BLAKE'S PANACEA

NOT very long ago, in the pages of an American magazine, there appeared a cartoon (by an artist named Hilk) which shows a disconsolate, middle-aged man lying on a couch, a psychoanalyst sitting beside him with pencil poised. The man identifies himself: "I'm a white, middle-class Protestant of Anglo-Saxon origin and responsible for all the world's ills!"

Well, the admission seems partly a conceit, yet hardly without substance. He *is* answerable for a lot. And those who feel qualified to keep books on the behavior of the negligent and guilty members of the human race have not been reticent in compiling their reproaches. In what character, then, is he accountable? What can he say to all these charges and complaints?

After all, he does not suffer indictment merely because of his privilege-winning skin-color, nor by reason of other traits heaped upon him by fortune—with which he personally had nothing to do, so far as obtaining them is concerned. No, he does not offend through blessings he could not possibly dispense with, should he be so inclined. His guilt originates rather in a role which is derivative of these hereditary endowments: he is *Homo politicus,* a man equipped by both theory and fact with the power to do far better than he has done. *That's* why he must be accused of failure and made to feel shame.

Homo politicus has both power and responsibility, and he isn't even facing up to the obligations defined by his own imperfect belief-system. His immaturities are notorious, his pretensions ridiculous, his pleasures shallow and contemptible, his ethics narrow and self-serving, his intellect small. What do the critics armed with undoubtedly accurate lists of his offenses tell him to do? They tell him to improve the system which he advocates and defends, or at any rate to make

it *work;* and if he can't make it work any better than the way it works now, to get busy and *change* it. Then, after a briefly dramatic pause, they add . . . *or else.* There are various ways of filling in the *or else,* ranging from occasional threats of a punishing visitation from Providence to a new set of retributive "controls" by a sternly righteous Congress; or, finally, to a wrathful uprising of the world's dispossessed. *It will come,* they say, looking about for testimony on which to found a new series of indictments. And they need not look far.

There is one thing, however, that they do not look for. They inquire not at all into whether they are doing any *good.* The insignificant response to all these charges of malfeasance leads only to deductions of a greater wickedness; the crimes of *Homo politicus* acquire a theological dimension through his indifference to manifold complaints. Never once do the critics ask themselves, Is *Homo politicus* man or abstraction? Is he the moral agent we claim him to be, or only a hypothesis necessary to the rationale of our moralizing activity? Have we, perhaps, invented him, somewhat as other generations of righteous critics invented Satan in order to have a proper enemy to contend against? Are our delightful virtues no more than functions of their opposites in a psychological projection—a target extrapolated from the voracious demands of our moral contempt?

Well, for the purposes of these questions it will be useful to add as much as we can to the portrait of the conventional Sinner whose failings so plainly threaten the downfall of democratic society. For example, we can now identify him as a *liberal,* which means, of course, that his feeble, fretful gestures in the direction of political reform have simply not been good enough. Liberalism, we say, has been the prevailing political theory,

and it is in terms of its unfulfilled promises that the typical indictment against *Homo politicus* is drawn up. It is the manifest inadequacy of this theory, after all, which entitles us to blame him for a great many multiplying troubles and wrongs, and to insist that he *shape up.*

It is now necessary to acknowledge certain plainly neglected facts. One such fact is that the proportion of really political people—genuine *Homo politicos*—is always very small in relation to the total population. This helps to explain why political people almost invariably grow angry and shout and wave their arms. They are few, the nonpolitical people many. So political people try to compensate for the "immaturity" they see all about. This is a reality which political theory tends to ignore, except in *verboten* justifications of aristocratic or oligarchic rule, yet it is obvious enough when you think about it. The average citizen is only one-eighth political-minded, and the other seven-eighths of him is busy pursuing other interests or goals—objectives which may be more or less enlightened than political objectives.

Another neglected fact is that the *operative* faith in democratic politics tacitly endorses this subdivision of human interests. Since John Stuart Mill, if not before, we have understood that the political authority can legitimately interfere with our lives only when we are doing really bad things. The rest of the time we are free to amass wealth, write grand opera, climb Mount Everest, become successful plumbing contractors, invent profitable inventions, and, if we happen to be especially bright, discover the double helix or edit a magazine like *Commentary.* If we righteously devote seven-eighths of our lives to "making it," Natural Law will take care of everything else, and if it doesn't—well, those meddlesome political people just don't know when to leave well enough alone.

But nobody really *believes* that any more! Well, maybe one eighth of one eighth of the people don't believe it any more, but Dispassionate Observers like Robert Paul Wolff

and Henry Kariel know that this is exactly what all those people "out there" believe, and only about an eighth of their identity—maybe less—feels any responsibility for social and economic and political problems.

