

# THE NATURE OF HUMAN NATURE

## PART I: SYMPATHETIC INTERACTION

ONE can scarcely get through a day without hearing somebody write off man as "naturally" selfish, dishonest, aggressive, or whatnot, on the grounds that many people behave in those ways in our particular society. Sociologists and anthropologists traditionally reject the entire concept of "human nature" as meaningless, for they know that in other societies and cultures people behave quite differently (and if they were not wedded to the assumption of social determinism, they might note that not even in our own culture does everyone act selfishly, dishonestly, aggressively, etc.).

The virtually unchallenged credo reigning over the behavioral sciences is "cultural relativism." This credo holds that until he passes through an "Iron Maiden of social and cultural forces" (John Gillin), man is nothing—an utterly inert, infinitely malleable kind of clay. It is a short, painless, almost inevitable step from the doctrine of cultural relativity to that of moral relativity: *i.e.*, there is and can be no valid basis for judging the relative goodness or badness of "Iron Maidens." If man has no intrinsic nature, if he is merely a mutable sort of clay, then it makes no difference what is done to him: any social and cultural means and end-products are just as good as any other.

Let us here attempt a fresh look at this doctrine, from the standpoint of what might be called Humanistic Sociology. Such a perspective does not require the suspension of all disbelief and the substitution of mere mawkishness. If there is such a thing as human nature, its qualities and processes must meet certain objective conditions.

*First:* these qualities and processes must be distinctively human. Characteristics which man shares in common with other members of the

chordata, vertebrate, and mammalia groups are important enough in their place, no doubt, but their place is in animal nature, not in human nature, if that term is to have any value.

*Second:* a usable concept of human nature must derive from the real-life world. Rather than stemming from some poetic or philosophic construct of man as someone believes he ought to be, the referent must be man as he actually is. By a similar token, it would seem doubtful that the nature of human nature is to be successfully extrapolated from observations in laboratories, standardized interviews, or other artificial settings.

*Third:* if the concept of human nature is to have any useful meaning, it must refer to characteristics which are true of human beings through time and space, independent of tribe, clan, society, culture. This is the most important, and most difficult, of all conditions to meet.

There is, however, a setting in which it is possible for us to observe—if we have eyes to see—the essential nature of man unfolding, before social and cultural injunctions and encrustations. That setting is very simple, very commonplace. It consists of a parent and a newborn child.

During the first few weeks of life, a baby is not "human" in the sense we are here using that word. The infant is equipped with enough reflexes to keep him alive, but he is little more than an alimentary canal with arms and legs attached. Much sooner than one might suppose, however, that small bundle of random movement embarks on the process of humanization. Not the acculturation which anthropologists claim as their province. Not the socialization which sociologists study. Those processes come later. The term, humanization, should be reserved for a prior, more basic process, which practically all subsequent learning presupposes, but which hardly

anyone studies, for it takes place wholly without language, and cannot be measured by any standardized scientific instruments.

At a few weeks of age, a baby begins to respond to the human beings in his environment. He does not know that they are "father" or "mother." He does not know any words, any symbols. The process may be regarded as central to universal human nature precisely because it is beyond language, which is to say beyond culture. The first building block of humanness is responsiveness to the human presence. The child, very early, develops an inchoate sense that human beings are different from the rest of his surroundings, and more important. He reveals this awareness by his gestures and expressions—beginning with so simple an act as focussing his eyes and following the motions of the parent with his eyesight.

The parent is delighted by the baby's signs of nascent humanness.<sup>1</sup> She shows her delight. She smiles, laughs, sings, talks to the baby. He responds to her response. He begins to reply to her smiles with smiles of his own. His squeals, gurgles, cooing and crowing begin to grow purposeful rather than random. They convey an unmistakable feeling-state. The parent responds with a heightened and corresponding feeling-state, which she communicates through expressions, gestures, inflections of voice, squeals, gurgles, cooing and crowing of her own. And so the process builds, and spirals, and soars.

This universal form of communication is of the very essence of becoming and remaining a human being. It is the bedrock on which the rest of the human structure is erected. Most subsequent learning rests in one way or another upon this fundamental aptitude for response based

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<sup>1</sup> Because women customarily have more to do with child-rearing than men, we shall use the feminine form in this discussion, although the process of universal human nature could just as well—and for many reasons should—include fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and other male figures.

on a sense of how the other person feels. This sense is based, in turn, on the fact that one feels the same way, or has felt the same way, or is capable of feeling the same way. The process might be called pre-symbolic or emotional interaction.

