

ON HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

IN an otherwise unpublished essay which appeared in a small university quarterly, Henry Miller reports on a dialogue between a man and his wife concerning the education of their children. But where, asked the mother, puzzled by the extent of the undertaking, do you begin? The father (no doubt Miller himself) replied with a spate of words which all, at the time, seemed to the point, but which we have forgotten except for the final exclamation. "Begin," he said, "with that knot on the wall! What does it matter where you begin!"

So with all general questions and problems. What does it matter where you begin?

There is some encouragement in this question for the one who ponders the breakdown in communication which seems almost universal in relation to the issues of war and peace. You hear so many stump speeches, these days, delivered with unchallengeable righteousness. The utterances of important people go up like skyrocket, their fiery track parting the darkness for a moment or two, but the trajectory is always parabolic. The ideas so bravely launched seem never to go into settled orbit, nor do they add their light to the thinking of other men. We have a lot of fireworks, but no illumination. Our understanding is not improved. The foundation for effective thinking about a peaceful world does not appear.

So, if you want to try to do something about this, you can start most anywhere.

One choice of a beginning is with an article in the *New York Times* (Western edition) for Aug. 20. The writer, Lewis F. Feuer, professor of philosophy and social science at the University of California in Berkeley, is concerned with what the headline writer calls "Frustration of the Soviet Intellectual: Inability to Raise Basic Social

Problems." The subtitle adds: "Russian sociologists dare not dispute official view and so suffer the Anxiety of Truth Repression." The article is long and interesting. The reader may think he detects (as we did) a certain sympathy for the plight of Russian intellectuals in Prof. Feuer's account, but on the whole the report seems as "objective" as anyone could ask. After four and a half months in the Soviet Union, this American scholar returned home to say: "Everywhere the honest Soviet scholar and social scientist labors under restrictions which an American would find shameful and intolerable. Within those confines, he tries to do useful work and waits, and waits." The central difficulty for the Soviet social scientist, according to Prof. Feuer, is that he is not allowed to subject the problems of his own society to impartial analysis and criticism. He may not even admit that the problems exist. Soviet society, by Communist fiat, does not *have* the sort of problems which afflict the imperialist democracies. The only criticism permitted the Soviet scholar in this field is partisan attack on social conditions in the West. After laying out the evidence of massive restriction, Prof. Feuer concludes:

Competitive coexistence, if it is to be meaningful, presupposes that the facts of both the Soviet and American societies will be open to study by all social scientists. A principle of "open sociological inspection" is essential if rival social structures are to be evaluated. And such sociological inspection remains impossible so long as there are "unproblems" in the Soviet Union.

The achievement of free inquiry itself rests on the opening of the doors to "ideological coexistence." The freedom of the Soviet scholar and scientist is thus a condition for long-run peace between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The impression of "Well now, look here, why don't you straighten yourselves out?"—addressed

to the Soviets—that you get from these final paragraphs is not wholly accurate, since Prof. Feuer's long discussion of the restraints and inhibitions under which Soviet scholars labor creates a feeling of greater generosity. Nor does he seem to be saying to his American readers that he is doing this article because we, who are on the right side of the Cold War, must keep track of what the Russians, who are on the wrong side, are doing and thinking. Through his objectivity there comes a clear picture of human beings who suffer difficulties they are unable to overcome at least for the present. The yearning for freedom of thought is manifesting most noticeably in the younger generation, composed of men who have entered professional life since the Stalinist regime. Meanwhile, the controlling administrators are those who survived the hazards of Stalin's rule by conforming, and who therefore have little sympathy with the inquiring minds of the oncoming generation of youth. As Prof. Feuer says:

Today, from vantage posts as bureaucrats in institutions and universities, they stand an uneasy guard against the restless searching for freedom which moves younger colleagues.

Without any capacity for original thinking, without achievement in scholarship, their sole stock in trade is precisely their unoriginality and unscholarliness, because they can always adapt themselves to the prevailing wind. They hate "ideological coexistence"—the Khrushchevian translation of what we shall call "freedom of thought"—because in free discussion they are so hopelessly at a loss that they feel comfortable only when free criticism is repressed. I often heard them use arguments so crude that their younger colleagues sat in embarrassed silence.

The great problems of Soviet society are for the Soviet ideologist "unproblems." He will look troubled, sometimes annoyed or distressed, when you refer to them. When I pressed them upon one Soviet sociologist privately, he finally replied: "There is a proverb, 'When there has been a hanging in the family, do not refer to the rope'."

Two major unproblems stand out in Soviet intellectual life today—the "conflict of generations"

and the "cult of personality." They overshadow the whole character of Soviet existence.

