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THE DEFICIENCY OF THE PRESENT

AT the conclusion of a discussion of student unrest in *Science* for March 27, Leon Eisenberg, professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and chief of psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, has this to say:

> Unlike the last generation, this one rejects ideologies, capitalist and communist alike. The young insist on unconditional morality, a goal no society has yet attained, and they demand it now. Their insistence on immediate change together with their disdain for tactics and practicality, their emphasis on resurrection through personal witness, and their substitution of rhetoric for the hard work of politics, understandable though these manifestations may be, jeopardize the realization of the very social aims behind which they rally.
>
> Irresponsible calls for social revolution when the social conditions for change do not yet exist can endanger the very possibility of change.

Two comments suggest themselves: one, that Dr. Eisenberg's summary is probably quite accurate; second, that it does not help us very much. Fortunately, he adds:

> But perhaps we have been addressing ourselves to the wrong question all along. Perhaps we should be asking, not why there is student unrest, but why there is no *adult* unrest, except in response to students. Why are we content to tolerate an immoral and futile war? Why do we as physicians permit health services to be cut back while $100 million each day is committed to the war in Vietnam? Is it perhaps because we have been complacent that the young are frantic?

A tentative reply to these "why" questions is provided by René Dubos in *Reason Awake:*

> Despite our scientific and technological triumphs, we suffer from a loss of nerve and have become a conservative society satisfied with continuing our present course. We are no longer willing to construct models of possible futures that we really desire, despite the fact that our willingness to let science and technology proceed on their own course generates nightmares of reason.

One might also say that it is these "nightmares of reason" which are driving the young frantic. We could add this, and supply a detailed account of the present paralysis of vast numbers of people in the face of spreading disaster, but we still would not provide ourselves with any real help. "Failure of nerve," incidentally, is a phrase now given the opposite of its original meaning, when, years ago, it was the title of a symposium in the *Partisan Review.* It was then applied to literary deserters from the ranks of believers in tough-minded scientific method. Dr. Dubos, however, means that we lack the nerve to challenge the value-free basis of our scientific and technological society.

Why should there be a "failure of nerve"? The easiest answer comes from the conventional moralist, who would doubtless say that modern man lacks moral courage. Again this seems accurate enough, but *why* is moral courage so rare as to have no place in what are termed "objective" social studies? Details and historical analysis aside, we can certainly say that one reason for the absence of moral courage is the general disbelief that it exists. This is a term which has little currency in our cultural communications. It is a rhetorical expression which may occur in old-fashioned reproaches or religious oratory, but has no place in working conceptions of human nature or theories of education. The ancient question, Can virtue be taught?, has not been seriously asked for centuries.

The unusual few who possess moral courage, for whom it becomes a ruling principle in their lives, are wondered at like sports of nature. It is a quality without a rational ground. It is probably natural, therefore, that those who demand some equivalent of moral courage in human behavior often reveal logical weaknesses in their contentions—as for example Sartre, whose conception of human freedom, with consequent individual responsibility, has been subjected to devastating criticism in recent years. For the same reason Dr. Eisenberg is able to say

what he does about the insistence of the young on "unconditional morality."

How, then, would one go about building a rational foundation under the idea of moral courage? The first step, it seems obvious, would be to show that it does in fact exist—that it is a quality potential in human nature, not derivative or a result of "conditioning," but a thing in itself. But what if realities of this sort are not demonstrated by "argument"? At the end of *Crime and Punishment,* Raskolnikov, now in a Siberian prison, finds himself at last. Over him has come a realization of the meaning of the "freedom" he has been seeking, and he tries to formulate it to himself in intellectual terms.

> But he could not think for long together of anything that evening, and he could not have analyzed anything consciously; he was simply feeling. Life had stepped into the place of theory and something quite different would work itself out in his mind.

Something like this probably happens in recognition of all the existential realities in human beings. When their presence is felt, they displace and dissolve the intellectual paradoxes which are our only means of speaking of these things.

Yet when there is sickness—especially when there is moral sickness—we need to speak of realities like moral courage, and if we do not have language for speaking of them it becomes necessary to invent it. There are of course old ways of thinking about ourselves in heroic terms. The Platonic philosophy is filled with high conceptions of human potentiality, but Plato postulated a spiritual origin for mankind; he makes the moral struggle the chief drama of man's life; and Platonism includes an evolutionary theory which requires palingenesis or reincarnation. Actually, all the high religions of the past provide means of thinking about the reality of moral courage, but their root-ideas are not now a part of the currency of thought. Present-day religious language for thinking about ourselves has no metaphysical discipline. Terms like "soul" have lost their transcendental implication, obtaining what meaning they possess from the arts and from humanitarian ethics and social doctrines. For rational structure concerning the self, or self-knowledge, we must go to psychology, and this means to its sources in psychoanalysis. But what we find there, if we are in search of a rational ground for such ideas as "moral courage," is far from rewarding. Except for individual therapists and psychologists like Karen Homey and A. H. Maslow, the so-called "moral qualities" are not objects of study among psychoanalytical theorists.