In one of the most important of all sociological writings, an essay entitled "The Nature of Human Nature"—forgotten for nearly thirty years—Elsworth Faris called the basic ingredient Sympathy. The word is an apt one if employed in its original, generous sense. Only in quite modern times has the term "sympathy" been narrowed to implications of compassion or commiseration. The Greek equivalent means "feeling with," or, freely, "fellow feeling," without limitation on the nature or intensity of the emotions one felt in common with another.

Basic human nature, conceived in this way—as the outgrowth of a process of Sympathetic Interaction—meets the three empirical criteria stated earlier. It is normal, natural, and peculiarly human. It is independent of vagaries and variations through time and space. It holds true in democracies and despotisms; in monogamies, polygynies, polyandries; all societies and all cultures. There are, of course, cultural differences as to how intensely the parent may "properly" respond. But this much is necessarily universal: the parent must make some response, in the same dimension as the baby's response, or that baby will not become a human being, will decline, and may well die from his lack of fulfillment.

No society could survive a single generation if its adults did not interact sympathetically with its infants. In fact, some societies have been so demoralized by Western contacts that they lost this ingredient, and they died out faster from this lack than from the white man's bullets, diseases, or liquor.

Several additional characteristics of the process of sympathetic interaction may be noted. There is nothing about the process which is initiated, or, once begun, carried forward, by

genetic inheritance. The baby's wavings and vocalizing and smiles and laughter arise in the first place only out of human association, and they must continue to be reinforced by appropriate responses from others or they slow down and are extinguished.

The humanization process is intrinsically creative. It builds upon itself. It is not limited or limiting. It is not depleted through usage. It is never "finished." Tomorrow, the baby will catch more cues from the mother, and register delight in more ways; the mother will catch more cues from the child and register more delight on her own part.

Still another distinguishing characteristic of the basic humanization process is that it is joyful. If you smile at a very young baby—as young as two or three months—somehow he seems to know what that means, and he smiles back at you. But if you scowl at the baby, if you shout, if you sneer, if you show any of the hateful emotions, he does not know what you mean, and he does not know how to respond. He does not scowl back at you; he does not shout; he does not sneer. He is bewildered, and perhaps shows his bewilderment by bursting into tears. The hateful emotions, it seems, must be learned as part of the processes of acculturation and socialization. The emotion of joy, however, is unlearned. It appears to flow from some inner wellspring which can only be regarded as part of the natural equipment of man.

Finally, the process of Sympathetic Interaction is undemanding, uncalculating, unmanipulative. The baby does not respond to the parent because he is trying to gain something from her. And the parent does not respond to the baby because she is trying to wrest some advantage out of the situation. It is a pure and pristine relationship. It is free from social roles and statuses and taboos and claims and expectations. When the parent is alone with her baby, she tends to reveal herself, she tends to *be* herself. And the baby, who has not yet become bowed down by the

baggage of rote, is entirely spontaneous.<sup>2</sup> There are no masks, no boundaries, no barriers, no games. There are just two human beings, unafraid of one another, giving all that they have to give. Neither holds anything in reserve; neither is fearful that he cannot fully trust the other.

These moments are critical for the whole future development of the fledgling human being involved. They are perhaps just as significant for the mature human being involved. They may well be the only moments she will ever know, in her adult life, in which she is unguarded and truly herself. People who do not have babies may never know any such moments at all. They go to church, or to psychiatrists, or to cocktail lounges, or to encounter groups and "marathons," in the search for their lost human nature.

Their humanness—the qualities of artlessness and joy and giving, and the master quality we have here called Sympathy—is not, in truth, lost. It cannot be lost any more than the processes of peristalsis, or oxygen exchange, or the beating of the heart. But human nature may be, and often is, covered up by filagree or by armor. It may be, and often is, mislaid and forgotten. What is required then is to pause and reflect and remember how we joined the family of man in the first place.

*(To be continued)*

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<sup>2</sup> We cannot say that the baby reveals his "self," because at this point the baby has no such concept or image. Without self-awareness, there is no self. This awaits the development of *symbolic* interaction, which is also in the nature of human nature, and will be the subject of Part II in this series.

## *Letter from* **EASTERN EUROPE**

THE advocate of nonviolence does not meet with much sympathy in countries such as Poland, where the Nazi occupation and subsequent mistreatment at the hands of the Soviets are so much a part of everyone's experience, and where a violent struggle against impossible odds is somehow accepted as normal. Poles today may resort to passive resistance because nothing else is possible, but like the rest of us, they remember past gory, glory.