What we should like to look at, now, for a moment, are the free association tendencies of the American reader in connection with this article. There is first the almost inevitable reaction, "Oh, oh, this is about the *Russians*," and without much deliberate intention of doing so, you put up your guard. Then you read along, looking for things that help you to feel self-satisfied. This is pretty important, since if you can't react with disdain, how can you justify wanting to put these people down? Or, if you don't want to put them down, you at least want to be able to feel that they made a bad choice among types of government and economic systems.

Fortunately, there is enough detail in Prof. Feuer's discussion to take the reader a little way into the lives of the young Russians who chafe under the thought-control of the Soviet regime. Sympathy (or "empathy") begins to change the feeling-tone of your reaction as you get into the article. The writer tells how, at Leningrad this spring, university students greeted with catcalls an expression of the new attack on "abstract art" and "ideological coexistence." The speaker, the editor of *Neva*, a literary journal, repeated the party line recently renewed by Khrushchev (see Daniel Bell in the *New Leader* for April 15):

When he echoed Khrushchev's rebuke of Yevtushenko for publishing in a French paper his *A Precocious Autobiography* (a plea for human integrity in Soviet society), students shouted: "But what did he write?" They roared with laughter when the speaker said he didn't know.

A first-year student rose and queried: "Why all this fear of abstract art?" Picasso, he noted, was both a Communist and an abstract artist. And it was the works of poets such as Vosnesensky, lyricist and disciple of Pasternak, which were always sold out, not those of Khrushchev's favorites. Then a professor rose, and scolded the student as immature. Subsequently, the party apparatus, taking no chances, discontinued youth poetry readings.

A visiting Western sociologist will learn these facts with difficulty. For he will receive no

cooperation on an "unproblem." They are ready to discuss the racial problem in America, missionary activities in Africa, militarism in France, but they must cultivate a sociological blind spot for what lies close at hand.

It would be easy to draw parallels between this suppression of free discussion in the Soviet Union and conventionalized objection in the United States to "modern art" and to "sick" literature. But discovering the similarity of the prejudices of conformists—whether Russian bureaucrats or American jingoes—while devastating to the claim that the two cultures represent opposite poles of development, does not help us to enter into the lives and feelings of these people. The idea is to see them as human beings, not as "samples" of a differing civilization. We are helped by the image of students "roaring with laughter" at the blind ideological obedience of their professor, but this is still a picture of a "group." What the reader begins to long for is a sense of the plight of the individual in Soviet culture, and not just of his "plight," but of his human longings and struggles. We need to forget entirely, for the moment, the ideological contest and the cultural rivalry which turns the Russian people into abstractions and barely human competitors.

But individuals, alas, do not appear for long in Prof. Feuer's script. His inquiry, after all, is aimed at sociological understanding, and the human element in the figures he describes is reached only by interpolation and inference. However, the ordeal of one social scientist comes close to disclosing the price of intellectual independence in Stalin's time. This story is told in connection with the "unproblem" that the Soviets now refer to as "the cult of personality." How is the subservience of the people to Stalin's ruthless rule to be explained?

If [writes Prof. Feuer] they attribute the manifold occurrences under his dictatorship to the underlying social system their explanation will be a Marxist one, but it will constitute an indictment of the Soviet foundation. On the other hand if they attribute these occurrences to Stalin's personal traits, his fears,

his persecution complex, their explanation will make the unconscious forces of the individual paramount, and this will move them to be "Freudian" despite themselves.

[But the Freudian psychology is banned in Soviet Russia. Prof. Feuer's point, here, is that the younger social scientists are beginning to realize that they need the concepts of psychoanalysis to understand the dynamics of personality worship and are feeling deep frustration from the denial of this tool.]

And why, moreover, were the Soviet Communist party and the Soviet people themselves in such an irrational frame of mind as to allow themselves to be guided by the all-dominant neurotic personality of their time? Soviet thinkers, prohibited from dealing with the great contradiction of Soviet society are also vaguely aware that if they did so, the whole Leninist theoretical structure might be shaken.

Now comes the story of the individual:

I met only one social scientist who had dared even to pose this question. He was a man in early middle age who, during Stalin's era, had spent several years in solitary confinement. His crime: he was accused of having said that Stalin was a cruel man.

I had learned of this man and his experience only after a great deal of questioning of his colleagues, who were none too willing to tell me about him.

Now I asked how he, as a social scientist, would try to explain the Stalinist period. He paused for a moment, and then said bluntly: "To explain the Stalinist era, we shall have to call on all of Freud's categories." He could say no more but for a moment I had a glimpse of the strains and rebellions which seethe in the unconscious of Soviet social scientists against their own cultural censor.

It occurs to us that if Prof. Feuer had done a short story or a novel, instead of a sociological report; if he had changed the names of the nations and the historical figures, and had woven a simple plot around the struggle for free expression of a few individuals, his American readers would have no difficulty at all in identifying with these people.

Someone may say, "But we mustn't identify with the Russians! That would make us blind to the threat of Communism!"