Yet what can be thought of as a beginning in this direction is made in a current study, *Ego and Instinct* (Random House, $10.00), by Daniel Yankelovich and William Barrett. This book is probably the best available survey of the intellectual circumstances and implications of the work of Freud and later psychoanalysts. Subtitled "The Psychoanalytic View of Human Nature—Revised," it is a clear attempt to free psychoanalysis from the confinements of nineteenth-century scientific assumptions. These writers find the humanistic weakness of Freud in the inadequacy of his concept of the "ego." Summarizing the Freudian doctrine, they say:

> (1) The Freudian ego clearly starts off its career as a weaker force than the instincts from which its energies must be borrowed. The ego, growing out of the id, is a secondary growth, while the id, the seat of the instinctual drives, is primary. The id stands for millions of years of primate evolution, preceded by billions of years of evolution of nonhuman life on the planet. The ego, being derivative, must borrow its energy from the id . . .
>
> (2) Freud tended to think of the ego as devoid of goals needs, and purposes of its own. In Freud's work, the ego is regarded as a means only; it is the "servant" of id and superego. In his final statement in the *Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940), Freud repeats essentially what he said in 1923 about the ego as servant: "An action by the ego is as it should be if it satisfies simultaneously the demands of the id, of the superego and of reality—that is to say, if it is able to reconcile their demands with one another." In this same final work, Freud also repeats a conclusion that remained, with one exception, unchanged in his thinking for over fifty years: namely, that the pleasure principle, the regulating principle of the id, is the fundamental law of psychic life. This conclusion reinforces the primacy of the id, for Freud adds that

> the ego too serves the id by striving after pleasure and seeking to avoid unpleasure.

While Freud once suggested that the ego "might" have independent energies of its own, he never developed this idea, and the deep pessimism of the Freudian position and of Freud himself (see his correspondence with Einstein about war) is not difficult to understand in the light of this view. As Yankelovich and Barrett put it:

> In summary, then, the Freudian ego is weak (1) because it is conceived as a secondary development, it evolves out of the id and borrows its energies from the instinctual drives; (2) because it has no goals of its own but as servant to the other stronger psychic functions borrows its goals from them; (3) because it represents the individual's puny life experience pitted against the greater force of millions of years of evolution represented by the instinctual drives of the id; and (4) because it has to fight against the negative force of the death instinct.

When we reflect on the enormous influence of Freudian concepts on literature in general since the 1920's, one may find in it at least a partial explanation for the passivity of the present, for the sense of helplessness or "failure of nerve" in relation to external forces which seem far beyond our control. Yet to stop with this observation would be to ignore the roots of the resistance to this effect, which may be recognized in Freud's earliest disciples and even in Freud himself. Ira Progoff's book, *The Death and Rebirth of Psychology* (Julian, 1956), traces this counter tendency in the work of Adler, Jung, and Rank. The author feels able to declare, in his first sentence: "Although it began as part of the protest against religion, the net result of modern psychology has been to reaffirm man's experience of himself as a spiritual being." *Ego and Instinct* is also a part of this counter tendency, being mainly an effort to set aside once and for all the mechanistic assumptions and reductionism which made Freud's work so paradoxical in effect—since it must be admitted that Freud strove to *free* his patients from bondage to their psychological ills. "Freedom," according to Yankelovich and Barrett, "is a mode of being, a form of the person's total relatedness to himself, to others, and to his world." Their book is an effort to provide a rational ground in psychoanalysis for the idea of human freedom:

> We come to the most significant meaning of human freedom as revealed by psychoanalytical experience. Angyal used the term "homonomy" to describe man's profound desire to belong to something larger and more significant than himself. The contrasting term is "autonomy," the independence of self. The sickness that is neurosis, at least in our times, is largely a cutting off of relatedness to meanings outside the narcissistic self, leading to withdrawal, self-involvement, alienation, and a profound dislocation of the human spirit.

Now comes a particularly interesting comment:

> A passing reference to the human spirit in the present era calls for comment. The term is suspect to many of us, the notion of spirit has no place in science and it has all but disappeared from contemporary philosophy. The long-standing secular stance of our culture tends to make us regard the "spiritual" as a vestigial remain of sectarian religion.
>
> Yet Freud himself—in that conversation with Ludwig Binswanger which we have taken as a dramatic and pivotal episode for understanding the history of psychoanalysis—speaks of the "spiritual" (*geistige*). "Man has always known that he has spirit," he remarked to the younger psychiatrist, "it has been for me to show him that he is instinctual." Confronting the contemporary situation, we are hardly likely to agree with him that man today knows he has spirit. In fact, a large part of psychoanalytic ego psychology is devoted to recapturing qualities of the human person which Freud simply took for granted in his reference to spirit but which we can no longer take for granted today.

