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THE RIGHT TO BE WISE

THE first time a Western man reads Lao Tse, he is likely to be puzzled, and even upset. There is manifest wisdom in the *Tao Te Ching*, but there is also "wisdom" which is hardly manifest at all, if not something very close to nonsense. The mystical, pantheistic side of Lao Tse makes an immediate initial appeal. Here, we feel, is the stuff of direct spiritual perception, in so far as it can be set down on paper. You get the feeling from the Old Boy that he somehow knew what he was talking about. But what a reactionary old boy he turns out to be, on occasion.

> In ancient times those who knew how to practice Tao did not use it to enlighten the people, but rather to keep them ignorant. The difficulty of governing the people arises from their having too much knowledge.

Good democrats, conscientious educators, and honest publishers will obviously have some difficulty in admiring these ancients. But if you read on, you get something like this:

> Were I ruler of a little State with a small population, and only ten or a hundred men available as soldiers, I would not use them. I would have the people look upon death as a grievous thing, and they should not travel to distant countries. Though they might possess boats and carriages, they should have no occasion to ride in them. Though they might own weapons and armor, they should have no need to use them. I would make the people return to the use of knotted cords. They should find their plain food sweet, their rough garments fine. They should be content with their homes, and happy in their simple ways. If a neighboring State was within sight of mine—nay, if we were close enough to hear the crowing of each other's cocks and the barking of each other's dogs—the peoples should grow old and die without there ever having been any mutual intercourse.

The second time around on this paragraph, you may begin to find something familiar about it. It is of course in close parallel with the second book of Plato's *Republic*, but it also calls to mind the "face-to-face community" of the modern sociologist, and much that Arthur Morgan has written about the rural scene. True, Lao Tse shows no interest at all in what we think of as "progress"—or used to think of as progress—while technology with its vast promise for human welfare is for him an unopened book. But in this passage he does make you ask all the old philosophical questions, an important one being: How do you measure progress or the Good Life—by individual or "social" criteria? It is clear that if social criteria alone are used, some very bad mistakes can be made. We, for example, might be found by statistical study to be the most advanced or progressive people known to history, yet the analysis of individual lives on the basis of creativity, serenity, fulfillment, or even simple happiness might lead to a very different conclusion. One thing, at least, would come from the serious pursuit of such questions: the discovery that we are by no means sure what we are after, and whether what we get through our mode of living is actually worth having. And this entitles Lao Tse to a further hearing.

He is certainly getting it, these days. A recent instance is the use of Lao Tse made by Roger Bray in his article in *Anarchy* (September, 1962):

> "To be always talking is against nature." Even about disarmament. "It was when the family was no longer at peace, that there was talk of 'dutiful sons'." To love the people is the beginning of hurting them. To plan disarmament in the cause of righteousness is the beginning of rearmament. It follows, as Lin Yutang asserts, "When it becomes necessary to talk of disarmament, all plans of disarmament must fail, as man has learned today." This Taoist concept is similar to that of present libertarian thinking. Disarmament under social conditions in which rearmament is possible is meaningless.

Not being historians of the world's wars and its endless "negotiations" for peace, we are unable to declare with certainty that no frontiers have been demilitarized or armaments reduced as a result of the kind of "conferences" now conducted between the

great powers, but it seems plain enough that in the cases where the peoples of two adjoining countries pursue private and common affairs without fear of one another, their unarmed and peaceful attitudes were not the result of "convincing arguments." The amity prevailing between them has been an unmentioned and unnoticed thing of nature, not a monument of rational accord.

So Lao Tse has a point. But granting him his point, how can we in conscience stop talking about disarmament?

The dilemma is something like that of the pupil who was studying archery with a Zen master. How, he asked his teacher, can I learn how to hit the mark without wanting to hit it? And how can I stop wanting to hit it without wanting to stop wanting?

Lao Tse might answer:

> The greater the number of laws and enactments, the more thieves and robbers there will be. Therefore the Sage says: "So long as I do nothing, the people will work out their own reformation. So long as I love calm, the people will right themselves. If only I keep from meddling, the people will grow rich. If only I am free from desire, the people will come naturally back to simplicity."
>
> If the government is sluggish and tolerant, the people will be honest and free from guile. If the government is prying and meddling, there will be constant infraction of the law. Is the government corrupt? Then uprightness becomes rare, and goodness becomes strange. Verily, mankind have been under delusion for many a day!

What Lao Tse is saying, one might propose, is that the essences of the good are never obtained by any kind of striving. Their presence can be inhibited, but they cannot be "produced." There are things which come from being, and things which result from doing, and the two ought never to be confused. The real ends of man are always modes of being, never the fruits of doing, and the more furiously we "do," in order to "be," the greater the frustrations and disappointments. So with peace, which is a quality of being.