Would it? Is intelligent love really blind? Does the mother love her child less for seeing its weaknesses? Can the therapist help his patient without achieving some degree of identification with him?

Again, it will be said, "The Russians aren't our '*patients*'; they are the *enemy!*'"

What does this really mean? It means, quite simply and directly, that we refuse to regard the Russians as human beings. It means that we fear the responsibility of seeing them as a part of humanity. If you ask a man in the street if he thinks the Russians are human, he will answer, "Of course," and look at you in amazement. But is this reaction, no matter how many times you get it, out of genuine understanding, or is it simply a verbal reflex? When you are ready, in theory or in fact, to kill a man, have you not already declared him not human? Doesn't this constitute a judgment that he is not fit to live?

Doesn't it mean that, by an accident of birth which caused the Russian to be born on another part of the planet, instead of next door to you, or in the next town, this man (whom you don't know at all, have never met, and have made no attempt to understand) is now judged to need extinction?

In these circumstances, there is hardly any way of avoiding the conclusion that nationality is more important than humanity.

Within a given nationality, we have entirely different methods. Only after careful examination, either by a jury of his peers or by a battery of physicians, do we allow any man to be restricted in his behavior; only when he has been found to be socially dangerous because of the psychic limitations or distortions through which his humanity finds expression, do we limit his freedom. By constitutional authority and humanitarian principle, we insist that every man has certain inalienable rights, of which he can be deprived by the state only with great reluctance and by due process of law. And in addition to these political rights of the individual, there are

the accumulated cultural traditions of respect for the growth-potential of all men. If people give us problems, we diagnose their behavior; we don't declare them inhuman and liquidate them. We have developed remarkably effective tools for the purpose of encouraging human development and fostering recovery from deviant behavior. During the development of these tools—which we call education and psychotherapy—we have built up a vast body of literature filled with the data of the dignity and promise of individual human beings. This literature is concerned with how to overcome destructive and hostile tendencies in people who have a history of exposure to adverse parental or environmental influences. We are not told that it is "easy" to bring a new start or a new orientation to these people, but we do learn a lot about how they became sick, and in most cases we find that a lot can be done to give them another chance. Actually, you could say that the knowledge now possessed concerning the growth-possibilities of human beings, and of the factors which contribute to constructive change, is the most notable addition to the total of human knowledge that has taken place in the twentieth century. Admittedly the youngest of all the disciplines, the least certain of itself and obviously the one with the most to learn, this junior science of education-with-therapy, or therapy-with-education, is none the less the most promising of all the efforts of mankind to improve the quality of human life. It began, early in the twentieth century, with most of the presuppositions of nineteenth-century Naturalism—it tried to practice total "objectivity" and to isolate the problems of behavior in terms of the mechanisms and abstractions of Stimulus-and-Response theory—but already, in a scant forty or fifty years, the living (not the "brute") facts of clinical experience have transformed the theoretical foundations of its practice into a free-wheeling reliance upon basically Humanist assumptions concerning the nature of man. No other hypothesis, it was found, would work in relation to the psychological ills of human beings. Why was this discovery made? Because the

doctor-patient relationship, the teacher-pupil relationship, is still *individual*, still personal. It does not permit the reduction of individuals to abstractions. It compels the recognition of unique individuality and of the basic needs and the basic capacities of the human being as he is encountered in terms of his empirical reality—*as a single man*.

Interestingly enough, these two branches of human endeavor—education and psychotherapy—are the only fields in which one finds characterological self-criticism on the part of its practitioners. Especially in recent years, the people who work in these fields have been looking at themselves as much or more than they look at pupils and patients as "objects." And the more effectively and dispassionately they look at themselves, the more they are able to do for others. It can hardly be contested, today, that both education and mental health, or maturity, are projects in self-knowledge.

For this reason, perhaps, there is a great deal of latent opposition to educators and psychotherapists in our society—and some of it not latent at all. The idea of self-examination is a threat to many people. Many people, apparently, harbor feelings of guilt, and quite naturally, don't want to be "exposed." How we shall eventually get over this hurdle is difficult to say. Perhaps the insights of the therapist will have to emerge in another vocabulary and be conveyed by means which are less associated with the odium of mental illness. No doubt the authoritarian image of "the doctor" will have to disappear before the instinctive self-reliance of Americans will learn to welcome the clues of psychological growth. But in any event, it should be plain that there is a close relation between this kind of awakening and the need for a realizing sense of the humanity of peoples in other parts of the world.

For the beginning of this general discussion, we started out with the proposition (borrowed from Henry Miller) that it doesn't matter where you begin, if the issues and questions to be examined are really fundamental. On this theory,

you ought to be able to make a new beginning any time. Since it is probably just as difficult for American readers to understand Gandhi and Gandhian thinking as it is for them to develop fellow-feeling for the Russians, a look at the Gandhian movement may be in order. What, we might ask as a start, has come through to us about Gandhi, thus far?