The other seven-eighths part of them wants, and feels it has a natural right, to be left alone. Why, in view of present disorders, do their consciences permit this strange indifference? One explanation may be the extravagant and probably unworkable remedies proposed by the critics, which seem purely political, to which should be added the entirely predictable resistance generated by the "or else" threats which usually follow the critical analysis. Whether or not he really has one, the critic finishes by brandishing a big stick. Like other people who believe more in power than in man, he tries to make his threats *credible, so* he conjures up a proper retribution for failing democrats at the hands of unforgiving revolutionary cadres, or by some infallibly just and all-powerful state that the critic insists will somehow *emerge.* And it is just such angry arguments which make non-political people stop listening. They don't know much about politics but they have instincts sound enough to create suspicion of all such claims. Threats make partisans, not problem-solvers. Even while knowing better, they go off to their Chamber of Commerce meetings on Law and Order, pretending to think that none but partisan solutions are now possible. In time, only caricatures of political half-truths have hope of attracting public attention, and a virtuous man becomes known by the ferocity of his denunciations. Then, after a generation or so of purely *adversary* encounters of this sort, the creeping popularity of practically nihilist demagogues begins belated instruction of honest critics in the law of diminishing returns affecting their chosen profession.

So, with this unhappy prospect in the offing, it becomes doubly important to wonder who, after all, the critics of democratic politics are

addressing. The books they write sell, but do their arguments really reach anybody? The one-eighth part of the average human being which has accepted instruction in democratic responsibilities and accountabilities is not much of an identity to respond. When will the critic begin to recognize and admit the fragmented character of his audience? Or is he too preoccupied with the bitter accuracy of his statistics, the stormy righteousness of his judgments, to be interested in the fact that an authentic, full-bodied human public for what he has to say simply *isn't there?* That the court where he presents his charges is actually mythical—filled not with men but only gaseous wraiths generated by the political theory which declares that they *ought* to be there? That the hypothesis which provided the rules of the hearing, the modes of procedure, and predicted its just and wise consequences was something in the heads of men like John Stuart Mill, and took little account of the way people really are and the way they think and live?

There are doubtless things wrong with all these people—there are always things wrong with people—but the things they are now accused of may be offenses created in large part by a political theory which gave attention to only a *small portion* of their lives, and then promised to perform utopian miracles, in mistaken confidence that the entirety of human behavior can be molded and shaped by the leverage of political decision.

It is a central puzzle or mystery of human nature that a man will often give up his life rather than admit defects in his theory of morality. Rather than modify a claim which, he has come to believe, declares his character and foretells his destiny, he will undertake wholly impossible tasks, such as sorting out the angels from the devils among mankind, even institute torturing inquisitions, train in indispensable brutality a secret police, attempt to brainwash whole populations, and, finally, stand ready to erase the planet from the solar system, simply to prove that he is *right.* If Milton wanted models for the drama of his great Exile from Paradise, he had no need of ancient theologies for data. Lucifer's proudest egoism has epic prototypes here on earth. When, one wonders, will these indignant moralists whose very breath is a list of our shortcomings learn their true spiritual ancestor? We are now, it seems, in for a long season of encounters with such men. Call them the Holy Denouncers. Who else can get the floor when *no* theory will possibly work well?

The theory, they say, tells us—What theory? *Any* theory!—that men ought to be busy with so-and-so, and our society achieving benefits which are obviously within reach—but look, just *look,* at what "you people" are doing! All rhetorical notes of petulance, impatience, and indignant reproach are sounded. A decent race of men would surely grovel in self-contempt. But "the people" do nothing of this sort, and many of them look around for less intelligent and less demanding theorists. Fools are preferable as leaders and instructors to endlessly angry men. The semi-religious political theories of the times can accomplish only one of two things. They can demand that the people measure up to the canons of commonly received doctrine, or they can identify scapegoats who mar and subvert the primeval goodness of the social community. In either case, however, the clinching argument for human betterment is made with *denunciation.*

So regarded, the facts of the situation are horrifying, yet hardly anything new. The past is filled with the noise of Holy Denouncers. Look at the agonizing track left by the most famous of their number—the Augustines, the Jeromes and Savonarolas, the Calvins and the later Puritan thunderers who shaped far too much of the American mind, not to forget Karl Marx and his numerous epigoni of ideological religion. Where did these denouncers get their case against the common run of human beings? Well, they had a theory. They would warp, frighten, coerce, and compel men into conformity, or stamp them out, liquidate them, send them to Hell.

There is of course much historical evidence of wrong. With or without theories of accountability, people suffer persistent pain. But we may never know how much of the wrong comes from angry, partisan definition, how it is multiplied through righteous denunciation and fiercely purifying crusade. The "natural man" is now hardly identifiable. While we can do little more than puzzle over such questions, it is still possible to acknowledge one simple and indisputable truth—that no matter how right or how wrong we are, or anyone is, *denunciation does not help.* Denunciation makes everything and almost everyone worse. It disheartens the good and drives the bad to self-justifications, and a bad man's defenses can only be dishonest, which makes him worse, for now even the little good remaining in him turns corrupt.