But people without much of an instinct for simple "being"—and most of us are like that—have great difficulty in understanding and practicing the counsels of Lao Tse. Here is a man who says: "Attain complete vacuity, and sedulously preserve a state of repose." What shall we make of this, in a world so filled with wrong? So many things so badly need doing. But Lao Tse says:

> Purge yourself of your profound intelligence, and you can still be free from blemish. Cherish the people and order the kingdom, and you can still do without meddlesome action.
>
> Who is there that can make muddy water clear? But if allowed to remain still, it will gradually become clear of itself. Who is there that can secure a state of absolute repose? But let time go on, and the state of repose will gradually arise. . . . Conveying lessons without words, reaping profit without action,—there are few in the world who can attain to this!

His analogies are plain enough; what remains obscure is their application. Or we say to ourselves: This is all very well for the ancient, pastoral scene, when "nature," so to say, was all about. There was always the quiet equilibrium of the natural world to set us straight, in those days. But now the arrangements are different; now we live in rows, spread out on the moving parts of the Big Machine, and we have to keep it going; we can't just *relax!* Nor can we "go back" to the simplicity framing the wisdom of Lao Tse.

Some people find fault with technology and hope to solve their problems by retiring to an acre of land and a goat, but the main current of life—the life of our mankind—does not flow through a primitive agricultural scene. While technology does create the possibility of many difficulties—as Lao Tse says: "When the people are skilled in many cunning arts, strange are the objects of luxury that appear"—it also seems against nature to abandon the skills and capacities that time and experience have placed in our hands. The trouble is rather in what we expect of our mechanical and technological genius. Because we can see the operations of technology and enjoy the substance of its endless fruits, we have let ourselves believe that the whole of human meaning and fulfillment is somehow potential in this dramatic achievement of our time. Or, to put it more accurately, we have become convinced that the good life must have some kind of external "sign." We like

to measure the good, and for this you have to have a good that is measurable, with signs that you can count.

It seems most unlikely that Lao Tse advised anyone to sit around doing "nothing." Rather, he was suggesting: "Don't be so foolish as to mistake the meaning of what you do. It may turn out to be sound and fury, signifying nothing. And then, if you thought it was all, your race is run."

Here, in brief, is one of the problems of the peace-maker. He may suspect that the secret of peace is in some kind of moral mutation in the human species. But he knows he can't go about telling people to "change." They wouldn't like it and they wouldn't do it. So he talks about disarmament, which is something to *do*.

We do it. We make arguments for disarmament. Very nearly all the peace-makers or would-be peace-makers do it, with all sorts of variations on the theme. Some do more, such as going on long peace walks across continents and committing civil disobedience. Actually, these are alchemical procedures. The people who walked from San Francisco to Moscow had no urgent personal reasons for going to Moscow. They walked to Moscow in the hope of making something quite different take place on another plane—in the hearts of men. Their tired and dusty feet, the miles traversed day after day, the cold nights and dry suppers: these things had no immediate relation to the making of peace. The walkers were trying to induce a current of being by turning their actions into a sign of a state of being—peaceful being. That, you might say, was something the Russians could count, if they would. And our people could count it, too.

The problem is to learn how to do what you think has to be done without loss of wholeness. This, one may think, is always possible so long as what is done is never mistaken for the state of being of which it is only a sign.

Here, indeed, is the deep error of all political movements, which have as their end the good of man. Political movements cannot of themselves ever produce the good of man. All they can ever do is carry the signs of the good of man. And the signs are not the good. The good is a state of being.

The signs by which men identify the good, as well as strive after it, change from epoch to epoch. Take for example the idea of "the wilderness"—of nature untouched, unsullied by a human presence or man-made mark. This is a comparatively new symbol of the good in American life. According to David Lowenthal, who writes on "The Wilderness Cult" in the Winter 1962 issue of *Landscape*, there was a time when Americans much preferred inhabited lands. In fact, the government chose the name "primitive areas" to describe the first forest reserves through fear that "the public might find the word 'wilderness' repulsive." Mr. Lowenthal comments:

> All that is changed; for contemporary Americans, it is civilization that is hard to endure. A "primitive area" is now a place, according to the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, in which one enjoys a "wilderness experience"—"a sense of being so far removed from the sights and sounds of civilization that he is alone with nature." . . . Are the "sights and sounds" of civilization more difficult to live with than those of nature? Is being alone with nature the only, or even the best, alternative to civilization?

A man of an earlier generation, Sir Francis Younghusband, quoted by Mr. Lowenthal, speaks to this question:

> I can realize what the river-valleys of England must have been like before the arrival of man—beautiful, certainly, but not *so* beautiful as now. . . . Now the marshes are drained and turned into golden meadows. The woods are cleared in part and well-kept parks take their place. . . . And homes are built . . . which in the setting of trees and lawns and gardens add unquestionably to the natural beauty of the land.