Apart from the funny-little-man-with-a-loincloth image of Gandhi, we have a sense of his extraordinary achievement, but not as an authentic expression of human resources. Rather, what Gandhi did is accepted as some kind of oriental "magic" which worked for the Indians against the British, but could hardly be applied elsewhere. Americans, as Professor Herbert Ratner pointed out recently, are an "activist" people, and they tend to measure anything that happens according to a standard of immediate external results. Did the British quit India? Yes, they did. Gandhi, therefore, was a success. Did the Indian Government practice non-violence against the Chinese? No, it didn't. Gandhi, therefore, was a failure. What about Gandhian *Satyagraha* for the United States? Who needs it? Nonviolence may be okay if you don't have any guns, but we're all right in that department. Anyhow, our temperament is different. We're not "spiritual" like the Indian people. We believe in a high material civilization and in getting all those good things for everybody.

It seems highly unlikely that a more accurate picture of Gandhi's philosophy, motives, and intentions would generate much further response from Americans, who are far from feeling that they have anything to learn, and least of all from an odd-ball saint who lived in one of the "underdeveloped" nations. Even the rather dramatic applications of nonviolence by American Negroes in their struggle for civil rights in the United States, while beginning to make a dent in the national consciousness, are not related with any depth to the Gandhian revolution, nor does this seem especially important. Actually, the

Negroes could hardly pick up the Gandhian spirit in a year or two, and put it to work. What seems reasonable, and more compatible with Gandhi's thought, is that the Negroes have found in themselves a temper of unassailable justice-seeking which bonds intuitively with an unwillingness to do harm to others. It was Gandhi's idea that the entire human adventure is a search for truth—an *experiment* with truth, he called his own life—and why, in the same age of history, should not another dispossessed people come upon the same truth as he did?

There is a sense in which the Gandhian enterprise—which was first and foremost an attempt to find a means for the moral regeneration of the Indian farmers—will inevitably seem either an anachronism or a far distant prophecy, so far as they are concerned, to the American people. Gandhi's ideas in respect to the "nation" of India were almost casual in content and mood. He did not think in "national" terms. He saw the daily lives of *people*, and he saw that only the actions of those people could make their lives better. Some arrangements might have to be changed, to make it possible for those actions to be pursued, but Gandhi certainly did not concentrate on "arrangements." He concentrated on moral attitudes and the inward sense of dignity that human beings arouse in themselves if they are to have any kind of life worth living. From this point of view, Gandhi's famous "non-violent action" was an end-product of a total way of life, and not the ingenious invention of a saintly man. As Richard Gregg put it:

Gandhi's program was all of a piece. His Satyagraha was not unrelated to the rest. Just as the assumptions and activities of Western civilization finally boil up into war, the eighteen different parts of Gandhi's constructive program boiled up into Satyagraha or non-violent resistance to end wrongful public relations. The peasants did not follow Gandhi just because they thought he was a saint. They followed him largely because they saw he was not just a man of words, but a man of action, and because his constructive program operated to mitigate their

immediately felt practical daily needs. He taught them how to help themselves.

Well, one may say, that is just fine for them; but why has it anything to do with us? To answer this question we need to take note of the fact that, behind the superficial reaction of Westerners to the life and work of Gandhi is a puzzled but none the less real feeling of reverence and wonder. This makes understandable the press Gandhi gets, and has had for years, in the West. Book after book about him comes out, and sells. In fact, for the publishing industry in the United States, Gandhi has been a very good thing. Perhaps in America and elsewhere in the West, there is a popular intuition that here was a man who was equal to meeting the desperate needs of a vast number of people—and meeting them in the only way they can be met, through an arousal of the hidden potentialities of human dignity in the people themselves. It was the logic of that dignity that led Gandhi to become a man of peace and nonviolence. He became, for India, perhaps for the world, one could argue, a new kind of *Kshatriya* (member of the warrior caste)—who could not be defeated because of the weapons he chose.

It is these qualities in Gandhi's philosophy which may make the people of the West turn to his thought in earnest—and sooner, perhaps, than we think. He was, we may find, one of the universal men of our century, from whom, in its great and finally recognized need, the entire world may learn. Another lesson of this century is undoubtedly in the fact that, whatever men learn from Gandhi, it will be about themselves, and that they will learn it finally from within themselves. For this too was his instruction.

REVIEW

TRENDS IN HUMANISM

AN article by E. C. Vanderlaan in the July-August *Humanist* (organ of the American Humanist Association) gives perspectives on the temper and direction of Humanist thinking in several countries of the Western World. A former teacher in the San Francisco public schools, Dr. Vanderlaan is secretary of the Northern California Humanist Council. His knowledge of Dutch and German enables him to keep in close touch with European Humanist groups.

