. Marcuse does the same at the University of California, and Mr. Moore is at the Russian Research Center at Harvard.

We are noticing this book mainly because of the excellence of Mr. Wolff's essay, which opens the subject to wider considerations. Mr. Moore seems chiefly interested in defending an enlightened use of the scientific method, while Mr. Marcuse is an undisguised and angry revolutionist who, like the anarchist Malatesta, doesn't like revolutionary violence, but, again like Malatesta, regards it as the only way to put an end to the still worse violence practiced by the *status quo.* Marcuse nonetheless makes a powerful case in arguing against a tolerance that is partial to the existing society and shuts out change. As he puts it:

> Tolerance toward that which is radically evil now appears as good because it serves the cohesion of the whole on the road to affuence or more affluence. The toleration of the systematic moronization of children and adults alike by publicity and propaganda, the release of destructiveness in aggressive driving, the recruitment for and training of special forces, the impotent and benevolent tolerance toward outright deception in merchandising, waste, and planned obsolescence are not distortions and aberrations, they are the essence of a system which fosters tolerance as a means for perpetuating the struggle for existence and suppressing the alternatives. The authorities in education, morals, and psychology are vociferous against the increase in juvenile delinquency; they are less vociferous against the proud presentation in word and deed and pictures, of ever more powerful missiles, rockets, bombs—the mature delinquency of a whole civilization.

One may recognize the occasion for Mr. Marcuse's anger but not know how to turn it to constructive use. Nor, apparently, does he, although his skill in providing reasons for getting mad is practiced and persuasive.

There is a classic wholeness and finish in Wolff's discussion, the longest, fortunately, of the three. His object is to show the inadequacy of what he calls "pluralist democracy," which is what we practice in the United States, and therefore the inadequacy of its outstanding virtue—"tolerance." By pluralist he means the balancing of the demands of the various groups within the society—groups which are recognized to be its operative democratic units. We shall quote a few of Mr. Wolff's pungent phrases and definitions and then look more broadly at his material.

The idea of man in our society is drawn from traditional liberal thought—he is "a rationally calculating maximizer of pleasure and minimizer of pain." This view of man has the following consequences:

> Rationality thus reduces to calculating prudence, its highest point is reached when we deliberately shun the present pleasure for fear of the future pain. It is of course a commonplace that this bookkeeping attitude toward sensation is the direct reflection of the bourgeois merchant's attitude toward profit and loss. Equally important, however, is the implication of the theory for the relations between one man and another. If this simple psychological egoism of liberal theory is correct, then each individual must view others as mere instruments in the pursuit of his private ends. I discover that the actions of other persons, bent upon similar lonely quests, may affect the outcome of my enterprise. In some cases, they threaten me; in others, the possibility exists of a mutually beneficial cooperation. I adjust my plans accordingly, perhaps even entering into quite intricate and enduring alliances with other individuals. But always I seek my own pleasure (or happiness—the shift from one to the other is not of very great importance in liberal theory, although Mill makes much of it). For me, other persons are obstacles to be overcome or resources to be exploited—always means, that is to say, and never ends in themselves.

People, of course, are really better than this, sometimes strikingly so, but the point is that this doctrine is the available common denominator when we look around for something to believe in; and even its more euphemistic forms are so little above the prevailing practice that one easily sees how this low-grade political theory is responsible for the production of what Marcuse elsewhere calls "one-dimensional man."

How does tolerance function in such a society? Mr. Wolff writes:

> Tolerance in a society of competing interest groups is precisely the ungrudging acknowledgement of the right of opposed interests to exist and be pursued. The economic conception of tolerance goes quite naturally with the view of human action as motivated by interests rather than principles or norms. It is much easier to accept a compromise between competing interests—particularly when they are expressible in terms of a numerical scale like money—than between opposed principles which purport to be objectively valid. The genius of American politics is its ability to treat even matters of principle as though they were conflicts of interest.

Since little practical account is taken of moral man—or individual man, which is indeed the same thing—we practice a politics bold in its indifference toward moral and individual intelligence:

> Even the periodic election becomes a ritual in which voters select a president whom they have not nominated to decide issues which have not even been discussed on the basis of facts which cannot be published. The result is a politics of style, of image, of faith, which is repugnant to free men and incompatible with the ideal of democracy.

Mr. Wolff reaches this conclusion:

> We must give up the image of society as a battleground of competing groups and formulate an ideal of society more exalted than the mere acceptance of opposed interests and customs. There is need for a new philosophy of community, beyond pluralism and beyond tolerance.

Who can fail to agree? We must learn then, if changes are in order, how the "image of society" is shaped. It is made, as Mr. Wolff has explained earlier, from the idea of man. So our idea of man must be replaced with something better.

What seems important to note here is the impracticability of looking to political thought for help. Political philosophy takes its elements ready-made from other areas of thought and endeavors to conceive the best possible relations between these elements as given. But if there are incommensurable values in those elements, political analysis tends to make them finite by the application of statistical techniques. A great thing, social science. It shows how to reduce the irreducible, to confine the unconfinable, and to ignore all unmanageable essences.

But the unconfinables, the unmanageables, and the incommensurables are still there, and they revolt by bringing a wild berserker dynamism to the non-moral units of *interest* which have been made to take the place of human individuality. So we get businessmen who drive their corporations to *incommensurable* profits, statesmen who insist on *unlimited* power, merchant-purveyors to hedonistic longing who promise to take us *out of this world,* and technologists who tell us we are now capable of *total* destruction in the same hour they promise that soon *no one* is going to have to do any hard work unless he feels like it. Everything is raised to a utopian extreme— everything except individual man, who still just sits there, unhonored, isolated, powerless, and still unknown.