You could say, of course, and no doubt should, that the forest primeval has one sort of beauty, the pastoral landscape another, nor is the matter of "beauty" the entire point of this comparison, since for lovers of the wilderness there seems to be a mystical reality in wholly wild environs which they do not encounter elsewhere. But since the idea of wilderness or primitive area is now plainly established as a cultural "sign" of the good, it is fair

to say that it represents some deep need, or answers to some serious deprivation in the life of modern man.

Yet there is a sense in which it must be acknowledged as only a sign. Mr. Lowenthal has a further illustration of differences in attitude toward the natural environment, taken from William James. In an essay, "On a Certain Sense of Blindness in Human Beings," James told of a journey through North Carolina during which he passed numerous examples of what seemed to him appalling examples of the desecration of nature. The settlers in those mountains had cleared land by girdling large trees to kill them, and leaving standing the smaller stumps, surrounded these fields of mutilation with rail fences to keep out the pigs and cattle. Then they planted Indian corn around the dead trees and stumps. James reported his findings:

> The forest had been destroyed; and what had "improved" it out of existence was hideous, a sort of ulcer, without a single element of artificial grace to make up for the loss of Nature's beauty. . . . Talk about going back to Nature! I said to myself, oppressed by the dreariness. . . . No modern person ought to be willing to live a day in such a state of rudimentariness and denudation.

But after a mountaineer had said to James: "Why, we ain't happy here, unless we are getting one of these coves under cultivation," he wrote—

> I instantly felt that I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation. . . . To me the clearings spoke of naught but denudation. . . . But, when *they* looked on the hideous stumps, what they thought of was personal victory. The chips, the girdled trees, and the vile split rails spoke of honest sweat, persistent toil and final reward. . . . In short, the clearing, which to me was a mere ugly picture on the retina, was to them a symbol redolent with moral memories and sang a very pæan of duty, struggle and success.

Not all readers will go along with James's moral conclusion: "The *spectator's* judgment is sure to miss the root of the matter, and to possess no truth"; after all, the spectator sees in a perspective which has its own validity; but the point is none the less worth making. The spectator does see *differently*, whether better or worse, and the sign he sees has a different meaning with a different tale of values. When Mr. Douglas goes to the wilderness, he takes with him a state of being which enables him to read a sign of profound significance there; and it may be that he is right when he says that this experience should never be denied to anyone who seeks it; but the values he upholds, we submit, are not *in* the wilderness but in the human sensibility which is a state of being and which collaborates with that state of natural being we call "the wilderness."

So Lao Tse, who was a kind of preacher himself—after all, he *did* something; he wrote a small book—would laconically say: "Do not rush off to the mountain; the mountain can give you nothing that you do not already have"; meaning, the mountain is not what you truly long for, but only its *sign.*

But for a man to speak as Lao Tse does, and not be misunderstood—we hope we have not misunderstood him—requires that he be of considerable stature. When he says, "Do nothing," it has somehow to be realized that he is also saying, "Tao is eternally inactive, and yet it leaves nothing undone." Such a man has the right to be wise, to leave his great paradoxes untortured by stultifying analysis, still filled with life.

The rest of us find it continually necessary to break the rule, to point to actions which we think are good, and to read aloud or write our interpretations of the signs which have the greatest meaning for our age and place.

REVIEW
THE FAILURE OF WESTERN SOCIALISM

THE current issue (No. 7 of Vol. II) of *Audit*, a little magazine edited by Ralph Maud, of the University of Buffalo, has an article, "Towards a Redefinition of 'Radical'," which calls upon socialists to consider what has happened to their movement, and why. This discussion brings to the recent past of the radical movement the kind of critical attention that is needed to make some sense out of the extreme decline, if not the total disappearance, of socialist activity. The writer, L. S. Halprin, makes no mention of Dwight Macdonald's section, "We Need a New Political Vocabulary," in *The Root Is Man* (Cunningham Press, 1953), and this reviewer, for one, wishes he had, since Macdonald's proposals ought to enter into any new idea of what "radical" means, but Mr. Halprin develops a line of criticism that also deserves attention.

Briefly, his point is this. Socialism started out with a full set of ideals based upon Renaissance thinking. The Socialists wanted to make man free, whole, independent, and creative. They thought that, given a just economic system, humans beings would undergo natural changes in this direction. The origins of socialist thinking have a rich humanist background and its premises include an optimistic theory of human nature. As Mr. Halprin says:

> A rudimentary socialist belief is in the joy of the work, the creation itself, when it is a consistent expression at once of the communal and the individual and the powerful. The pleasure of recreation is an important part—as the word ought to suggest—the reinvigoration of the power to create. . . . With this view . . . to liberate man to the full creativity of his will—with this synthesis of the Greco-Judeo-Christian, the Renaissance, and the industrial society, the American socialists set out to reform their world.