But what, precisely, is Humanism? Following is a paragraph which appears on the inside front cover of the *Humanist*, under the heading, "About Humanism—a Guide to Authors":

Humanism is a faith in people, in all humanity, and in science as a means of attaining truth. It is also a quest for the ethical and spiritual values of life through philosophy, science, the arts and literature. Humanists in general are not interested in supposedly supernatural phenomena nor in conventional religion and they are opposed to any form of authoritarian control. Most of them are individually active in expressing these ideas in some form of social action or education that promotes human dignity and enriches the content of life on earth.

Dr. Vanderlaan discerns two trends in Dutch Humanism. One is the changed policy of the weekly magazine, *Bevrijdend (Emancipative Thinking)*, of the Dutch Freethinkers' Society:

This paper has undergone a great transformation in the twenty years or so that I have seen it. It used to indulge in raucous, ill-mannered and hateful propaganda against religion. Then it underwent a change of heart, and is now a tasteful, well-mannered exponent of rational thinking.

The Dutch Humanist League, an organization with some eleven or twelve thousand members, was founded at the end of World War II. It publishes an eight-page bi-weekly called *Mens en Wereld (Man and World)*. Of this group, Dr. Vanderlaan says:

From the first it set out to be, not a foe of the churches, but a ministry to the unchurched. The

Dutch Humanists have striven almost plaintively for equal recognition with the churches as an agency ministering to the spiritual needs of those who cannot accept the old doctrines. With hard work and steady pressures, some of this has been accomplished so far as government is concerned. Humanists have been lately allowed, somewhat grudgingly, to render a kind of "chaplain" service in the armed forces—but with restrictions. Service men under age must have written permission of their parents before attending Humanist gatherings—something not required in the case of church services.

There opens up now, also, the possibility of offering courses in ethics in the public schools, for those who desire them. There is much discussion about how this may be done.

In Belgium, Dr. Vanderlaan reports, with government encouragement, a Humanist group is already conducting classes in non-theological ethics in the lower grades of the public schools. He adds that "now the demand is for similar classes in the higher grades, and here the difficulty is to find qualified teachers."

A small group of German intellectuals has revived the old Monist League of Haeckel and Ostwald (abolished by Hitler) and issues a small monthly paper which publishes articles on science, free thought, and "news, usually without comment, of what is doing in the churches and of events affecting liberty of thought." Of the reborn Monist League, Dr. Vanderlaan writes:

It is indicative of the precarious position of free thought in West Germany that, when this organization was revived many likely prospects among university men asked not to receive communications (their positions might be endangered).

A much larger association in West Germany (some 55,000 members) with a Humanistic flavoring is the League for Free Religious Societies. Founded about a century ago by priests and pastors who rebelled against clerical control of independent thinking, this movement, Dr. Vanderlaan says, "soon lost all resemblance to Christianity." He gives the outlook of the League this characterization:

It might be called Naturalistic Humanism with a touch of nature-mysticism. The writers in their

magazines do not hesitate to speak of "the Divine," sometimes even of "God", but they make plain that this is not the personal God of Christianity. It means something like the Life Force, something in nature that ever strives toward perfection. This sounds like Goethe. I suppose our orthodox Darwinists would deny that there is any such Life Force, anything in nature that "strives for perfection."

The reviewer adds:

Be that as it may, there is nothing in this movement (the German League of Free Religious Societies) that could properly be called superstitious. It is true that some of the leaders hesitated for a time about joining the IHEU [International Humanist and Ethical Union] because they felt that our Humanists were not sufficiently "religious," but they finally became convinced that the IHEU is broad enough to include them. Since they make plain that the service of their "God" and of "the Divine" consists in service to man, there is really little to dispute about.

From these and other comments it becomes evident that European Humanism, like Humanism in the United States, is taking on the leavening influence exercised by liberal religion, yet has by no means lost its distinctive identity in the concept of self-reliant dependence upon reason in the search for knowledge and in relation to all forms of human progress. The idea of Humanist "chaplains" may be somewhat dismaying to peace-workers here and abroad, but the Humanist movement has never been candidly revolutionary in relation to war and the state. These implications of the Humanist stance are left to individuals to develop for themselves.

What may be lacking, however, in all Humanist endeavors to duplicate the functions of the teachers of traditional religion, is a clearly thought-out account of the inadequacy of *any* institutionally transmitted philosophy. The young need from their teachers and elders an unequivocal charge to *go and find out*. At its best, Humanism is a box of tried and proven tools, not a completed philosophy of life. But running a close second in importance to supplying the tools of investigation is the Humanist rejection of any assumption or method of education which takes away the freedom of the inquiring mind. Possibly, the future growth of Humanist thought will lie in impartial examination of what, today, freedom of

mind actually permits in the way of new directions of investigation. A paragraph by Dr. Vanderlaan at the end of his survey of European Humanism is suggestive in relation to this question.