Elsewhere the circumstances of this conversation are described:

> In the conversation with Binswanger . . . the two men began by discussing a similar case: a patient known to them both seemed to make definite progress all along the way, but was unable to take the last decisive step toward cure, and so succumbed to a self-destructive neurosis. Binswanger ventured to suggest that the failure might be understood as a "deficiency of spirit." Then, as Binswanger reports it, "I could hardly believe my ears when I heard him (Freud) say, 'Yes, spirit (*geist*) is everything'." What Freud is acknowledging as tragic here is clearly not the failure of a mechanism but a defeat of the whole human person.

What, then, is "ego strength"? Freud apparently had little hope of finding out how it could be increased. In one of his last *papers, Analysis: Terminable and Interminable,* he said: "What we have to say about strengthening the ego will prove to be very inadequate." This, in the framework of our present inquiry, amounts to the judgment that virtue can *not* be taught. In 1937, when Freud wrote this paper, no great importance was attached to the idea by his readers. Today, however, the intellectual climate has changed. The idea of ego-strength, while still constituting a mystery, is beginning to get attention. Yankelovich and Barrett have written this book as a corrective of Freudian doctrines, and dozens of social critics are condemning the "apathy" of the older generation, which drives the young into becoming followers of Pied Pipers of various sorts.

The authors of *Ego and Instinct, you* could say, are doing what they can, along with others, to "recapture qualities of the human person which Freud simply took for granted," as a means of increasing "the best chance our society has for self-renewal and for correcting the historical overdevelopment of the dehumanizing, impersonalizing, compartmentalizing, logicizing effects of a one-sided philosophy." It must be admitted, however, that while speaking of man as a "whole human person" is a considerable improvement over reductionist psychological techniques and analysis, it is a very weak replacement for Socratic ethics, the "ego psychology" of Platonic philosophy, and the Greek conception of the virtues. And while the psycho-dynamics of some of the high religions are experiencing a slow revival, the intellectual climate is receptive only to devitalized abstractions. The characterological bankruptcy of the present reveals the need for a revival of ideal conceptions, but there seems little awareness of how feeble they remain in the form of intellectual generalizations. One thinks of the manifest strength generated among the Buddhists in war-torn Vietnam, then wonders how secular humanism can accomplish something similar. That there is an intense longing for ego strength in people seems obvious from the popularity, over the years, of the novels of Ayn Rand, and of other symbols and surrogates of individual achievement. The shallowness of most of these symbols is overlooked in the hunger for a larger sense of beinghood, and nearly all the sources of satisfaction lie outside the established or reputable avenues to education and attainment. It is as though the formation of human character had not been a serious objective in American education for at least a hundred years.

There are also subtler, subjective difficulties involved. Martin Buber has written acutely concerning the weaknesses of conventional moral education:

> . . . if I am concerned with the education of character, everything becomes problematic. I try to explain to my pupils that envy is despicable, and at once I feel the secret resistance of those who are poorer than their comrades. I try to explain that it is wicked to bully the weak, and at once I see a suppressed smile on the lips of the strong. I try to explain that lying destroys life, and something frightful happens: the worst habitual liar of the class produces a brilliant essay on the destructive power of lying. I have made the fatal mistake of *giving instruction* in ethics, and what I said is accepted as current coin of knowledge; nothing of it is transformed into character-building substance.

What then must be done? The only thing remaining, conceivably, is to provide the raw materials for *self-instruction* in ethics; and this might mean, in our case, offering alternate conceptions of the self which may be able, potentially, to call out the heroic resources hidden in the depths of human beings. The fault of the age in this crucial area may not be in our failure to "teach" spiritual truth or moral doctrine, but in making the philosophic sources of all such teachings seem irrelevant, unimportant, and indeed "dead," to modern man.

REVIEW
GANDHI'S MEANS

GANDHI dreamed of the world of tomorrow as a society based on non-violence. He admitted that its realization would be difficult, but he contended that it was possible. Toward the end of his life he said of this ideal:

> It may seem a distant goal indeed, an unattainable Utopia; it is often criticized as such. But I do not think it is in the least unobtainable, since it can be worked for here and now. I believe it to be perfectly possible for an individual to adopt the way of life of the future—the non-violent way—without having to wait for others to do so. And if an individual can observe a certain rule of conduct, cannot a group of individuals do the same? Cannot whole groups of peoples—whole nations?