Sympathy for the pacifist approach is even less to be found in a "victor" country such as Yugoslavia, where the Croats, for example, feel that their very existence is due to centuries of fighting, backs to the wall, for the survival not only of Croatia but of all of Christendom. This traditional feeling is enhanced by the quite justifiable claim that the Yugoslav-caused delay in attacking Russia and the forty Nazi divisions needed to combat the Yugoslav partisans all during the war spelled the difference between victory and defeat for the Nazis at Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad. In the postwar period, Yugoslav readiness to return to the forests and mountains if the Soviets should invade appears to have made the difference between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia at the present moment.

The situation in Czechoslovakia is indeed quite different. First, there is the centuries-long tradition of pacifism here, and in addition a grass-roots movement toward democracy in the nineteenth century, and twenty years of quite enlightened government—complete with a "philosopher king"—in the twentieth. This was a glowing exception in this part of Europe. Active resistance to the putsch that stifled the revival of this democracy in 1948 was impossible, for the putsch came from within. Yugoslavs, with the benefit of hindsight, say they would have resisted the most recent putsch, but this time the invaders came in the dark of the night; the Yugoslav airfields are guarded now—but were they earlier?

Whatever other "ifs" one can offer, *if* the Czechs and Slovaks had resisted physically in 1968, they would surely have been destroyed. As it is, their largely nonviolent resistance has proved very upsetting to the "authorities," and about the only support the very unpopular present regime gets results from departures from nonviolence. This is confirmed by the demonstrations in Prague marking the first anniversary of the Soviet invasion.

It would be difficult or almost impossible to find supporters of the present regime among the Czechoslovak population at large: this is truly a case of government versus people. The "people's militia" may rant about "provocateurs" and the newspapers, radio, and television may charge that the demonstrations were organized and led by criminal elements, hoodlums, idlers, and foreigners, and incited by foreign radio broadcasts. While a few internationalists probably did not help a patriotic cause by overtly participating in the demonstrations, they too have their rights. Actually, the demonstrations were spontaneous, and foreign broadcasts, mild as they were, were jammed!

As for the demonstrations themselves, they began two nights before the anniversary. The August 20 demonstration, for example, began with a crowd heckling one or more police at the St. Wenceslaus monument on Wenceslaus Square late in the afternoon. Very soon, a voice on the square's loudspeakers called for dispersal in the name of law and order. The crowd hooted and whistled, the police—in greater numbers now—drove the crowd to the sidewalks (the monument is on an "island" in the upper end of the square), and still other police immediately took positions at the monument with high-quality movie cameras and carefully photographed the crowd on the sidewalks! There was some scuffling, and in one instance a husky young fellow managed to break away from several police and disappear in the crowd. Whether the crowd would have dispersed is doubtful, but nevertheless, armored cars

appeared even before dispersal would have been possible, and directed water cannon at the sidewalks. Everyone took shelter: behind signs (in which case the police drove them further), or in side streets or arcades. Soon there was tear gas everywhere (Polish manufacture), and the police were advancing up the side streets. The demonstrations continued on into the night.

Thursday—the anniversary itself—was widely understood to be a day of protest. The government had prepared against this with meetings, including a major one of the old gaffers in the "people's militia." Passive resistance was to be essentially in the form of a boycott of all business and transportation, and possibly the wearing of black armbands (those who wore such armbands were arrested). The boycott was almost universal, so that official protests of disruption of public transportation were meaningless: the public was not using its transportation! The government charged in the papers that the boycott was enforced by intimidation. There were absolutely no signs of this.

Five minutes before noon, there was not a hint of a demonstration: streetcars were running—with very few passengers; the monument was ringed—not densely—with police, and no civilians were near it. It seemed doubtful that there would be any demonstration. Then, at the stroke of noon, all vehicles stopped, horns began to honk, and people began to whistle. There was no police interference. The crowd surged into the square—actually a very wide street—and chanted slogans: "We Want Dubcek," "Long Live Dubcek," "Strougal is an Ox," and eventually, in funereal tones, "Husa-a-a-a-k." Movement was *away* from the monument to the foot of the square, where for a time everyone sat down on the pavement. Later they surged back up the square, and finally—perhaps 20 minutes from the time it all started—the police loudspeaker warning came on, and from a distance one could see the police dash at the fringe of the crowd perhaps fifty yards from the monument. A security policeman fell down, and

the crowd cheered. Some civilians were led off by the police. The crowd continued to hoot and jeer, and soon there was tear gas, and the armored vehicles came again. Wenceslaus Square was cleared, and the police and military advanced perhaps fifty yards up side streets. In at least one side street, army trucks were parked, and civilians climbed on them as vantage points. The drivers ignored them! When it appeared that the police and military were advancing from the square, the demonstrators would run first, then look back, then stop running and return. But it was impossible to return all the way to the square. For the rest of the day the troops, "people's militia" and police groups and trucks, parked so as to block streets, prevented almost everyone from going past certain points toward the square. Yet the demonstration's purpose was accomplished: the city was paralyzed (though it was not "in business" anyhow). Everything funnels into Wenceslaus Square, and only the authorities would have benefited had the demonstrators moved to a less central place, where they could have been conveniently ignored.