But in the struggle with the status quo, Socialism suffered reduction to extreme and almost exclusive emphasis on the contention for economic justice. "Socialism in America," Mr. Halprin notes, "became hardly more than a plan for 'the more just distribution of the fruits of labor,' and for greater economic efficiency and productivity." The elimination of poverty was now the Socialists' only proclaimed goal.

It is Halprin's view that this over-simplification of radical goals was a fatal weakening of the radical case. Capitalist doctrine (Halprin terms it "Privatist" doctrine) claimed also to eliminate poverty through the economic system that best fitted "human nature," and without the humanist values to which Capitalism is notoriously indifferent, Socialism was only a rival economic theory, when it had been much more. Mr. Halprin writes:

> The trouble was that in the exigencies of social action, the socialist had come not only to meet the private industrialist on his own ground, but to meet him on no other, to have forgotten to insist that the privatist-industrialist's ground was not enough ground for a whole man to stand on. The socialists' most fundamental concern had been sucked up and lost in dealing with particular disorder: the cause (in both senses) was forgotten in dealing with effect. And the trouble perhaps more importantly was in the degree to which the socialist came late or early to share the privatist faith in a reduced instrumentalism. Like the privatist, liberated from medieval aestheticism (though, to be sure, going beyond the privatist faith that secured luxury was the end of progress), the socialist had come to believe that economic security was, for the laboring class at least, all that was needed for the beginning of the millennium.

This reduction of socialist aims seemed no great defect to those who allowed it, since it was assumed that, given relief from poverty, the working classes would flower into a truly civilized society. So, they said, let us get on with the main business—economic justice. Mr. Halprin comments: "In this sentimental anthropology, in Romantic populism, lay the American socialists' essential weakness, waiting to be exposed, and in the exposure to shrivel a great deal of radical reform energy." And that is what happened:

> When privatism's unprecedented distribution of wealth produced no apparent moral regeneration and

> hence seemed to disprove the socialists' romantic faith in man and economic well-being, many socialists had nothing but "Alas!" to say to themselves. All the ground was cut from under them and the privatist could appear to command the field as all his own. The massive exposure of socialist reductionism took sixty years to be completed.

After a review of the relationship of the socialist movement to the economic ups and downs of the first half of the twentieth century, Mr. Halprin remarks:

> . . . if the privatist economy and the military budget can keep off depression, large-scale socialist energy for any broad domestic program seems quite dispelled as it never was in the twenties. Then there were outs that the present left does not have, for instance, the hope for socialism in Russia. The horrors of Stalinist tyranny and Soviet power politics were most shockingly what the Russian experiment produced. Most American radicals of the 1950's have been left, as they thought, without illusions and without hope.

Mr. Halprin now proceeds to name what he regards as the central error of socialist thinking. "The socialists," he says, "almost came to assume that poverty proved personal virtue in the poor as well as social vice in the society that tolerated poverty." There are not sufficient grounds, he points out, for this assumption. "A man is not necessarily morally different from his fellows if by chance or design he succeeds within the social pattern." Further: "When we ask the entrepreneur to temper his mastery with charity, we ask him to do as a personal act of will what the society as a whole cannot do, and to undo what society as a whole has done."

These comments make a great deal of sense. Actually, they are indirectly reminiscent of the indigenous socialism of Edward Bellamy, whose theories were developed without reference to the "class struggle" idea. Mr. Halprin goes on to argue that, in point of fact, the original socialist idea was that "the mode of economic action by which wealth is acquired influences crucially the moral quality in the uses of wealth," and that this proposition has never really been tested by socialist practice. There remains the possibility that it might *work.* Halprin continues:

> The socialist hope for progress must be based on the assumption that the social order can be a primary influence on the moral quality of individual action. The socialists contradicted this assumption when they painted the privatists as individually and autonomously culpable for social vice. When most of American labor history proved only a will to redivide the spoils—and not a will to make competition for spoils less the center of social life—many socialists had to pay with disillusionment the cost of their own sentimentality.