As to the timetable of this change, he wrote:

> I think it is necessary to emphasize this fact: No one need wait for any one else to adopt a humane and enlightened course of action. Men generally hesitate to make a beginning if they feel that the objective cannot be achieved in its entirety. It is precisely this attitude of mind that is the greatest obstacle to progress—an obstacle that each man, if he only wills it, can clear away himself, and so influence others.

Throughout his life Gandhi sought to show that it is always possible and desirable to "make a beginning" in this way of life. It was these beginnings on the part of individuals which interested him, and he saw no progress in activities which did not lead to them. He regarded the nonviolence which did not proceed from an inner conviction of its truth, and from strength rather than weakness, as of little value, or even a kind of fraud.

Understanding Gandhi is of immeasurable importance to all those who wish to work for a warless world and to sustain their efforts in this direction with rationally grounded hope. Yet it is not easy to understand Gandhi. While there are dozens of volumes made up of his writings, and probably hundreds of books about him and his ideas, the key to understanding Gandhi lies in the reader, not in all this reading material. Gandhi's strength lay in his indomitable faith in the potentialities for growth of all human beings, and this may be recognized as a kind of self-knowledge. While Gandhi worked for known historical objectives, these were never more than limited and imperfect embodiments of the growth which was his fundamental objective. The apparent paradox of many of his practical decisions is almost always dissolved by consideration of this larger concern. Quite plainly, he believed that if true growth could get under way, all lesser objectives would come about naturally, in time. His politics, one must say, was always the servant of the moral psycho-dynamics on which his life and all his work were based. Understanding this is the first step in understanding Gandhi.

Gandhi Through Western Eyes (New York: Asia House, $7.00) by Horace Alexander is a book of modest size (some 225 pages) which helps the reader to take this first step. It is a book, therefore, which could be widely used in the schools for the dual purpose of introducing the young to an extraordinary figure of modern history and as a study of the great psycho-moral dilemma of our age. There is no sentimentality or false optimism in Mr. Alexander's view of Gandhi. An English Quaker working in India, he first met the Indian leader in 1928, and in time became his friend. In some measure, at least, the book is a personal report. The strength and the fidelity of the report comes from intimate experience. There is enough detail to generate a sense of historical reality, enough quotation to provide the flavor of day-to-day events, and enough generalization to set the problem of the age to which Gandhi addressed himself, and which remains, today, for each one of us to recognize and meet. The point of the book is its invitation to the reader to inquire into the depth of Gandhi's conviction, the source of his courage, the temper of his determination, and to see the relation of these extraordinary qualities to his influence on the millions of India and on common folk throughout the world. What is it that enables one man to do all this? If there

could be more such men, what might be accomplished? These are questions which in fact Gandhi himself asked with his life, for which he sought or hoped to achieve working, practical answers in the lives of other men.

As for the "power" of non-violence on the stage of history, during the first phase of Gandhi's struggle in South Africa, the observations of Jan Smuts' secretary are initial testimony:

> I do not like your people, and do not care to assist them at all. But what am I to do? You help us in our days of need. How can we lay hands on you? I often wish you took to violence like the English strikers, and then we would know at once how to dispose of you. But you will not injure even the enemy. You desire victory by self-suffering alone, and never transgress your self-imposed limits of courtesy and chivalry. And that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness.

Gandhi worked for the political freedom of India, but as a means, not an end. "The main thing," he wrote, "was to rid the agriculturalists of their fear by making them realize that the officials were not the masters, but the servants of the people, inasmuch as they received their salaries from the taxpayer." But fearlessness was not the only objective. He wanted the people to be civil and kind, as well as courageous. Gandhi worked for political freedom for India so that the needs of the silent, illiterate villagers could be met by a government of their own countrymen. He was not interested, he said, "in substituting exploitation of the masses by brown men for exploitation by white men." Gandhi wanted free India's government to work for the interests of the primary producers in the villages, who carried all the rest on their backs:

> India must become strong by conquering her own weaknesses. This meant abolishing untouchability and other caste abuses; it meant bringing hygiene and true education to the villages; it meant better care for the masses of half-starved cattle; it meant bringing women into public life and giving them a part in the upbuilding of the new India; it meant that the several religious communities must learn mutual respect and understanding; it meant fighting against poverty in all its manifestations . . .
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> He had the economic needs of the half-starved Indian villagers constantly in mind; he cared far more about them than about any political issue, even the issue of independence. Indeed, I have heard him say that, if he believed that the British would really be single-minded in treating the problem of poverty as the first problem to be tackled in India, he would be happy to see them continue to rule India indefinitely, even though he might be the only Indian to ask them to stay. Though he hastened to add that he was convinced that this could never be, as every alien government was bound to make its own security its first concern.