Rocks were thrown at the police: Prague's mosaic sidewalks are ideal as a rock supply. Without exception, those who threw the rocks were young people—doubtless working off their accumulated frustrations.

But here, the issue of pacifism comes to the fore: First, older persons repeatedly implored the rock-throwers to stop! And they were right: it did sometimes provoke a violent response, including clubbing, tear gas and arrests. It also was what the authorities needed to strengthen their hand, as will be explained below.

To the credit of the military, at least some stood still under rock throwing, later calmly gathering up the rocks and putting them in a corner. On other occasions, the response was tear gas, sometimes thrown from special guns mounted on armored cars. The crowd threw tear-gas cannisters back when possible, and while the people could run from the gas, the soldiers could

not! The next day, incidentally, tear gas was still strong in the square, which otherwise was back to "normal."

By dusk, the authorities were more strict and drastic. Several windows had been broken by rocks—or by tear-gas cannisters fired by the armored cars. And orders had been defied long enough to cause tempers to be short. Ironically, there was action on "Peace" Square, where an armored car raced up and down, aiming hoses at civilians, who retreated when it neared, advanced when it moved on. A barricade was erected there later and an empty streetcar sent hurtling toward the police: it hit an open switch, turned down a different track and toppled over, however.

The authorities announced the next day that they had achieved complete control and had restored law and order in the early hours Friday. But the restoration of law and order was not of the authorities' making and after Thursday the city returned to "normal" solely because this had been a spontaneous one-day protest which did not continue because it had in the main accomplished its purpose. To the end, the military did not venture anywhere singly—especially away from the protection of military vehicles and the city streets; nor did they venture out onto the river bridges, whither they were taunted by the crowd!

Rumors existed that the next move would be a slowdown, if the government did not "get the message," and accordingly a decree was published detailing drastic penalties for failure to do one's assigned job. The "people's militia" would be busy!

As mentioned above, older persons spoke out against rock-throwing. Such violent actions did indeed work to the advantage of the Husak regime, exaggerated though its claims may be. The violence was just enough to "justify" police action, but not so much that the regime might have had to call for Soviet aid. Had the demonstrations been completely nonviolent, the liberal forces might have emerged with considerable strength. But, of course, people's

nerves were taut, and there is a sense of desperation after thirty years of suppression. Although the pacifist tradition goes back centuries, so does the military tradition.

The role of the military and police is of particular interest. The notorious "people's militia" has reappeared on the scene after a long absence. These truly ugly old men are the party's private army—which does not speak well for the party. They bring to mind what one has read—in regime-approved books—of the down-and-outers so successfully recruited by the Nazis. Incidentally, cries of "Gestapo" particularly infuriated the authorities, although they for their part claim that there is a vast body of German revanchist-supported, anti-socialist, counter-revolutionary forces here. In general, the military showed considerable restraint. On the other hand, they have come a considerable way from their outright aid to those who opposed the invasion last year. Were they not ordered to shoot because the authorities knew they would refuse? A hypothetical question, perhaps, but with this much change already, one wonders what next year will bring.

But is all this unique? Police brutality, quisling regimes, invasion in the night. Isn't our own behavior in Asia and Latin America, to mention only these, cut from the same cloth? What can we do about it all? Surely we must at least bring it to the light of day. We can then at least try to set our own house in order. Perhaps by so doing we can in some way help others.

AMERICAN ABROAD

## *REVIEW*

### A STUDY OF EXISTENTIALISM

AT the suggestion of at least two readers, we have been turning the pages of William Barrett's *Irrational Man* (Anchor, \$1.75), which seems a book of exceptional usefulness to any reader seeking orientation in respect to the intellectual movements of the age. Few writers have the ability for apt generalization equal to that shown by this teacher of philosophy, and his background in the entire cultural tradition of the West enables him to move around freely and with an assurance that the reader is likely to trust. Of necessity, all such books represent but "one man's opinion," yet the minimizing tone of this expression signifies little more than a general ignorance of the nature of philosophic inquiry. The modern preference for "fact" is responsible for the mood of disdain toward the uncertainties intrinsic in all inquiries concerning *meaning*. It amounts to superficial contempt for the very necessities of individuality, and resists the challenge of thought to a faith which ought never to have existed in the first place—the expectation that accounts of meaning can be rendered with the same exactitude as an engineer's report on the properties and dimensions of a physical object.