Mr. Halprin pursues his analysis further by pointing out that Russian and Chinese socialism or communism arose in countries devoid of any vital tradition of individualism, from which he draws the conclusion that these experiments have not really tested the Western idea of a socialist society in which the rights of the individual are a principal value. He says:

> What the East imported of modern Western social and economic theory was not all the Western socialists wanted to export. Or perhaps the East did import the whole theory, including the assumption that only, or most expeditiously, by establishing fast the instrumental power of industrialism could room for the individual and time for the present be created. But though you may import a theory, you cannot import a tradition. . . . The Eastern revolutions were industrial, created within the framework of the old world-view rather than, as in the West, part of a total switch of centers. The industrial and political revolutions of the East have not—despite the relative absence of individualistic freedom—failed of being what the East wanted them to be. At the moment that the Russian or later the Chinese revolution undertook to create industrialism it should have been predictable that the transformation would come at the terrible cost of the repression of the individual. There was no substantial Eastern tradition to oppose the oppression, and the sight of Western wealth and power and the danger of Western intervention made the drive for industrialization terribly intense, defensive, and ruthless.

Mr. Halprin is saddened by the fact that the Western nations did nothing to help the Eastern countries to reach a comparable industrial balance, thereby eliminating at least the motives of fear and

suspicion which have animated the drive to power in both Russia and China. As he says—

> . . . the logic of Western privatism did not go that way, but toward hostility and sabotage, however abortive. And with the failure of their hopes that a revolution could undo in a moment a socio-political psychology, the American socialists were left alienated and impotent. They abandoned the world to the polarities of East and West and the hostilities now keeping us all at the edge of some final disaster. Somehow it is less the disaster that appalls than the opportunity missed for making our unprecedented power an instrument for the liberation and humanizing of mankind.

Here, in this short discussion of socialist failures, is substantial humanitarian intelligence, it seems to us. It is a great pity that those who pride themselves on hard-headed devotion to American freedom and the constitutional rock upon which this Republic was built are unable to recognize the fact that, for many years, the only serious concern for the inequities suffered by the majority of humankind has been found in the literature of the radical movement. What Mr. Halprin calls Privatism, and less sophisticated souls Capitalism, is not a theory of the good of man, but a short-term doctrine of economic self-interest which once related with some success to the processes of industrial development, but which, as it turned into a kind of pseudo-patriotic religion, systematically ignored and caused its champions to ignore, the far-reaching and larger problems of mankind. You do not find any warm social intelligence in Privatist arguments, but only bristling defenses and special pleading. This comment is not intended as a blanket endorsement of any socialist claims or theories, but as a note on the feeling-tone of the arguments concerning the social question. It follows that until conservatives, privatists—what shall we call them?—begin to show some interest in the values which radicals embrace, and begin to do some "radical" reflection of their own, they can hardly be regarded as among the serious thinkers of the time. The effective social and sociological criticism and analysis appears almost exclusively in the radical journals. And today the best critics of radical thought are the radicals themselves, and not the "Privatists," who by default let themselves be championed by the ridiculous spokesmen of the Ultra Right.

For those who wish to pursue this question further, we strongly recommend a reading of Jayaprakash Narayan, the Indian socialist who is calling into question many of the assumptions of conventional Western socialism, and Dwight Macdonald's *The Root Is Man*, which is still a classic of criticism of Marxist theory.

Mr. Halprin concludes his discussion with an expression that may be taken as an example of the temper of the modern radical:

> The East has great things to learn from the West: it has to learn the integrity of the individual. And the West has great things to learn from the East: it has to learn the integrity of the community. Together they could make a synthesis devoutly to be wished, a synthesis that in the making would demean neither thesis. Could such a synthesis be? If we give up working for it, it is doubly unlikely. In any case, there are worse things to spend one's mortality hoping and working for.

COMMENTARY
THE QUESTION OF SOCIALISM

THE observant reader may note in this week's Review what sounds like a cautious avoidance of editorial identification with "socialist" leanings. This had better be explained, lest it be mistaken for mere prudence.

We would have no objection, we suppose, to a socialism which sought only to perform with efficiency and a minimum of fuss those economic functions which would keep us all fed, housed, and clothed. It seems pretty obvious, with present-day facilities for production, that a state monopoly could do all this very easily.

But we have not been able to figure out a socialist form of society in which the administrators could be compelled to mind their economic business and leave completely alone the matters of ideas, values, and questions of meaning. It is bad enough in our "free" society, where the policy-makers in public office seem constrained by some insidious drive to be always "selling" their righteousness and foursquare representation of the eternal truths of the true religion and the correct ideology. What if they had the power to make it even tougher than they can, now, for the voice of dissent? Dissenters are by nature boat-rockers; in fact, any kind of truly independent thinking is disturbing to people who have acquired the idea that all the important questions have been settled and that the going system, whatever it is, is the appropriate political expression of this fundamental certainty.

We keep wondering how anybody would go about starting a magazine like MANAS in a socialist society. Even supposing some kind of pluralism would permit small, independent publishing of this sort, what if—*mirabile dictu*—it should gain popularity, become "successful," and move up into a bracket where the State would be obliged to have a finger in the editorial pie?