In the early days of his movement, Gandhi found allies among Indian liberals, and sometimes among British liberals. These men all relied upon reason as the means of persuasion. And Gandhi, in meetings and conferences, always listened attentively to his opponents. He would willingly learn from them, on occasion. Mr. Alexander's comment is illuminating:

> Indeed, this very generosity towards his opponents was often alarming to his political colleagues. They never knew when he might come away from some talk with a British statesman—or, indeed, some much less important person—saying: "I must change my line of action. I have learnt something that I have overlooked."
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> So impressed was I by this endless patience in the use of the art of persuasion that I asked him one day why from time to time he abandoned the use of persuasion and adopted a policy of direct action. His reply was to this effect: "Because human beings are not always ready for persuasion. Their preconceptions may be so deeply-rooted that arguments do not touch them at all. Then, you must touch their feelings. Nothing else will change their minds."

Unlike the great majority of his political colleagues in India, Gandhi was profoundly concerned with the fitness of the Indian people for self-government. This was not a matter of gradually "taking over" from the British authority:

> To him, the essential evidence of fitness for self-government was shown by the capacity of the Indian people for self-discipline. And this could be shown in two main ways. Mass civil disobedience could show their ability to suffer without retaliation in resistance to the authority of the British Government. Beyond

> this, their ability could be tested, not by running local government under British tutelage, but rather by undertaking large-scale economic and social reforms under their own leadership. To Gandhi this latter activity, which he called "the constructive programme," was quite as vital an aspect of true ahimsa, or non-violent social life, as the nonviolent resistance to government. To many of his colleagues, it appeared to be nothing but a retreat from the political struggle.

Gandhi differed from most of his associates in being far more concerned with means than with ends. The means we use to gain our ends, he said, are at least within our control, while the ends are inevitably uncertain. Yet the means we use color and even determine our ends. Confidence in using just and considerate means grows out of long-term confidence in our fellow human beings. At the root of all such questions is the conviction one holds concerning the nature of man—not only man as he is, but man as he may become. Non-violence as a way of life is a means of demonstrating what men may become as they work toward the goal of a world in which peace and brotherhood prevail.

COMMENTARY
UNPROGRESS REPORT

RECENT newspaper reports give random evidence of the obstacles placed in the way of obviously necessary reforms in a technological society. The reforms may come, but only from the enterprise and persistence of individuals, who almost invariably encounter the resistance of established business and sometimes of political authority (see Frontiers). Industrial interests are probably the stubbornest enemies of needed change. Take for example the idea of a steam engine as replacement for the internal combustion gasoline engine in automobiles.

As recently as 1967, according to the Los Angeles *Times* for Aug. 23, the Ford Motor Co. turned down a steam-type engine designed for automobiles. Wallace Minto, head of Kinetics Corp., which has developed what is "essentially a steam engine but which uses a refrigerant gas, known commercially as freon, instead of water," said in an interview:

> "We went to Ford and asked them to test the theory of the engine. Ford had no argument with our facts. They said at the time that the engine would work. But they also said pollution was not a problem, and if it became a problem they would fix up the internal combustion engine."

But the difficulties of "fixing up" an internal combustion engine are almost insuperable, since its imperfect combustion results from an internal explosion, while the continuous burning in external combustion used for a steam engine. according to a Senate Commerce Committee report in 1969, "produces almost no pollution."

In a Senate committee pollution hearing in May, 1968, a General Motors vice-president concerned with research said that his company had tried for forty years to develop a practicable steam engine, with no success. In the spring of 1969 GM engineers exhibited at a company show in Michigan a steam car they had devised (in less than a year) which apparently did what it was supposed to do—display "the disadvantages of the steam engine." The details of this effort at "pioneering" are given in another Nader Study Group Report, *Vanishing Air* (Grossman paperback, 95 cents), by John C. Esposito:

> A steam-powered vehicle was bolted together in time for the show and later in the year it was also wheeled down to Washington so the President's Environment Council could see how it worked. The GM engineers had slapped together a Rube Goldberg. Despite the fact that steam engines are generally quieter than conventional types, the GM contraption made wheezing, clanging noises like an untuned calliope. Furthermore, even though all experts agree that the steam engine is less polluting than the internal combustion engine, this machine sputtered out huge quantities of smoke and soot. The engine weighed 500 pounds more than the conventional type because GM claimed that its concern for public safety had impelled it to design the engine to meet the American Society of Engineers Boiler Code—a code prepared for factory boilers. GM got its message across: a great deal more time was needed back at the drawing boards.

The Electrovan, also by GM, was a similar triumph of impracticality. Mr. Esposito comments:

> How does the world's largest auto maker—a company with a contract from NASA to help build an electrically powered lunar vehicle—botch things so badly? It works very hard at it. The company claims to be spending about forty million dollars annually on research related to air pollution control. But such results as its steam car and the Electrovan indicate that the thrust of the company's effort is toward discouraging talk of alternatives to the internal combustion engine, rather than searching earnestly for new propulsion sources. The industry's enormous monetary stake in perpetuating the present system explains why no major automobile executive has ever held out any promise for a mass-produced automobile not powered by the internal combustion engine.