It should not be inaccurate to say that unless uncertainties or risks are present, nothing "philosophical" has been offered. This idea might be amplified by proposing that a truly philosophical statement requires a contribution from the one who considers it—that all forms of philosophical verity involve the *volition* of the human being who pursues cognition of them. Books on philosophy, then, are, in the nature of things, never more than sources of the "raw materials" of philosophy. Yet some are much better than others. The poorest ones are those which conceal the fact that progress in philosophy depends entirely upon the self-reliance, imagination, and motives of the reader.

Thinking of such books in this way helps to generate a legitimate sort of expectation. It is no longer depressing to reflect that another man, devoting himself to the same general area which Mr. Barrett covers, would inevitably write a different

book. One would no longer take up a book on "philosophy" in the hope of getting the "real facts" about the meaning of human existence, but would read rather with the intention of finding out what sort of wondering the writer means to and does in fact provoke.

Mr. Barrett is especially helpful in showing the remoteness of modern man from certain of the immediacies of life:

We are so used to the fact that we forget it or fail to perceive that the man of the present day lives on a level of abstraction altogether beyond the man of the past. When the contemporary man in the street with only an ordinary education quickly solves an elementary problem in arithmetic, he is doing something which for a medieval mathematician—an expert—would have required hours. No doubt, the medieval man would have produced along with his calculation a rigorous proof of the whole process; it does not matter that the modern man does not *know* what he is doing, so long as he can manipulate abstractions easily and efficiently. The ordinary man today answers complicated questionnaires, fills out tax forms, performs elaborate calculations, which the medieval man was never called upon to do—and all this merely in the normal routine of being a responsible citizen within a mass society. Every step forward in mechanical technique is a step in the direction of abstraction. This capacity for living easily and familiarly at an extraordinary level of abstraction is the source of modern man's power. With it he has transformed the planet, annihilated space, and trebled the world's population. But it is also a power which has, like everything human, its negative side, in the desolating sense of rootlessness, vacuity, and the lack of concrete feeling that assails modern man in his moments of real anxiety.

Continuing, Mr. Barrett shows that the practical effect, psychologically speaking, of all this abstraction is the externalization of life, which is typified in the pseudo-realities of mass communication and modern journalism. His comment here seems of particular value:

Journalism has become a great god of the period, and gods have a way of ruthlessly and demoniacally taking over their servitors. In thus becoming a state of mind—as Kierkegaard prophesied it would do, writing with amazing clairvoyance more than a century ago—journalism

enables people to deal with life more and more at second hand. Information usually consists of half-truths, and "knowledgeability" becomes a substitute for real knowledge. Moreover, popular journalism has by now extended its operations into what were previously considered to be the strongholds of culture—religion, art, philosophy. Everyman walks around with a pocket digest of culture in his head. The more competent and streamlined journalism becomes, the greater its threat to the public mind—particularly in a country like the United States. It becomes more and more difficult to distinguish the second hand from the real thing, until most people end by forgetting there is such a distinction. The very success of technique engenders a whole style of life for the period, which subsists purely on externals. What lies behind those externals—the human person, in its uniqueness and its totality—dwindles to a shadow and a ghost.

In his *Man in the Modern Age* Karl Jaspers has diagnosed all these depersonalizing forces within modern society so completely that they hardly need pointing out here. Jaspers sees the historical meaning of existential philosophy as a struggle to awaken in the individual the possibilities of an authentic and genuine life, in the face of the great modern drift toward a standardized mass society.

Well, these are some of the generalizations of which we spoke. These things need only to be said for their importance to become apparent. But what kind of "truth" is in them? Where is the verification for such matters? It comes from our pain. These are diagnostic truths.

Mr. Barrett returns to this critical theme again and again. In the latter part of his book, he says:

. . . it is not so much rationalism as abstractness that is the existentialists' target; and the abstractness of life in this technological and bureaucratic age is now indeed something to reckon with. The last gigantic step forward in the spread of technologism has been the development of mass art and mass media of communication: the machine no longer fabricates only material products; it also makes minds. Millions of people live by the stereotypes of mass art, the most virulent form of abstractness, and their capacity for any kind of human reality is fast disappearing. If here and there in the lonely crowd (discovered by Kierkegaard long before David Riesman) a face is lit by a human gleam, it quickly goes vacant again in the hypnotized stare of the TV screen. When an eclipse

of the moon was televised some years ago, E. B. White wrote in *The New Yorker* that he felt some drastic turning point in history had arrived: people could have seen the real thing by looking out of their windows, but instead they preferred looking at the *reflection* of it on the screen. Kierkegaard condemned the abstractness of his time, calling it an Age of Reflection, but what he seems chiefly to have had in mind was the abstractness of the professorial intellectual, seeing not real life but the reflection of it in his own mind. We, however have fabricated for our time a new kind of abstractness, on a mass scale; through our extraordinary mastery of technique we provide a ready-made reflection in place of the real, and not for university dons but for the millions. Our journey unto untruth has gone farther than Kierkegaard could have imagined.