Speaking of the free-thought journals now published abroad, he says:

Perhaps it is not amiss to mention here that the word "rationalist" has at least two meanings. In the history of the theory of knowledge there is a "rationalism" which stands opposed to empiricism. The question at issue there is whether or not all our knowledge comes from experience. With this rationalism we are not concerned. On the other hand, in the field of religious discussion "rationalism" means a dependence on reason, including all man's ordinary ways of gaining knowledge, and stands opposed to the theory found in many religions that human investigation is supplemented by revelation, as, for example, in the Bible. In this sense we Humanists are all "rationalists."

However, a great deal depends upon the meaning of "revelation"—or rather, on the allowance of possible alternatives to the dogmatic disclosures of revealed religion. For example, among the magazines devoted to free thought Dr. Vanderlaan lists *La Ragione*, organ of the Italian Giordano Bruno Society. We do not know what sort of material appears in this paper, but Bruno, it is certain, went far beyond the limits of what is now "acceptable" as an expression of scientific Humanism. In philosophy and cosmology, he was an enthusiastic Pythagorean and Platonist; his thought was indeed "free," and one wonders whether the idealisms and daring metaphysical conceptions of the ancient mystery religions, which Bruno sought to revive, can be assimilated to the materials acceptable to contemporary "rationalist" inquiry. This is a question that may soon be seen to be implicit in the advances of the self psychologists, already revealing, to some extent, the correspondences between contemporary reports of subjective experience and the doctrines of certain psychologists of the high religions of the distant past.

COMMENTARY
"WELL-MEANING" PREPARATIONS FOR
1984

A PAPER presented at the convention of the American Psychological Association in August bears directly on questions raised in this week's lead article. According to Dr. Elton B. McNeil (University of Michigan), the children of the United States have been "at war" with the Soviet Union for at least fifteen years. He is quoted in a New York Times report (Sept. 1):

"Well-meaning parents have prepared their children psychologically for a new children's crusade." . . . This does not speak well for mankind some 750 years after the children's crusade against the Moslems, he observed.

Dr. McNeil said there was systematic evidence that the average 30-year-old American was at least a 15-year veteran of a "psychological children's war" that was still going on. . . .

"If we follow our present course of development," Dr. McNeil said, "our children will become the cooperative citizens of a tomorrow few of us can stomach."

By this he meant that the sort of society depicted by George Orwell in *1984*, for the children now growing up, will "hold fewer terrors and will seem less alien" than it does to their parents.

A parallel study reported by Dr. J. H. Elder, of Washington State University, showed that students were not worried by the prospect of nuclear war, but about Communism.

The odd thing about this situation is that the United States, among all the Western democracies, is the least threatened by Communism, yet has gone about indoctrinating its people with a mood of anger and distrust which has no parallel anywhere else in the world. Several European countries have large and active communist parties, yet seem to conduct their affairs without noticeable disaster and are counted as faithful allies by the United States. Possibly one reason for the success of this campaign of fear

lies in the fact that there are so very *few* American Communists. The bogeyman you have never met in the flesh is always the most frightening.

However, the report of Dr. McNeil's paper concludes on a hopeful note:

"Despite the fact that for at least 15 years Russian and American children have systematically been taught to suspect and fear one another and to know one another as 'the enemy,' it is possible to begin the process of teaching them a more temperate view of the complexity of international relations," he said.

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

DEHUMANIZATION OF THE YOUNG

BETTY FRIEDAN'S *The Feminine Mystique* (MANAS, Sept. 18) presents numerous points for discussion respecting education and child-rearing. The link between Mrs. Friedan's central theme and various problems relating to "apathy" in children is suggested by the following:

It is time to stop exhorting mothers to "love" their children more, and face the paradox between the mystique's demand that women devote themselves completely to their home and their children, and the fact that most of the problems now being treated in child-guidance clinics are solved only when the mothers are helped to develop autonomous interests of their own, and no longer need to fill their emotional needs through their children. It is time to stop exhorting women to be more "feminine" when it breeds a passivity and dependence that depersonalizes sex and imposes an impossible burden on their husbands, a growing passivity in their sons.

Mrs. Friedan argues that our children are becoming "dehumanized," that their world often amounts psychologically to a "comfortable concentration camp":

Over the past fifteen years a subtle and devastating change seems to have taken place in the character of American children. Evidence of something similar to the housewife's problem of vacuity that has no name in a more pathological form has been seen in her sons and daughters by many clinicians, analysts, and social scientists. They have noted, with increasing concern, a new and frightening passivity, softness, boredom in American children. The danger sign is not the competitiveness engendered by the Little League or the race to get into college, but a kind of infantilism that makes the children of the housewife-mothers incapable of the effort the endurance of pain and frustration, the discipline needed to compete on the baseball field, or get into college. There is also a new vacant sleepwalking, playing-a-part quality of youngsters who do not seem to feel alive or real in doing it.