It would no doubt cost a lot to retool automobile design for steam propulsion, but Mr. Esposito reminds us that GM grosses "about 2.5 million dollars an hour, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year."

Meanwhile, the Japanese manufacturers of the Datsun are reported to have purchased the

Asian rights on the freon-using engine turned down in 1967 by Ford. Meanwhile, again, *Newsweek* (Aug. 31) revealed that Edward C. Cole, president of General Motors, recently made a "very private" visit to Washington to talk to Sen. Gaylord Nelson, author of a bill that would outlaw the use of internal combustion engines by 1975. Mr. Cole claimed, *Newsweek* said, that "the industry needs more time to solve the problem."

The Nader study, *Vanishing Air,* is filled with interesting information on how the automotive industry has been using its time, in the past, in relation to this problem.

Another report tells how GM has been obliged to use some of its money. An AP dispatch of Aug. 13 relates that the company has agreed to pay Ralph Nader $425,000 to settle out of court his claim for damages in an "invasion of privacy" suit he brought four years ago. In this action, Nader charged General Motors with hiring private investigators to inquire into his personal life, the object of the investigation "to harass and intimidate" him so that he and other potential critics of GM products would be restrained from publicizing information about them. Nader's book, *Unsafe at Any Speed,* published in 1966, collected evidence to show that automobile manufacturers, including General Motors, were failing to design and build safe cars. The money received by Nader will be given to the Center for the Study of Responsive Law, which he founded, no doubt to finance similar research undertakings.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ON CROWDING

THERE are no doubt "objective facts" which need to be considered in planning education, just as there is a "physical" dimension in matters of health, and an "engineering" aspect of constructive social thinking. The primary subjective realities in all these areas cannot help but find definable reflection in material conditions when whole populations are considered.

It is well known, for example, that mental disorders increase in direct proportion to the concentration of population in urban areas. The same is true of social disorders. As long ago as 1914, a pioneer investigator of juvenile delinquency, Edward M. Barrows, reported on the formation of juvenile gangs in the streets of New York. After three years of study, he described his findings in a book, *The City Where Crime Is Play,* observing in conclusion:

> The child life of the New York tenement neighborhoods is a world apart. Twelve thousand children are arrested annually in New York. These are not exceptional children. Rather, they are typical children. They are mere exhibits drawn from the mass of those children who live in the congested neighborhoods, a small portion of the children who have done the same thing and have not been caught.
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> These children are not sub-normal, and they come from homes which are typical of whole enormous population districts. They are arrested for the only thing a child can do in the street, and they have no place but the street in which to do anything . . . Child crime in New York is built on play—wholesome, educational play—which the law treats as crime and which street conditions gradually pervert until innocent play becomes moral crime.

In his account of the growth of American urban areas, in *Culture of Cities,* Lewis Mumford wrote:

> The brakes of tradition and custom were lifted from the exploitation of the land; there was no limit to congestion, no limit to rent-raising, there was no standard of order or decency or beauty to dictate the division and layout and building up of urban structures. Only one controlling agent remained: profit . . . The two main elements in the new urban complex were the factory and the slum. By themselves they constituted what was called the town . . .
>
> Such urban masses could and did expand a hundred times without acquiring more than a shadow of the institutions that characterize a city in the sociological sense—that is, a place in which the social heritage is concentrated, and in which the possibilities of continual social intercourse and interaction raise to a higher potential the activities of men . . . Never before in recorded history have such vast masses of people lived in such a savagely deteriorated environment.

Mumford's book was published in 1938. Since that time, the conditions of which he and others wrote have become much worse. The effects of city life on both young and old are now obsessively "objective"—omnipresent and inescapable. Criticism has become a cry of outrage, and the most poignant criticism is in books by teachers—men like Jonathan Kozol and Herbert Kohl. Yet criticism of this sort began at least as far back as the eighteenth century, with William Blake's"London":

> In every cry of every Man,
> In every infant's cry of fear,
> In every voice; in every ban,
> The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

Why doesn't this criticism do any noticeable good? Blake is at least an exception, since his extraordinary qualities have heightened the sensibilities of countless men, giving them strength as well as critical awareness. But the objective accounts of what impoverished, congested city life does to people seem powerless to bring about change. It is the same sort of powerlessness, no doubt, that afflicts critics who deal in the objective horrors of war and in the indisputable facts of the deterioration and pollution of the natural environment.