If you could ever corner a really sincere denouncer—they exist; there is something of the denouncer in us all—and were able with proofs from history and humanistic psychology to make him retreat from his chosen activity, he would probably feel all but lost. He might read these proofs as having for him the impact of total disaster. For if there no longer is a useful career in being *right,* and making that right more widely known, how shall he avoid thinking himself a disoriented and identityless man? Yet his condition, technically, is not so bad, since it now equals that of Socrates when the Oracle found him to be the wisest man in Athens.

We might consider this need to survive the loss of righteous theory to be at the heart of the moral crisis of the present. It is a crisis everywhere reflected in the pain imposed on people by *yesterday's* righteousness, which is now the rigidity of respected—or once respected— institutions. A case study of this inherited ill is found in Ashmore and Baggs' *Mission to Hanoi,* illustrating the moral blindness of political administrators whose secondhand righteousness had become a barrier impenetrable by either reason or fact. Then, if you turn to the most

notorious failures of public school education—the ghetto schools in the cities of the United States— you find a similar inheritance of righteousness controlling school administrators: the trouble, they explain, cannot be with the classes, the curriculum, and surely not the teachers, but only with the *children,* who just do not measure up. In this way theory dictates moral judgment, in incredible defiance of facts which reveal the suffering and misuse of human beings. It is not that any of these people—politicos, public school administrators, whatever—are "bad people," but that they are completely captive of a righteousness which was never really their own. People whose moral identity consists only of borrowed robes deserve, not denunciation, but a patient compassion. It is not too much to say that if you could take their righteousness away from them suddenly, they would become psychological basket cases in a matter of weeks.

In Review in MANAS for Jan. 7 there was quotation from an English teacher who told how in his younger days he had worked in various plants on the West Coast as a template-maker. Having some common-sense notions on how to improve his working conditions and to decrease the boredom of his job, he made up practical suggestions. He got nowhere, of course. Neither plant superintendent nor union official could accommodate the righteousness of the status quo to the small revisions he proposed in the plan of work and the routines of supervision. And a professor of Industrial Relations was no help. He suggested only that the template-maker might really be made for better things and advised him to get out of the plant. In all these encounters, the template-maker found himself up against an artificial antagonist—not sense but righteousness opposed him.

What can we conclude from this? It seems obvious that in a world of imperfect men, there are, and will continue to be, a great many misreadings of both facts and values, and ever- present "mistakes," with foolish things happening

all around. What could be more certain? Even the most carefully thought-out theories, in the perspective of time, reveal monumental errors and bad miscalculations. It follows, then, that if we cannot do without theory—and we cannot, since every bit of planning and consequent action has some kind of theory behind it—we ought at least to get rid of the righteousness, which leads to such terrible hardenings of both the mind and the heart. And if we can get rid of righteousness, then we might be able to put an end to denunciation, since the only reliable result of denunciation is a noticeable increase in the amount of suffering and evil in the world.

But, it may be asked, if we no longer are able to tell people who are doing bad or really ignorant things that they ought to stop, what will be left for us to say? Perhaps nothing, for a while. Are we really so sure that the consciences of other men would remain totally inactive without our penetrating remarks to goad them to self-examination? The question may be left open, but there is a theory of the origin of the American Civil War to the effect that the furious attacks of the Northern Abolitionists on the moral character of the Southern planters had a very large part in encouraging the intellectuals of the South to elaborate on the claim that Southern gentlemen were truly the Athenians of the New World, and that the flowering of their high aristocratic culture required the support of the institution of slavery, just as Athenian culture did. The Southern intellectuals *knew better* at the beginning, but denunciation did nothing to improve their minds or plant in them a resolve to be better men than the Athenians. As a result, they were nowhere near as good. In any event, denunciation only made them worse. And there is much talk, today, about the need to fight the Civil War all over again.

Finally, there is the proposition that men who abandon denunciation begin to have a better understanding of the evil in human life, and what can be done about it, than its most fiery

cataloguers. We speak in particular of one great humanist's contention—the theme of a poet and artist—that the power of the individual imagination is the only remedy. This was William Blake's theory for the overcoming of evil, and Blake was not ignorant of its power. Men of creative vision do not permit the experience of evil to twist them inwardly, though they suffer along with the rest of us, and perhaps more than the rest of us. Experience of evil may make a man list its producers, one by one, but *knowledge* of evil cures him of this reaction. It does no good. Men of imagination try to unmake evil by creative activity; and if they cannot unmake it, they at least construct counter-realities out of their pain. In his Pendle Hill pamphlet on William Blake, Harold Goddard helps to make this clear. Imagination, he says, following Blake, has the power to uncreate evil. He continues:

> I use the word "uncreate" because "forgive" and "forget" are not strong enough terms. Imagination is Dante's River of Lethe in Purgatory. It can literally obliterate. Imagination can not only cause that-which-was-not, to be; it can cause that-which-was, not to be. It is this double power to annihilate and create that makes imagination the sole instrument of genuine and lasting, in contrast with illusory and temporary, social change. . . .