Of course, one might argue that in a proper socialist Utopia, we wouldn't *need* magazines like MANAS, but this is really the worst possible argument, since it reveals the potential infallibility of the promised political system.

On the other hand, it is certainly imaginable that an intelligent population might take its common sense in hand and decide to socialize the most material, least cultural, economic functions—the production and supply of heavy goods like steel and building materials, and the manufacture of a large category of mass-produced items. This could be done without serious hazard, no doubt, by a population that chose its economic means as they ought to be chosen—according to expediency—and made no pretense that large moral issues were involved.

But we certainly can't do it now. As long as there are those who honestly believe that this would be like dashing down the Ark of the Covenant, we do not have a civilization or culture that is able to manage its affairs with common sense. Before any such steps can be contemplated, we need to get the maturity that would permit common sense to operate in such areas of our lives.

Basic in this process would be learning how to create forms of institutional activity that do not filter and censor out of existence the originality of men. Already our public institutions, even under capitalism, have gone a long way toward enthroning mediocrity in education, but the private school still exists and there are still situations where the rare individual can find work to do. The fostering of individuality is not something that any kind of system or program can assure. The attitudes which serve this kind of growth are basically contemptuous of power and largely indifferent to wealth. They are the attitudes of human maturity, and with them you can make practically any system work. People who have such attitudes can use power without becoming intoxicated by it. Actually, they prefer not to have it. They are the people you could trust to form a socialist government, and practically nobody else.

Of course, we may get some kind of collectivist order, simply as a result of the intense campaign to erase all differences of opinion concerning political truth. Collectivism is the inevitable social form to be achieved by people who allow themselves to be convinced that politics and economics are ends instead of means. Such people have reached the stage where they no longer have any real opinions, so how could they govern themselves?

There may be a way out of this dilemma, but it does not seem to us to lie in campaigning for socialism. We are quick to admit, however, that a large proportion of the world's most civilized men have been socialists of some sort or other. Our point is that this aspect of their lives and opinions was an effect, and not the cause, of their distinction.

CORRECTION

We have by surface mail from India word of a mistake made in MANAS for Oct. 17, 1962. In that issue, we printed an article, "The Foundations of Trusteeship," crediting authorship to Noshir Bilpodiwala. Mr. Bilpodiwala, however, was the translator of this paper, and the author was Dada Dharmadhikari, one of the leaders of Vinoba Bhave's Sarvodaya movement. We are sorry to have signed the name of the translator to the article and are grateful to Mr. Bilpodiwala for this correction.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

THE STUDENTS RIGHT TO READ

A PAMPHLET with this title, published by the National Council of Teachers of English, emphasizes the need for local resistance to "censorship groups." As is usually the case when suspicion and fear are rampant, red-blooded patriots seek to exhaust some of their disturbed emotions by attacks on whatever they regard as "unchristian" or "un-American." It follows, as *The Students' Right to Read* remarks, that "certain modern writers, praised by recognized critics and well established in the curriculum, are suddenly charged with seditious sentiment or licentious intent." A New York *Times* education page story (Nov. 9, 1962) gives the background on this pamphlet:

> In an effort to check censorship over students' freedom to read, the National Council of Teachers of English has prepared a 21-page booklet of guidelines. These tell how to resist local campaigns that would end by preventing students from becoming acquainted with certain well-established authors. Even in familiar classics, "overt pornography" is increasingly being "discovered" by local censorship groups. Even a collection containing the life of Plato is reported to have come under attack because the philosopher expressed his views on such issues as "free love."

The report upon which *The Students' Right to Read* is based was prepared by a committee of teachers and scholars headed by Edward R. Gordon, director of teacher training at Yale University. These educators have collected evidence to show that such authors as Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, Mark Twain, Hemingway and Faulkner are often omitted completely or are "inadequately represented" in current curricula. The *Times* story continues:

> The report adds that constant pressure causes book publishers to eliminate controversial authors from anthologies and textbooks. Such pressure leads some librarians to play it safe by removing potentially troublesome books from the shelves, it says. Some teachers also may seek to avoid trouble by not making full use of important books, especially the great variety now available as paperbacks, it protests.
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> As a result, the report says, "many students continue their 'education' in a climate hostile to free inquiry, with limited access to important literary documents."

A year ago Brooks Atkinson discussed in his *Times* column the election of Henry David Thoreau to the Hall of Fame at New York University. The first organized effort for this purpose took place in 1940. Thoreau received 60 votes that year, but was held down to 36 in 1945. He received only 33 in 1950, but in 1961 polled 83 ballots. As Mr. Atkinson points out, there are abundant reasons—understandable, if not laudable—for the fact that it took 98 years for Thoreau to become officially famous. Mr. Atkinson continues:

> A brief quotation from Thoreau will have to be chosen and inscribed on the base of the bust. Any one of several would be suitable:
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> "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." "The sun is but a morning star." "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in." "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth."
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> There are others that might disturb the peace:
>
> "My thoughts are murder to the state." "The ways by which you may get money lead downward." "Our manners have been corrupted by communion with the saints." "The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely my good behavior."