Doubtless the facts need to be reported. Doubtless men need to realize what they—we have collectively done. But it seems equally clear

that we didn't "know any better," don't see when and where we went wrong, and don't really feel responsible for what has happened. In other words, the mistakes were all made before the objective evidence was in, or even began to show. That is the main trouble with the objective, scientific approach to questions of human good—to matters whose reality is essentially subjective. We have norms for effects, not for causes. The terrible facts we see all about are largely the result of treating other human beings as means, as objects, and not as ends in themselves. Quite conceivably, unless there are changes in *attitude,* in basic feelings toward nature as well as other men, the "terrible facts" will drive people to scapegoating excuses rather than to personal change or action, or to escape rather than cooperative reform.

Take the question of crowding in the schools. In a research paper in the June issue of *Community Comments* (published by Community Service, Inc., Box 243, Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387), Griscom Morgan asks:

> Is the rising tide of drug abuse, alienation, sexual deviation and mob psychology connected with the massing of youth in large schools? There is evidence that this is the case.

About half this paper is devoted to reports of the deleterious effects of crowding on animal populations. There are also established facts concerning crowded human beings:

> Crude statistical evidence from Selective Service 1966 figures of failure to meet mental requirements of the armed services show that in the nine states of the northern part of the United States and California, with largest cities and schools systems, the rate of failure to meet mental requirements was two and a half times the failure rate of the ten northern states with smaller cities and smaller rural schools. Despite poorer educational resources and much less wealth, such states as New Hampshire, Vermont, the Dakotas and Iowa have a far lower rate of failure.
>
> A special meeting was held recently for principals of large high schools in Washington, D.C., and it was agreed by those attending that "good education can be destroyed by making a high school too big."
>
> According to report, "One principal called his 4,000-student high school a 'monstrosity' and said that the more students he gets, the greater the problems."

The gross effects of crowding and of big schools are plainly apparent, yet the momentum of past theories and plans causes the authorities in public education to "continue to build larger and larger schools." As Mr. Morgan says:

> The drive to have American youth bussed to larger and larger consolidated schools—against the will of the people—has been proceeding now for several generations. In 1955 the Ohio State Department of Education was planning a new wave of super-consolidation, and it now seeks legislation to carry it out. The growing evidence of harm from such massing of human beings has been widely noticed only during the past decade, and the avalanche of evidence of its effect on youth has become devastatingly clear only within the past five years. Thus the education departments are still driven by policies that were formed long ago, and that are out of harmony with reality.
>
> The American public cannot wait for this new evidence of damage to youth from large schools to trickle through to educational administrators . . .

The parallels between animal and human behavior in respect to crowding have at least the value of showing that not even the biological level of health and normality is preserved for the children in large urban schools. Cattle breeders sometimes use tranquilizers on animals subjected to crowding, which suggests this comment to Mr. Morgan:

> Just as cattle can be made docile and tractable and less alive, so do the tranquilizing drugs reduce the sensitivity of people to ambition, conscience and stimuli. Tranquilized people are more readily subject to enslavement, exploitation and domination by rulers. Yet without tranquilization the over-stimulation of crowded living leads to uncontrolled over-activity and eventually to exhaustion. Such chronic over-stimulation is clearly apparent in the students who come to college from large cities as contrasted with those from rural areas. The resort to tranquilization is much more widespread among city

> youth. The use of marijuana, LSD and heroin has spread to become fairly general in the country's city and large rural schools. Enforcement of drug prohibition has largely failed. Since drugs are a means of "turning off" stress and pressure from the large school environment, we may say that the large school system bears an important responsibility for the drug problem.

Toward the end of this paper, Mr. Morgan says:

> It should be clear that there is no such thing as healthy acclimation to such effects of crowding, any more than there is an acclimation to atomic radiation from exposure to it. Brief periods of radiation or of crowding may not be harmful if, on balance, there is a relative freedom from it. Seals, birds and buffalo all had their times of herd crowding, but these were balanced by long periods of isolation . . . Whether over-stimulation from overcrowding takes place through physical principles and influences we have yet to discover, or through those we already know, remains to be determined. But certainly over-stimulation does exist, and we do not yet know how it works. There are no sound grounds for assuming that we can overcome and compensate for harmful effects of overcrowding (as by breaking large classes into small units) when we are ignorant of how these effects take place.

The chief lesson of these observations is surely that the right approach to education will be one that does not wait until such desperate conditions become "objective," since the definition of ills in terms of the last-ditch failures which are now all about is not likely to be of much help as the basis of reform.