> Force cannot be overcome by reason. Force can be overcome only by a higher order of force. Imagination is that force. And Blake believed from the bottom of his heart that if a nation of warriors were confronted by a nation of imaginative men, the weapons of the former would fall uplifted from their hands.

This seems a curiously beyond-good-and-evil theory. At any rate, it provokes no anger and supports no self-righteousness. It is surely a theory we haven't tried.

REVIEW

THE BAUHAUS: FULL RETROSPECT

FUTURE historians as well as contemporary students and readers will almost certainly be grateful for the immense labors of Hans M. Wingler in compiling *Bauhaus* (a very large book—10" X 14", of 653 pages), and to MIT Press for publishing this detailed study of the origins, life, and influence of the school of design founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar, Germany in 1919. The price of the volume is $55.00.

What is the importance of this book? Superficially, interest in the Bauhaus reflects an enthusiasm for the arts and for the ideal of cultural synthesis the school represented in design education. However, as the first large-scale attempt during the age of technology to make humanistic principles the basis for the activities of daily life, the Bauhaus may some day be recognized as one heroic forerunner of a new phase of human history. It is after all no more than egotistical prejudice and political obsession to let history obtain its structure from the transient exploits of power-seekers, while wealth-accumulators blandly falsify the symbols of civilization. Such events may some day be seen to have no more meaning for authentic human history than the inroads of plagues and other disasters. The historians of the future will then comb the records of the present for what little evidence can be found of impulses and determinations to become more *human*—somewhat, perhaps, as scholars of our time have searched out lonely anticipations of the scientific spirit during the Middle Ages. Nothing of this sort, it seems fairly obvious, will appear in chronicles of the wars of empires and the struggles of rival ideologies. Instead, scholars will inquire into what men did to increase the free expression of their creative capacities, and how, against the grain of economic pressures and political contests, they managed to make these efforts survive for a time, and even to exercise an unmistakable leavening influence on future generations. For historical research of this sort, Hans Wingler's *Bauhaus* will constitute a treasure-trove of documents.

However, for best use of this material there is need for preliminary orientation. It was once suggested in these pages that much advantage could be gained by taking the responsibility for writing history away from conventional historians and turning it over to men like Siegfried Giedion and Lewis Mumford. Let history be composed, in short, by men with known capacity for recognizing the *quality* of human undertakings, and who are able, therefore, to speak intelligibly of "progress." Artists, and craftsmen, ideally considered, are men faithful to the human excellences of their calling, which they pursue undistracted by ulterior ends, and the rich harvest of this integrity becomes the subject-matter of the thoughtful art historian. It is often the artist who sees, far more clearly than others, that the life of the times has lost its way, that "civilization" has foundered on some shoal of really despicable greed, or is smothered by wholly unwarranted vanity, and needs to be brought up short, to be *stopped* in its plainly destructive course. It is the artist, most frequently, who can sense in the habits and preoccupations of the people about him a pitiable disdain for the authentic virtues in human life, and who records his protest in ways available to him.

At any rate, by reading about the ideas and works of visionaries in the arts—perhaps we should say the *applied* arts—one becomes aware of the herculean dimensions of the tasks set for themselves by the men of the Bauhaus, and to value and cherish—in some amazement, probably—the degree of their success in what they set out to do. In his opening paragraph, Prof. Wingler says:

> The Bauhaus is, from the standpoint of cultural history, no isolated phenomenon. It was the climax and focus of a very complex and multifaceted development which reaches back to the romantic period, continues at the present, and is unlikely to terminate in the near future. . . . Institutionally the Bauhaus was an institute for art, which emerged as the successor to an academy and a school of arts and crafts through their mutual "integration." . . . the Bauhaus was marked by an anti-academic attitude from its very beginnings. It was a practical educational establishment with all the usual trappings and with a strong tendency toward practical and manual training. . . . within a few years of its inception, the educational ideals of craftsmanship

were giving way to thoughts of educating designers capable of designing products for mass production. It even became one of the goals of the Bauhaus to undertake product development in its own workshops and thus provide a broader economic basis which in turn could prove profitable for the institution.