It is usually the case that the most stimulating thinkers are those whose opinions are offensive to defenders of status-quo attitudes and values. Today Henry David Thoreau would almost certainly find time to demonstrate against the opening of new missile bases and range himself in some appropriate way with that venerable hero, Bertrand Russell. Not only would Thoreau be a conscientious objector to military service; he would probably be a most vocal and intractable one. And during these years of astronomical expenditures for military might, the government would have to dig money out of Thoreau's tiny

bank account (if he had one, which is unlikely), just as it did recently from Milton Mayer's.

In the eyes of contemporary self-appointed censors, Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance" would definitely be classified as subversive doctrine. For example:

> Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed, does not. The same particle does not rise from the valley to the ridge. Its unity is only phenomenal. The persons who make up a nation to-day, next year die, and their experience with them.
>
> And so the reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it, is the want of self-reliance. Men have looked away from themselves and at things so long, that they have come to esteem what they call the soul's progress namely, the religious, learned, and civil institutions, as guards of property, and they deprecate assaults on these, because they feel them to be assaults on property. They measure their esteem of each other, by what each has, and not by what each is.
>
> A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick or the return of your absent friend, or some other quite external event, raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it, It can never be so. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.

The student's "right to read," of course, involves the same issues as his right to think for himself. The same stalwarts that censor the library shelves and books for English classes are those who condemn "off-beat" attitudes towards world issues. An article in the *Activist* (Fall, 1962), titled "Academic Freedom & NYC Schools," surveys the difficulties encountered by high school students who want to be heard in favor of peace. Mr. Ethan Geto summarizes:

> Even the distribution of leaflets announcing a Student Peace Union, SANE, or Young Americans for Freedom meeting, or any sort of student political gathering, is not permitted. There have been innumerable instances of students seriously reprimanded for distributing such handbills, one specific case of suspension having been brought to my attention. The formation of independent protest groups, such as several students uniting to back freedom rides with financial support, is discouraged, and more often forbidden. The possibility of being ostracized for merely expressing an unpopular opinion is a tragic aspect of the educational experience. For liberal students, especially those members of the colorful "red" or "pink" Student Peace Union, being called every pejorative associated with the Communists is frequent.

Well, at least no one has yet gotten around to *calling* Emerson subversive. English and literature teachers can still make good use of the famous essay on "Self-Reliance.

FRONTIERS

"Label and Libel"

AMIDST the welter of unpardonable confusions as to what is a Communist, what is an American, etc., one is tempted to suggest that if the majority of men in America and Russia were acquainted with only the rudiments of political philosophy, at least half the psychological forces which press toward war would be eliminated. Pure communism, for instance, would afford an excellent opportunity for the functioning of democratic procedures at the grass-roots level. Russia, however, has never been really "communistic," for the state has never "withered away," nor is it likely to in the foreseeable future. It might be argued, incidentally, that the "ultra-right" politicos of the United States fear a working democracy as much as Stalin did.

President Kennedy recently suggested that the real struggle is not against communism as an ideology, but against the insistence of Russian bureaucrats that only one version of communist ideology is correct, and that coercion must be used to implement Soviet political dogmas. This we may be willing to acknowledge, but few today have the temerity to point out that both the Buddha and Jesus preached a pure form of communism—simply a furtherance of social relationships where each gives according to his capacity and receives according to his needs. Some of the most thoughtful intellectuals of our time had their day of Communist profession. Among the posthumous tributes to James Agee, we note from Dwight Macdonald's recollections (in the December, 1962, *Encounter)* that Agee once wrote, "I am a Communist by sympathy and conviction." Agee made this now damning remark in the '30's, and it is easy enough to say that he was shortly disabused of any desire to so classify himself. But the important thing about Agee's "communism," as Macdonald also shows, is that this man never really assumed a Position in a political sense. So, in the letter which began by stating "I am a Communist," Agee went on:

> But it does not appear (just for one thing) that Communists have recognised or in any case made anything serious of the sure fact that the persistence of what once was insufficiently described as Pride, a mortal sin, can quite as coldly and inevitably damage and wreck the human race as the most total power of "Greed" ever could. Artists, for instance, should be capable of figuring the situation out to the degree that they would refuse the social eminence and the high pay they are given in Soviet Russia. The setting up of an aristocracy of superior workers is no good sign, either.