FRONTIERS

Important to Millions

AN aggressively critical article on health care in the United States is contributed by Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (Connecticut) to the *Saturday Review* for Aug. 22. America spends more than any other nation on "health"—"$63-billion a year, 6.7 per cent of our Gross National Product, $294 per person"—with not even health-conscious Sweden equalling this amount. Yet by comparison with some other countries, the people of the United States are poor in health:

> A dozen nations, each of which spends less per country and per person, can match us and do a better job of preventing infant deaths. Twelve nations also have a lower maternal mortality rate. In seventeen countries, men live longer than in the United States. Women have a better chance of surviving in ten other countries. And the percentage of men who will die between the ages of forty and fifty is less in seventeen other nations. Obviously, we are not the healthiest nation in the world. We are not even close. Personal habits, life-styles education, income, genetics, and physical and social environment have combined, along with medical care deficiencies, to produce the data that destroy this myth.

Since Sen. Ribicoff writes on medical care, his analysis is largely concerned with the faults of medical and hospital practice, yet his summary of "data" suggests the importance of looking in other directions:

> Medical care may play only a secondary role in these world rankings (although the countries that come out on top, such as Sweden, also have good and inexpensive medical care). Public health officials often contend they could do more for the nation's health by getting rid of the slums and ending pollution than by making sure everybody has a thorough physical exam once a year. Early death, they say, seems related more to income and life-style than to medical care. And although infant mortality occurs mostly among poor blacks, who often do not see a doctor, a recent California study found that whites with regular medical care do not have that state's lowest death rate. Japanese-Americans do. In fact, they outrank whites on every index of good health.

Articles like this are chiefly evidence that political measures, being subject to compromises and to the insistent pressures of interest groups, almost never get at the real problems of the people' and often, in pretending to deal with them, create new and worse problems. And while it would doubtless be unjust to say that public health officials do not really care about public health, the recent Nader-inspired report on the Food and Drug Administration, *The Chemical Feast* (Grossman paperback, 95 cents), by James S. Turner, with an introduction by Ralph Nader, is final evidence of the folly of loading government bureaus with any serious responsibility for essential human welfare.

Governments can do little to overcome widespread self-interest, comfortable habit, and popular delusions. Changes against the grain of these established attitudes are far more likely to come as the result of individual effort and the voluntary collaboration of small groups. Often individuals and groups must make their way against massive prejudice and sometimes actual persecution before the value of what they attempt has any chance of general recognition. The section in the Nader book on the FDA policy concerning vitamins and health foods makes this evident. As Mr. Turner says: "The FDA combines an implicit belief in the honesty of big food interests and a caution about engaging in big fights with a vigorous and unrelenting pursuit of relatively minor hazards which use up large portions of its resources." A leading nutritionist in the Harvard School of Public Health has said that the FDA's position on hunger and vitamin supplements is based on "absolutely absurd comments about nutrition." Many people need vitamins, he said, because of the deterioration in the American diet, especially since 1960. But the FDA's campaign against vitamin and health food "fraud" has been a major activity. Mr. Turner comments:

> The real problem at the FDA was the failure to develop sophisticated methods to go after meaningful violators. Instead of building a thorough knowledge

> of the food industry's technology and economics so that it could deal on a basis of equal knowledge with industry personnel, the FDA spent its time on spying techniques. As a result, between 1950 and 1965 the food industry went through its period of fastest growth almost completely unmonitored. In that time a brand-new series of problems—including the hazards involved with the chemical environment through the use of food additives the threat of food contamination becoming nationwide through a modern mass-distribution system, the monitoring of dangerous pesticide residues, the introduction of brand-new synthetic foods made up entirely of chemicals—developed without serious and effective attention from the FDA.

The Chemical Feast becomes in effect the strongest possible argument for home-gardening and natural foods. Fortunately, because of the efforts of individuals, begun years ago, there is already a "movement" of amateurs who have pioneered in this direction. There are examples to follow. Meanwhile, on the question of health "research," the following, taken from J. I. Rodale's *The Healthy Hunzas* (Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pa., 1948), is pertinent:

> In the early 1920's, at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Sir Robert McCarrison told a large group of physicians that there was a people, the Hunzas, who never suffered from cancer, who practically never were afflicted with any disease at all. He went on to say that their immunity was due to the way in which this people raised their food. About 25 years have elapsed since that day, but the doctors have not made a single move to check into the possibilities of eradicating disease by the suggestions contained in Sir Robert McCarrison's talk. Don't forget that the question involved was one of life or death for millions of people. Why didn't the medical organization that sponsored McCarrison's appearance start an experimental farm to check up on whether the manner in which the food is grown has any bearing on the people who consume it?

Mr. Rodale's book skips around in an unsystematic fashion, but there are many good things in it. The beginnings of a more healthful life for a lot of people have come from books like this one. This is the kind of research we need—research which leads to individual action. The "counter-culture," if it ever gets going, will be largely the result of slowly forming voluntary movements of this sort, in which people learn from one another, and through diversity as well as cooperation create new ways of life.

A final note: It can't be entirely coincidence that the Japanese-Americans, who are, according to Sen. Ribicoff, the healthiest of the Californians, are also known to be the state's most skillful gardeners.