The Bauhaus existed in and through the vision of its teachers. Where did that vision come from? As Wingler says, it arose from a "multifaceted development," yet it can be no accident that its godfather or spiritual ancestor—the man, that is, who first suggested Gropius for head of the Weimar School of Arts and Crafts, out of which the Bauhaus grew—was Henry van de Velde. This Belgian architect had more than twenty years earlier been literally *driven* from the fine arts into the applied arts by what was for him an intolerable personal situation. In 1892 van de Velde was a young Belgian painter who wanted to get married. He found the houses that were then available too hideous to endure. He would not subject his wife to these "immoral" surroundings, and forthwith became an architect in order to design a home fit for his family. And an architect he remained. He made himself into a personal antidote to the advancing ugliness and crude disorder imposed on the common life by the industrial revolution, now evident everywhere on the continent—just as, thirty years earlier, it had been evident in England, making William Morris cry out for similar reforms.

The Bauhaus set out to educate and humanize the rude and chaotic energies of industry itself. A paragraph written by Gropius, a distinguished architect, in 1923, embodies the visionary theme behind the intentions of the Bauhaus teachers:

> Although we may achieve an awareness of the infinite we can give form to space only with finite means. We become aware of space through our undivided Ego, through the simultaneous activity of soul, mind and body. Through his intuition, through his metaphysical powers, man discovers the immaterial space of inward vision and inspiration. This conception of space demands realization in the material world, a realization which is accomplished by the brain and the hands.

The Bauhaus, then, began in 1919, in a wartorn land suffering severe economic deprivation, with students poor in everything but dreams, and against a cultural background all too vulnerable to the anxieties and suspicions that would within a decade begin to feed the gathering forces of the Nazi revolution. The Bauhaus was the opposite of these dark tendencies. It attracted as teachers men who would be world-famous as artists and designers during the next half-century. The combination of their intense artistic commitment with the tools of industry gave practical being to a wonderful utopian venture which flowered in civilizing influences too numerous to mention. A provocative synopsis of the potentialities of the Bauhaus is found in the splendid photographs of the teachers. Their faces seem prophetic of the action of which men of vision become capable. One sees the signature of strength linked with gentleness and understanding, of perception married to rich capacity, with all these qualities united by a willingness to give of themselves—to *teach.* The gallery of portraits includes Gropius, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, George Muche, Johannes Itten, Oskar Schlemmer, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Josef Albers, Lothar Schreyer, Herbert Bayer, Marcel Breuer, and many others. (The name of Fritz Hesse, mayor of Dessau, should be honored, also, since it was his determination which gave the Bauhaus a new home after it could no longer survive in Weimar, because of various antipathies and opposition.)

Two books would be good to read before turning to Prof. Wingler's large volume. One is *Bauhaus: 1919-1928,* edited by Herbert Bayer and Ise and Walter Gropius (Branford, 1959), a volume which distills the essence of the undertaking and is amply illustrated. The other is the revised edition of Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's *Experiment in Totality* (MIT, 1969), the life-story of her husband, who was perhaps the most stimulating and influential of all those who taught at the Bauhaus, and who came to Chicago in 1937 to establish a second Bauhaus in the United States.

The present volume has four large sections: two provide the documentary history of the Bauhaus, in Germany and in America; the other two are devoted to illustrations of the work in both places. (There is also an excellent section of full-color illustrations.)

Prof. Wingler's book would be exceedingly valuable for its visual material alone, which includes numerous examples of the designs and products of the various workshops, including woodworking, metalworking, weaving, wall-painting, stagecraft, sculpture, printing (typography), and photography. There are sequences of illustrations to show the changing temper and emphasis of the famous "preliminary course," in which students were introduced to basic Bauhaus thinking, with background documents covering the various periods of Bauhaus history—telling what happened under the direction of Hannes Mayer, after Gropius resigned, and later, under Mies van der Rohe, who was obliged to close the school in 1933 because of pressure from the Nazis. Samples of the running fire of attacks on the Bauhaus, from the beginning, are sufficient to show the familiar origins of the prejudice which harassed the school; the wonder is that the teachers were able to accomplish so much, in spite of these stupidities.

The spirit of the Bauhaus and the record of its achievements—which will go on and on, as Prof. Wingler indicates—can hardly be captured in a brief review. Yet clear indication of the intentions of all those inspired by Bauhaus ideals comes out in some pungent criticism by Serge Chermayeff, who became director of the Chicago Institute of Design after Moholy-Nagy's untimely death in 1946. At an opening of a show of typographic design in Chicago Chermayeff spoke of the misuse of the elements of visual communication in printing, and of the opportunism in design which Bauhaus training then sought to overcome:

> We saw a parade of technical tricks employing design idiom and elements, whether photographic, typographic, color, shape or texture, borrowed wholesale from previous work without the essential preliminary study of the purpose the design had to serve and without understanding or feeling for the design elements, production techniques and media. . . . Such work speaks eloquently for the motive behind it: the production of something which will strike the advertising agent or his client as novel and up-to-date instead of being either a purposeful and controlled act or a spontaneous expression of the artist. . . . The immensely expanded technical resources have all too often been misunderstood or misused. Far too many effects are produced by the maximum use of these technical resources. The more commendable process of producing maximum effect with minimum means is disappearing. Complexity and extravagance are substitutes for simplicity and economy.