When Harold Taylor was president of Sarah Lawrence College, where students are encouraged to take a large measure of responsibility for both

their education and the organization of campus affairs, he noted an increasing helplessness in incoming freshmen. Mr. Taylor wrote:

Whereas in earlier years it had been possible to count on the strong motivation and initiative of students to conduct their own affairs, to form new organizations, to invent new projects either in social welfare, or in intellectual fields, it now became clear that for many students the responsibility for self-government was often a burden to bear rather than a right to be maintained. . . . Students in college seem to find it difficult to entertain themselves, having become accustomed to depend upon arranged entertainment in which their role is simply to participate in the arrangements already made. . . . The students were unable to plan anything for themselves which they found interesting enough to engage in.

Whether or not youngsters are now brought up to be "absurd," it is certain that very few are brought up to be "real"—in the sense that reality for the individual must stem from a sense of self-reliant identity. Mrs. Friedan quotes from sociologists and psychologists to reinforce her view that, for many children, "ideas, the conceptual thought which is uniquely human, {are} completely absent from their minds or lives." She continues:

A social critic, one or two perceptive psychoanalysts have tried to pinpoint this change in the younger generation as a basic change in the American character. Whether for better or worse, whether it was a question of sickness or health, they saw that the human personality, recognizable by a strong and stable core of self, was being replaced by a vague amorphous "other-directed personality." In the 1950's, David Riesman found no boy or girl with that emerging sense of his own self which used to mark human adolescence, "though I searched for autonomous youngsters in several public schools and several private schools."

Mrs. Friedan agrees with Bruno Bettelheim that "love is not enough" when it comes to counteracting "progressive dehumanization." The symbiosis of love between mother and child can either make the child a captive or liberate him into creativity—depending upon the structure and

attitudes of the mother's mind. Mrs. Friedan speaks to this point:

I do not think it is a coincidence that the increasing passivity—and dreamlike unreality—of today's children has become so widespread in the same years that the feminine mystique encouraged the great majority of American women—including the most able, and the growing numbers of the educated—to give up their own dreams, and even their own education. . . . Without serious interests outside the home, and with housework routinized by appliances, women could devote themselves almost exclusively to the cult of the child from cradle to kindergarten. Even when the children went off to school their mothers could share their lives, vicariously and sometimes literally. To many, their relations with their children became a love affair, or a kind of symbiosis.

In recent years the "symbiosis" concept has crept with increasing frequency into the case histories of disturbed children. More and more of the new child pathologies seem to stem from that very symbiotic relationship with the mother, which has somehow kept children from becoming separate selves. These disturbed children seem to be "acting out" the mother's unconscious wishes or conflicts—infantile dreams she had not outgrown or given up, but was still trying to gratify for herself in the person of her child.

But "the cult of the child" is not representative, in any way, of concern for the *child*—nor even of simple uncomplicated love. Without a degree of genuine mental and spiritual autonomy, the mother is apt to regard her child as simply an extension of her own personality, which is itself without roots. Frustration, flightiness and general unease are inevitably passed on by psychic symbiosis, and lead either directly to neurosis or through apathy to neurotic patterns. A mother, like any other person, needs to "find herself" as a human being before she can become the sort of mother who transmits strength and ease as an attitude of living.

We might finish with a quotation from Constance Newland's *Myself and I*, offering a conception of education in the deeper values of being:

A great scientist once said that each new answer to a problem merely paves the way for further, more difficult questions. He was referring to the realm of physics, but the same principle seems to apply to people. Ever higher and higher levels of problems struggle to find solution, spiraling further and further out into the vastness of that which has not yet been accomplished.

FRONTIERS

Logotherapy—a Christian View

SINCE Viktor Frankl's first publication on logotherapy, following World War II, it is apparent that a number of Christian thinkers have been hailing him as a spiritually-minded psychiatrist. By his insistence that no truly therapeutic approach can leave out the elements of philosophical search or ignore "spiritual" distress, he seems to some to be saying that psychotherapy cannot do without religion. Well, this is a matter of how one defines religion; and we have never seen any indication that Frankl insists on either a monotheistic God or any of the usual theological "fundamentals."

In A. J. Ungersma's *The Search for Meaning* (Westminster Press, 1961), the author affirms that "in one of his first public addresses after the war Professor Frankl testified as to the sustaining power of faith in a personal, living God." But we find it significant that no such declaration appears in any edition of Frankl's major work, *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*. Dr. Ungersma is a professor of "Systematic Theology," a Presbyterian minister, and exponent of an intelligent mating of the Christian faith and psychiatry, so some bias may be expected in the direction of Christian belief. Yet this is an intelligent work, with considerable application in the field of "pastoral psychology."