In other words, Agee was never a "Communist" in the present highly-charged sense of the word; he would literally have been more alienated in Russia than he was in the United States.

Sydney Harris, in his column in the Chicago *Daily News* for Dec. 29, 1961, develops this point:

> In a world of conflicting "isms," our real enemy is not communism or fascism or another political "ism." The real enemy of the human race is irrationalism—that is the "ism" we have most to fear. . . . These political doctrines ... are all manifestations of the irrational in man, his dark, destructive impulses, his anger and his frustration. The dark impulses dwelling within cannot be defeated by force; indeed, force only fans the flame of resentment and rebellion. This is a lesson we should have learned from Lao-tse and Confucius and Jesus; but we have not learned it, and we are paying a heavy price for ignoring this lesson.

The foregoing provides some sort of introduction to an article by Stuart Chase in the October (1962) *ETC.* This writer's capacity for instructive semantic analysis should not be overlooked. Discussing "Label and Libel," he examines the abuse of logic by fanatical anti-Communists:

> The radical right is addicted to two deplorable logical fallacies, namely: thinking in terms of black and white with no allowance for gray, and guilt by verbal association.
>
> "Communism" seems to them a solid entity unspeakably evil. Arrayed against this monster is another timeless entity, "capitalism," wholly beneficent. The world is sharply divided between

these two belligerent abstractions. "Those who are not with us are against us"; neutrals have no place in this two-valued arena.

The radical right, having proclaimed the utter depravity of "Communism," proceeds to construct a kind of daisy chain, connecting "communism" with "socialism," "socialism" with "the welfare state," "welfare" with "liberalism" and "liberalism" with a whole field of beliefs and attitudes widely held by millions of Americans.

I will present a list of these equated comrades in a moment. We have it direct from T. Coleman Andrews, former Commissioner of Internal Revenue, and now a member of the executive committee of the John Birch Society: "We of the solid right equate the Democratic party with the welfare state, and the welfare state with socialism, and socialism with communism."

Now if by "communist" one means anybody whose political, or economic, or social, or educational, or medical views differ from one's own, it is entirely possible to create a communist menace in the U.S. of imposing proportions. On this assumption, my dinner companion was quite justified in saying that Connecticut towns are "crawling with communists." We have a lot of people with interesting and novel ideas in Connecticut, going back to the Hartford wits who helped the Federalist cause.

Mr. Chase constructs some amusing syllogisms:

As a student of semantics I have made an analysis of the logical fallacy known as guilt-by-verbal-association. At this point I had better warn the solid right not to equate "semantics" with "communism." In Russia last summer I found semantics equated with "capitalism."

A simple pseudo-syllogism illustrates the fallacy, as follows: The Supreme Court is opposed to segregation in the schools. Communists are opposed to segregation in the schools. Therefore the Supreme Court is communistic. On this spurious logic the John Birch Society proposes to impeach Mr. Justice Warren.

In Russia in 1961 I found that the party line was strongly opposed to birth control. Malthus was "entirely incorrect," they said, a low bourgeois economist. Whipping out our syllogistic slide rule, we can thus quickly compute: Khrushchev opposes birth control. The Pope opposes birth control. Therefore Mr. Khrushchev is a Catholic. Or if you prefer: . . . Therefore the Pope is a Communist.

At this moment the radical right is using the fallacy in a truly dreadful way. "Communists say they favor 'peaceful coexistence.' John Doe is working for world peace. Therefore John Doe is soft on communism."

This line of reasoning can be applied to practically any association, any connection, any idea, or family relationship one ever had. It is a direct misuse of the great human invention of language, by people who have never grown up.

The miseducation for which the "ultra right" is responsible contributes to the so-called "apathy" of university students. Kenneth Keniston, writing for the Winter *American Scholar* under the title, "American Students and the 'Political Revival'," gives one reason why a revival is not taking place on the campus:

The "disclosures" of the red-baiters, and their world of "unwitting dupes," "front organizations," "inconscient tools," "pseudo-reds," "hapless victims," et cetera, activated a not-too-latent fear in many young Americans that their idealism, tendermindedness, sensitivity or innocence might mislead them into the position of the "sucker." When students give reasons for refusing to sign political petitions with which they fully agree, they usually cite their doubts as to the backers and sponsors of the petition, worrying about the uses to which their names might be put. It is a mistake to assume that these students are really considering future security clearance; rather, in an age of conspiratorial interpretations of history, all but the most resolute or insensitive tremble lest they too become the pawns of conspiracy. Given such nagging doubts, and the impossibility of ever being *sure* about the credentials of any petition, individual or group, inaction is often the safest and easiest course. But by taking this course, young men and women merely confirm that image of youth that deems youthful political activity somehow "un-American."