This seems a good place to end these notes in review of *Bauhaus,* since what Chermayeff says sets the stage for a second round of Bauhaus campaigning. At the outset, the task was to penetrate the philistine defenses of acquisitive industry with the logic and subsequent blessings of integral design in which function, material, and process would declare form, and the designer would give these elements humanizing unity of conception. Now, after years of the dramatic success of applied design in industry—a success so plain that the designer often finds himself elevated to the status of counselor, guide and friend to the producer of goods and services—there are the oppressive problems described by Chermayeff, which are by no means found only in typography. For design, in its present expanded function, must now make war upon the very roots of "complexity and extravagance," and to offer a more deeply involving humanistic criticism. What can the designers of today and tomorrow do to help to free themselves and the rest of us from the fevers and frenzies of technological escalation, and from the fascination of techniques which know no bounds of self-limitation? This is a very large question, calling for a new Bauhaus inspiration.

COMMENTARY
A "READING" DIFFICULTY

PEOPLE who have never experienced the exclusions of race prejudice seldom find means to comprehend the behavior of those who have known little else. Valuable instruction in how it *feels* to belong to a racial minority is found in George Dennison's book, *The Lives of Children* (Random House, 1969, $6.95), the story of the First Street School, located in a Puerto Rican neighborhood in New York City. In one place Dennison tells why it was so difficult to teach Jose, a thirteen-year-old boy, to read. José had read Spanish when he was seven, but now it seemed that he *could not* learn to read English. He had been failing for six years. Using methods similar to those developed by Sylvia Ashton-Warner in teaching Maori children, Dennison finally had some success with Jose, but his explanation of the obstacles that had to be overcome is what we want to repeat here. The change-over from Spanish to English defeated the boy:

> Reading, for him, had few of the attributes of speech, and none at all—except in negative ways—of the attributes of feeling. He could not imagine his own identity waiting to meet him in books, as it met him on the streets and in his play with other boys. In fact, he still stumbled over the word "I." It is worth mentioning here that this collapse was not the merely negative phenomenon it is taken for by so many educators. There was something self-protective concealed within it, for the identity which did in fact lie in wait for him in the books that do exist—which is to say, in the society which does exist—was precisely that of a second-class citizen shunned where others are welcomed, needy where others are comfortable, denigrated where others are praised. A white middle-class boy might say, with regard to printed words "This is talk, like all talk. The words are yours and mine. To understand them is to possess them. To possess them is to use them. To use them is to belong more deeply to the life of our country and the world." José, staring at the printed page, his forehead lumpy, his lip thrust out resentfully—anger, neurotic stupidity, and shame written all over him— seemed to be saying, "This belongs to the schoolteachers, not to me. It is not speech, but a task.

> I am not meant to possess it, but to perform it and be graded. And anyway it belongs to the Americans, who kick me around and don't want me getting deeper in their lives. Why should I let them see me fail? I'll quit at the very beginning."

Still, José thought he wanted to read. But as Dennison put it, the truth was rather that "he wanted to cease failing; he wanted to *have already* learned to read." He did not "know what it meant to learn, and he did not know what it meant to read." These were barriers which required much patience to wear away.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
LIFE GEOMETRIZES

AN ADVENTURE IN GEOMETRY, written and illustrated by Anthony Ravielli (Viking, 1957), could do much to restore geometry to the humanities for readers of any age, even though this book seems designed for children of about ten. The text is good, and the illustrations are a wonderful amplification of a passage quoted by Herbert Read (in *The Redemption of the Robot*) from Werner Jaeger on the foundations of education among the ancient Greeks. The following is from Jaeger's *Paideia:*

> All the marvelous principles of Greek thought—principles which have come to symbolize its most essential and indefeasible quality—were created in the sixth century. . . . One of the most decisive advances in that process was the new investigation of the structure of music. The knowledge of the true nature of harmony and rhythm produced by that investigation would alone give the Greeks permanent position in the history of civilization; for it affects almost every sphere of life. . . .