Various kinds of sickness come from the cultural façades constructed of this "untruth," which now affect entire populations. And various movements demanding a restoration of health, authenticity, and natural immediacy are under way. But the crucial questions, "What is health? authenticity? and natural immediacy?" have no reliable answers. These are philosophical questions. Men know mainly that what they long for must be very different from what they have. The truth of the matter is that only our pain and the symptoms of our various illnesses have a clear, verifiable reality, so that we are able to define them, give them objectivity, and to speak of them with a certain factual brilliance. But identification of our ills is not philosophy. It is only a necessary preparation for philosophy. It was the first of the Buddha's four holy truths, dealing with the hidden as well as the obvious sources of human pain.

Perhaps the most important conclusion from all this is that our thought about remedies is infected with the ills we hope to overcome, and that thinking about health and goodness of life needs to be founded upon realities more enduring than theoretical extrapolations of the opposites of pain. This is a way of proposing that discovery of meaning will not reward a search which is shaped by flight from pain, and that truth is not so much "discovered" as *created* out of the ordeals of experience.

## **COMMENTARY**

### **THE POWERS OF MIND**

THE delighting simplicity of Henry Anderson's lead article brings a natural question: *Why* does what he says seem almost an "original" idea? Few experiences have the universality of the one he describes—watching and participating in the dawning humanity of an infant—yet this evidence of the uniqueness of man is largely ignored in learned theories of human behavior and human nature.

Why must we have "special studies," such as those pursued at the London Tavistock Center described in "Children," in order to persuade ourselves of primary human truths?

Doubtless the point of William Barrett's observations in *Irrational Man* (quoted in Review) has application here. The externalization of life through increasing reliance on mechanical techniques has led to withering misapprehensions of the idea of "truth." We have come to think that we do not really "know" anything unless it has been passed through the filters of intellectual abstraction, approved by a jury of scientists or scholars, and then published in handbooks declaring the "reliable knowledge" which the culture permits us to accept.

So, when anyone with the daring to rely on his own observations writes well about what he sees, it has the quality of a fresh revelation. And then, all too often, as Mr. Anderson says, the artful use of abstraction leads to designed imitations of such experiences to provide intellectually approved modes of "self-discovery," and people "go to encounter groups in search of their lost human nature."

We might note, also, that both the horrors and hardships noted in this week's "Children" are traceable to the imposition of political abstractions on natural ways of human life. The literally insane standards of value which result in unspeakable crimes on a mass scale would be impossible

without the perverted abstractions on which they are based.

Apparently, the unique powers of mind belonging to human beings make possible both the highest achievements and the most diabolical excesses. How can man develop effective checks on the misuse of these powers? How can he guard himself against the delusions of grandeur which "prosperity" in manipulative skills so easily produces? These are questions for which a civilization schooled only in hedonistic and utilitarian principles has no answer.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves THE NEED FOR TRUST

A READER who has given many years of a long life to study of the growth-processes in human beings has set down briefly in a letter what seem to him some of the conditions that will face the coming generation. His thoughts are in harmony with the spontaneous and widespread movement in search of forms of social and individual life which have a human scale, and for conditions under which choice and determination can make themselves felt. He writes:

Young people should go deep in their thinking and try to discover, and then to examine, the assumptions of our civilization, and then experiment with working out new ones.

Young people should not be discouraged by the inevitable slowness of building a new civilization. From three to five generations, at least, are involved.

After all, years of devotion go into helping a single individual to come to fruitful maturity. Careful studies of child psychology at the Tavistock Psychiatric Center, in London, which lasted over fifteen years and traced the lives of individual children, have shown that those who were deprived of motherly affection and love up to their third year developed into teen-agers who were suspicious and difficult in all human relations. Children surrounded by loving parental care up to their seventh year developed into normal people. One conclusion from this might be that girls who marry and have children can by loving care of their children feel that they are also helping to build a better civilization. This is no negligible thing to do, in other words, and it affords deep dignity to what might seem humdrum situations.