The first paragraph in *The Search for Meaning* reads:

This book is about that frontierland of psychotherapy religion, and the human self wherein extensive explorations are being conducted today. It is addressed to doctors of medicine, psychiatrists, ministers, and students who are concerned with new approaches in psychotherapy, their relevance to religion and the status of man in a technological culture. It was written in Vienna, itself a frontier of the West since it is situated less than a score of miles from the iron curtain of two totalitarian countries. Vienna once more draws the attention of the psychiatric world, for it is the home of Viktor E.

Frankl, survivor of Nazi death camps and a founder of existential analysis.

Dr. Ungersma's evaluation of Frankl's "existential analysis" is a useful statement. He writes:

The basic therapeutic approach of logotherapy depends upon man's freedom to change his attitudes. It therefore seeks to stimulate the patient to change his attitudes toward his difficulties or his neurotic symptoms. This is a conscious process, and it must be said in this connection that logotherapy, well aware of the importance of the psychogenesis of neurosis in the affect-dynamics, feels that the treatment of the spiritual distresses of man, such as despair and the feeling of meaninglessness, is still more important. It is a fine thing to trace present difficulties back to their source, as in the relatively simple analytic procedure of helping a man who has perennial difficulties with his employers to see that his unconscious feelings of aggression toward his long-dead father are a major cause. But if in addition to poor employer relations he finds his work an empty thing because his life appears futile, the methods of conventional psychotherapy if it is wary of philosophical involvement do not apply. If the world view of the patient is involved, this is an intellectual problem, often hidden by neurotic symptoms, and this calls for a psychotherapy in terms of the mind. Many a therapist in conventional psychotherapy has helped his clients with such problems.

Another paragraph may raise interesting questions in the minds of some readers. Dr. Ungersma approves the extension of rational control to matters of spiritual concern, yet makes it no easier to maintain that Christian doctrines place a high value on reason:

Existential logotherapy, as a special form of psychotherapy, is not intended to replace it, but to supplement its tested methods with a special approach for special problems. As one of its tasks logotherapy proposes to handle philosophical problems within their own frame of reference. Without denying the truth in the psychoanalytic theory and method of handling the irrational influences of the unconscious, existential logotherapy does not propose to slough off the responsibility of handling rational problems in a rational way. Human beings suffer not only from irrational fears and anxieties but also from psychic disturbances that have intellectual causes and these respond to objective discussion. Frankl has clarified

this differentiation in the following statement: "A doctor must carefully distinguish between psychic disease and spiritual distress; otherwise he might run the danger of suffocating the man's despair over a seemingly meaningless existence by prescribing tranquilizers."

Dr. Ungersma does not, however, discuss the question of whether specific beliefs may also serve as tranquilizers, although he does object to psychological influence which relies upon fear of God's judgment. In a chapter on "pastoral psychology as preventive medicine," he writes:

An area where pastoral psychology can make use of logotherapy is in viewing counseling, pastoral visiting, church education, group work, and even the sermon as opportunities for practicing "preventive medicine." The unique opportunity of the pastor to influence family living, the fact that normally he is not only welcome in the homes of his parishioners but also in those of the community in general, gives him an advantage not usually available to psychotherapists. Dr. Weisskopf-Joelson holds that "for a minister to be psychologically trained is today of utmost importance. Because of the minister's strategic importance in the community, people will go to him for help who normally would never go to a psychiatrist with their troubles." This lays upon the clergy the responsibility of seeing sickness of all kinds not only in relation to health as a norm but with respect to the still unhappily prevalent misconception of disease as a judgment or visitation of God because of sin.

The reader interested in the extent to which logotherapy may be appropriated by Christian ministers will do well to read Dr. Ungersma's concluding chapter. Here, after insisting that logotherapy has an essentially empirical base, he claims the same for Christianity: "Christian doctrine in its essence is always empiric: it is distilled from human experience of a transforming reality that unleashed new powers in man's life." The strongest period of Christianity, he feels, was when "in its very beginning the church was itself a movement of small groups meeting in homes." He continues:

The difference between a church that functions as a spiritual power in a community and one that is apathetic or strife-torn often lies in whether or not the

church fails or succeeds in providing opportunities for its members to express and communicate freely their true feelings, doubts, and beliefs. So often they give lip service to the things they are expected to say and believe while inwardly torn with doubts and confusions. Certainly, if seriously ill patients in a mental hospital can be accorded the dignity and freedom of persons, learning through communication to get well and return to society with self-respect, the church can also recover these powers and function again as a therapeutic community.

Well, while Dr. Ungersma can hardly hope to synthesize Christianity and logotherapy in one easy book, we can only agree with the point of this comparison.