> This harmony was expressed in the relation of the parts to the whole. But behind that harmony lay the mathematical conception of proportion, which, the Greeks believed, could be visually presented with geometrical figures. The harmony of the world is a complex idea: it means both musical harmony, in the sense of a beautiful concord between different sounds and harmonious mathematical structure on rigid geometrical rules. The subsequent influence of the conception of harmony on Greek life was immeasurably great. It affected not only sculpture and architecture, but poetry and rhetoric, religion and morality; all Greece came to realize that whatever a man made or did was governed by a severe rule, which like the rule of justice could not be transgressed with impunity—the rule of fitness or propriety. Unless we trace the boundless working of this law in all spheres of Greek thought throughout classical and post-classical times, we cannot realize the powerful educative influence of the discovery of harmony.

While Mr. Ravielli speaks in his Introduction of geometry as "an indispensable tool of mankind," a growing realization of the living presence of geometry in life is intrinsically different from grasping the manipulative skills which seem the main object of studying geometry in school. Awareness of living geometry brings a spontaneous order to the forms, shapes and motions occurring in nature. Mr. Ravielli has this suggestive paragraph:

> Since the beginning of time, the basic shapes have existed. These simple shapes have proved themselves functional and have remained unaltered in many of the life-forms that inhabit our planet. The circular eye, for example, does not belong to man alone. Every creature that looks at the world sees it through circular eyes, and creatures long extinct who looked at a younger, more turbulent world also saw it through circular eyes.

Throughout this book, geometrical forms are seen through the eye of the artist and the designer, rather than with the calculating perception of the engineer. The *feelings* one has about the forms in nature are examined and made intelligible. Balances which depend upon motion, for example, lay greater claim to our attention than the inert equilibrium which obviously is not "going any place." Commenting on the wonder of a butterfly's wing, the author says:

> Asymmetrical forms that seem beautiful to us are said to have dynamic symmetry.

> Dynamic symmetry is the most pleasing type of symmetry. The contour of a hen's egg seems more exciting than the contour of a marble. Both are balanced forms, but the shape of the egg reveals a dynamic symmetry, the shape of a marble a static symmetry.

> Dynamic symmetry dominates nature and man. It flows with majestic dignity in an oak tree. It is the "golden ratio" in the proportions of a Greek temple.

There seems good reason to urge that children should learn geometry only from artists—from teachers, that is, for whom the shapes of things have primarily a living reality. The illustrations by Mr. Ravielli comparing a circle with an egg-form inscribed in a rectangle having the proportion of the golden section, and then a great tree and a Greek temple, show the kinship

through geometry of forms in both nature and art. These should not be studied as abstractions, but as the endlessly repeated embodiments of a natural shaping tendency, some of them suggestive of repose, others declaring the formal necessities of growth.

Geometry becomes indeed the graphic representation of very nearly all our knowledge of the world around us, through the pages of this book. The discoveries of science since the time of the Greeks are made to extend the Greek conception of the harmony found throughout nature, as for example in the section titled "The Shape of Sound":

> Sound is a wave motion in the air that is similar in many ways to waves on the sea. Our ears tell us nothing about the shape of the sound, but the fact that sound has shape has been demonstrated by delicate laboratory instruments which make sound waves visible. On the screens of these devices we can see a similarity between the pattern of thunder as it rumbles through the air and the concentric ripples that are caused by a stone dropped in still water. The chief difference is that sound waves are in the shape of expanding *spheres,* because they move in three-dimensional space, while the ripples moving on the two-dimensional surface of water are expanding circles.

Here, as elsewhere, the drawings provide the essential drama, in this case supplying imagery which may help the reader to sense the universal geometrizing of natural energies.

We are again reminded that projective geometry, developed in the fifteenth century by artists in pursuit of the laws of perspective, much later contributed to the invention of non-Euclidean geometry on which depend the extraordinary advances of twentieth-century physics. Its importance is introduced with simple illustration:

> A magnificent example of projective geometry is the apparent sameness in the size of the sun and moon. The sun is 400 times larger in diameter than the moon, but it is also about 400 times more distant from us, which is why the sun and moon appear to us equal in size. This is spectacularly illustrated whenever the moon comes between the earth and the sun to produce a total solar eclipse, for then it appears

that the disk of the moon almost exactly covers the sun's disk.

There is a natural connection between the subjective reaction to egg-shaped forms and the feeling aroused by spirals. "A line that continuously changes its direction," says Mr. Ravielli, "has a tendency to stimulate us." He adds: "It is difficult, for example, to remain passive in the presence of a spiral." Perhaps a spiral can be thought of as a linear version of the oval, expressive of movement or growth, just as the egg form is a symbol of the internal movement or thrust of expanding life.