It is contributing, one might say, to the primary foundation of trust in human life. The absolute necessity of this foundation is too much taken for granted, these days, perhaps because the breakdowns of trust at other levels and in other relationships are so painfully obvious to us. Meanwhile, the "loving care" which requires practical wisdom as well as spontaneous kinship affection is seriously neglected. The non-physical or "cultural" environment given the young is seen

by them as a barren and betraying affair. J. Bronowski, in a recent article, said that the Generation Gap ought to be called the Hypocrisy Gap, which is a way of speaking of it as evidence of a failure of trust.

The young are often blamed for the improvised and impractical ways they choose for altering the patterns of their lives. What they do seems so *rootless*, so neglectful of plans for a secure future. But this is blaming them mainly for being young. It is a narrowly "adult" complaint and usually made without recognition that the need for change is felt by the young as an unavoidable existential necessity.

What is commonly overlooked is the fact that quite adult responsibilities have been heaped on the young long before they have had practical experience in meeting responsibilities of any sort. The call to fight an unwanted war is one of them. What other "adult" responsibilities come to them too soon? There is the overwhelming one of needing to try to create the kind of society which would not have so many terrible moral contradictions. They cannot even begin to do this, they feel, by doing what their fathers did. Planning to be "good providers" seems a hollow objective for boys who sense the emptiness behind the "affluence" of the times.

Sometimes it is useful for people who feel they have remediable troubles, insoluble dilemmas, to give some attention to the troubles and dilemmas of others. We have two books that might serve in this way, but one of them seems too filled with horror to be of any help; yet it probably ought to be mentioned. *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, published by McGraw-Hill, is made up of "Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-44." Terezin was a vestibule in Czechoslovakia to the Nazi gas chambers, and practically none of these children lived. Of a total of 15,000 under the age of fifteen that passed through the camp, only about a hundred survived. All that can be said is that the drawings are like other children's drawings, filled

with the inextinguishable charm and wonder of the young. The verses have the same quality.

The other book, probably not available through ordinary channels (published by Kenkyusha in Tokyo, 1953-54), is *Echoes from a Mountain School*, edited by Seikyo Muchaku. It is made up of little essays by young people, six in all, who went to a rural school in Japan. They are so "good" that the book became a best-seller. Their quality was created out of "nothing"—out of deprivation and hardship. The teacher, a young man of twenty-four who edited the book, explains how they came to be written. He begins with an account of the school:

A miserable old thatched roof building, it stands, waiting for rain and snow to pour in through its cracks and crevices. It is utterly devoid of any kind of apparatus. We have not a single printed map, not a bit of equipment for science, no reference books, just the textbook for each lesson, and nothing for the teacher but a piece of chalk and an ancient blackboard. Yet the pupils love their school and make heroic sacrifices for it.

I am most anxious that these children should know about social conditions in their country and especially in their own community and that they should become interested in improving them. Simply reading their text books on Social Science did not seem sufficient, so I conceived the idea of having the pupils write school compositions about their own special problems and their thoughts on life in general.

All but one of the contributors are fifteen years old. One essay, "We Must Have Time to Think and Study," tells of the struggle to stay alive, working to earn a little money, and then to do a little school work. It is the story of a boy whose father must work "night and day" simply to feed his family. The lives of these young are continually invaded by necessities which can have no meaning for them:

Why is it that, since the war, my father and others sell their charcoal on the black market? The reason is simple. They can get more for it. If they sold it at the Government price we would not be able to live. The other day, our teacher had us calculate how much it costs to produce charcoal. A bale of high grade charcoal costs one hundred and eighty yen

to produce, while the Government requires us to sell it at one hundred and fifty yen. What is there to do but sell it in the black market where you can get two hundred? . . .

Our school life, too, is unsatisfactory. We want to study but we often have to miss school to help on the farm. If there is not enough money for text books, the boys have to drag logs down the mountain for charcoal, until they have earned enough money to pay for them. I wonder if the additional three years of compulsory education will do the children much good. During these years our parents complain constantly and make us work, instead of sending us to school. Those of us who can go to school have to hurry there and back between times for chores. I don't know what is wrong, but there is something, and I am going to find out.

A fourteen-year-old boy reflects on the death of his mother, who worked herself to death. In her last hours the dying woman continually muttered questions to the children about preparing food. A family of five had to live on what was grown on two thirds of an acre, and it was just not possible. Another boy, fifteen, thinks of the time in 1944 when his elderly father was called to war. Not until 1947 did the son have word of his death. "Then I knew that father would never come back. I wanted to cry, but how could I cry? Was I not the head of the family?"

What grows on the reader of this book is the ruthless intrusion upon the young of disorders and irrational requirements which accomplish pitiless, impersonal reduction of their lives.