FRONTIERS
Reducer of Rights

IN the "Children" article of two weeks ago (Jan. 21), the question, "What is a nation?", was asked, but hardly discussed. Yet the question needs an answer. The difficulty is that we are neither rationally nor emotionally able to give the answer that was given in the eighteenth century, when most of our thinking about political institutions came into being. In those days, men regarded the prospect of creating "nations" with considerable enthusiasm. Today, being sadder if not wiser, we can hardly speak of the nation without laying most of the emphasis on its failings. We find that in the name of all the high-sounding talk about service to the common good, the nation commits continual evil. This must be, we are told, in order to prevent far worse things from happening. The nation, it becomes plain, has grown to its present eminence through expertise in determining the lesser of two evils, and by popularizing the idea that there is no other way to do "good." Once this conception of achieving good is thoroughly established, there can be no serious obstacle to believing that the survival of the Nation-State is now indeed the highest good, it following that the individual man is necessarily regarded as no more than a creature of the State's all-important ends.

But this is intolerable! It totally ignores the unique insight of the eighteenth-century nation-makers to whom we trace the unparalleled virtue of *our* state. There is a spiritual reality in human beings, they insisted, over which the nation can have no authority at all. A passage in Milton Mayer's Occasional Paper, *Man v. The State* (Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1969, $2.25), after recalling this original declaration of the rights of conscience, develops at some length the logic by which they have been reduced or withdrawn:

> "The rights of conscience," says Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* "we never submitted, we could not submit [to government]. We are answerable for them to our God." We have only,

then, to discover what conscience is, and what it compels, and our troubles are over, we have discovered the limit of The State's power and, so, the scope of individual liberty. The discovery has not been made, nor does it seem likely that it will be. For my conscience tells me X and yours tells you not-X, and The State's only hope of allowing me the liberty of what I call conscience is its undependable decision that I appear to be, and generally have been, a "conscientious" man. And it is The State equipped with no true instrument for the purpose—that will do the deciding. . . . How can *it* determine "an order of values"; how can *it* decide what conscience is and still leave conscience free?

It can't. So it does what it can't do either; it decides what conscience is, and in its own worldly terms it would be derelict (as no State has ever been) if it didn't. It decides, in the case before it, by submitting me to its investigation and interrogation, as if conscience were susceptible (as Philosopher Sidney Hook says it is) of "rational analysis" (by, of course, The State, which is assumed to be the competent custodian of rationality). What, then, has become of Jefferson's insistence that we are answerable to God alone, and not to government, for our rights of conscience? What has become of Aquinas in the Thirteenth Century, or Chief Justice Hughes in the Twentieth?—"The essence of religion is a belief in a relation to a God involving duties superior to those arising from any human relation." What has become of the Supreme Court's classic finding in *Girouard* that "throughout the ages, men have suffered death rather than subordinate their allegiance to God to the authority of The State. Freedom of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment is the product of that struggle!"? What has become of my "most fundamental personal values," on whose basis the Solicitor General of the United States, a former dean of the Harvard Law School, validates my *moral,* if not my *legal,* right to disobey? The State, when I ask it these questions, shakes its head sadly. God is not dead; he's alive and well in the Department of Justice.

There is really no way out of this dilemma on the assumptions and the reasoning provided. The nearly two hundred pages of Mr. Mayer's paper leave no doubt of this. You cannot really entrust your life, your fortune, and your sacred honor to the nation without bartering away your conscience, too.

The central question, which Mr. Mayer considers only by implication, has to do with "authority," and how much of ourselves, as a matter of daily practice, we believe it sensible and practical to give over to the control of a ruling power outside ourselves. For it is these *habits* of delegation of responsibility, taken for granted as just and right and necessary, which finally arm the nation with all its presumptuous powers.

Our consciences, reserved only for ultimate decision, such as whether or not we can be prevailed upon to kill some other man—a man doubtless as harmless and well-meaning as ourselves, had he no nation to order him about— have had too little exercise. Conscience comes into play only out of desperation, to save our last vestige of virtue, and it is simply not strong enough in this lonely confrontation. It makes only martyrs, not heroes and champions.

The State has already been burdened with all too many powers and responsibilities of decision, for which, as Mayer says, it has "no true instrument," and the ugliness of its maturing authority is only the mirror-image of human default, a reflection of the general failure to respect and develop a very different sort of authority. For how many of the people in the world is the area of behavior not covered by overt regulation of man-made law regarded as morally neutral territory? For how many people is the conception of order and moral responsibility based entirely on an imposed legal code?

The fact that the problems of society now tend to be argued in terms of extreme polarities— anarchism versus totalitarian control—illustrates the general impoverishment of culture wrought by the assumption that no authority which does not rely on coercion is *real,* that rules of conduct which have no *teeth* in them are mere idealistic "fancies."

The talk of making the nation over into an "ethical" entity has some reason in it, but this can hardly be accomplished except by men who first find ways to live ethical lives without benefit or

reinforcement from the technical assistance of the State. It seems likely that very few people will be able to persuade themselves that this is any longer possible. Yet a beginning ought to be made, and for humble beginnings a few might be enough.