This is but a single and quite fragmentary view of the responsibilities which come to the young before they are ready. Yet it seems an identifying characteristic of these times that *everyone* is confronted by responsibilities for which he is unprepared. It is a situation which makes peculiarly difficult conditions for the restoration of trust. Yet what else is there to do?

## *FRONTIERS* "The Long Road"

THIS is the title of a book published by Arthur E. Morgan back in 1936. It has in it the seeds of an inspiration which, if put to work, might help to shape a great future for America and for the world. This simple and unpretentious volume is recalled here for the reason that the need for what it proposes now seems much more widely recognized than in 1936. Something of what *The Long Road* contains is suggested by a paragraph from its foreword by Dorothy Canfield Fisher:

There are, after all, many, many Americans left in the United States. They will be better ones after they have read this vitalizing statement of ideals, this stirring call to realize them in American life. To read this reminder that character, human character, is a vitamin as indispensable to the health of society in the new mechanized high-speed modern world as it has always been in every other version of human society, is to see as by the focussing of the lenses of binoculars, firm and familiar reality emerge clear and true from a wild whirling confusion, the proportions what they have always been—though on another scale. By putting upon us, on every one of us, his fair share of responsibility for the common good, he frees us from the fatalism of the multitude and the mechanical, gives us back our human dignity, and with dignity, strength, courage, faith in living.

This is a lot to say about any book, but it is all justified. (*The Long Road* is available in paperback for a dollar from Community Service Inc., Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387).

The very intensity of the present quest for social alternatives is beginning to produce more of the kind of thinking which Arthur Morgan initiated long ago. The changes, it is gradually becoming evident, must come in individuals before they can be reflected in organization. The *ills* are known to us in social terms, but the causes lie in individual life and habits, and it is there that remedies must be applied. This recognition, it seems to us, is half the battle—the greater half. As it grows, it will be necessary only to get to work. The modes of expression found by this

recognition are diverse, as they should be. One such expression comes to us as a pamphlet, *The Servant as Leader*, by Robert K. Greenleaf, published (at a dollar) by the Center for Applied Studies, 17 Dunster Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02138. The author says in one place:

The future society may be just as mediocre as this one. It may be worse. And no amount of restructuring or changing the system or tearing it all down in the hope that something better will grow will change this. There may be a better system than the one we now have, it is hard to know. But, whatever it is, if the people to lead it well are not there, a better system will not produce a better society. Many people finding their wholeness through many and varied contributions make a good society. These essays are concerned with but one facet: able servants with potential to lead must lead. Not much else counts if this does not happen.

If an able person is aware of his servant stature and his leadership potential, what does he do to prepare himself to lead? A few suggestions:

Begin by seeing the pervasive mediocrity in positions of influence for what it is—one man at a time not the "system." See the mediocre man as not necessarily evil, but simply a man in a leadership spot who has no "lead," who does not see what needs to be done any more clearly, if as well, as the people he is trying to lead. . . . Don't blame the mediocre man. Don't blame the system. Blame the right man for not being there and resolve that, a few years hence, such blame will not be heaped on you.

There is some psychological difficulty here, since the best leaders are often men who have to have leadership thrust upon them. Mr. Greenleaf tries to meet this by hyphenating "leader" with "servant," and by urging that leadership be "demythologized," so that men will be honored for their integrating function, for what they contribute to the whole, not because of their status. Yet the fact remains that good leaders become good by not thinking of themselves as leaders. But even if Mr. Greenleaf's pamphlet is haunted by this paradox, it contains much sound sense, and has the indispensable virtue of starting at the right end—with individuals—for the achievement of common goals.

An enormous amount of work has been done by Paul J. Marks in putting together *A New Community—Format for Health, Contentment, Security*, issued by the Questers Project, 37700 Van Fleet, Cathedral City, Calif. 92234, a division of Youth Resources, Inc., at \$4.00 a copy. This is a large book of 135 pages, filled with information helpful for thinking about, planning, and establishing an intentional community. The author brings to this compendium of practical plans a background of familiarity with utopian literature. The historical model is the Hunza way of life, but all the suggestions made are capable of modification. Ralph Borsodi's *Flight from the City* is cited early in the text, and his ideas appear later in the general outline of an actual community. There is musing discussion of the major features of community life, indicating the choices to be made. Space is given to various forms of livelihood that may be undertaken in community, with emphasis on the unique opportunities for education which the community environment provides. There is plenty of discussion of the sort of problems that will be encountered. An interesting feature is a large sketch-plan of what an ideal community might include and how it could be laid out. A selective bibliography introduces the literature on community and important related subjects. A number of existing communities are described. Ten possible regions where communities might locate are considered, with evaluation of each one. The clear intention of this book is to stimulate and assist in the formation of intentional communities.