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# REVOLUTION OR RESTORATION?

WHAT sort of drama is being played out on our patient and long-suffering planet? Or will this question be taken as an attempt to poetize hard realities? There is indeed a parting of the ways of thought marked by these questions. For to challenge the reality of drama is to cast doubt on the place of meaning in the world of nature and human life. Drama is nothing but the unfolding of meaning. The agony of modern man grows out of his progressive isolation from meaning. Alienation is precisely this.

It is hardly a secret that the conventional scientific picture of the world is a world without meaning. It is a world filled with objects and forces and physical events, but no meaning. We shall not here inquire into the historical explanation for the adoption of this world-view in European thought, but simply remark that it is now being gradually abandoned on more or less pragmatic grounds. Human beings find that they cannot and do not want to "belong" to a universe in which no meaning exists. The doctrine of unmeaning has a stultifying effect on our lives. Every step of progress in scientific knowledge of the world brings a further exclusion of man from nature. The perfect scientist, at the climax of this development, would embody the perfect "I-It" relationship to the world—man as totally external and nothing but a manipulator. He would also be completely alone. Apart from other consequences, this isolation is simply unbearable. So, increasingly, there are other affirmations. "I," a man will say, "am a member of the world, of the universe. I am a meaning-seeking being, so there must be meaning and meaning-seeking in the universe, even though its purposes and fulfillments may remain largely hidden from me. I am not and will not call myself an isolate. What was born in me was born in and of the universe—I and other beings are all together in the pursuit of meaning. This is my life, and it must be the life of the universe, too."

We could call this the existential return to the matrix of nature, to the living world. It is an acceptance of wonder and mystery, of the reality of one's consciousness, and the rejection of any conception of reality which excludes that consciousness and its feeling of a larger selfhood in the world. It is acceptance of the simple fact that one is alive as a human being only as he experiences growth in meaning, from which it follows that life is best conceived as a drama of progressive realizations, although involving all the paradoxes and contradictions of which our lives are made up. To be human is to live out a drama, and also to take part in the larger drama of the life of the world.

This is an attempt to articulate a *Zeitgeist* that seems to be spreading, however slowly and falteringly. It does not, we think, presume too much from the evidence found in human longing and changing behavior. We have left out the froth, the shallow rationalizations, and the juvenile cockiness, trying to give voice to the underlying movement of the human spirit.

Returning, then, to our question: What sort of drama is being played out on earth, in which we have a part? For an answer, it is usual to begin with some review of ancient and so-called "primitive" beliefs, but this could lead into a bog of misconceptions. To know anything about the beliefs or convictions of others calls for sympathy with or even sharing them, and the egotism of Western thought has made this practically impossible until very recently. For example, only since the work of men like John Collier, Frank Waters, and Hartley Alexander have we begun to get studies of the American Indians that show the depth and dignity of their ideas of the world

drama. As for most earlier research on supposedly "primitive" peoples, there is this observation (by J. D. Unwin in *Sex and Culture.*):

> It is on misleading translations that all theories as to alleged "nature-spirits" and "nature-worship" have been founded. These have been responsible for many unacceptable theories in regard to uncivilized ideas. For instance, some scholars have interpreted the presence of sacred groves among some deistic peoples as evidence of nature-worship, basing their interpretations of the facts upon the assumed existence of nature-spirits. A close study of the facts reveals the untenable character of these theories. . . .
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> Gradually, then, the fallacies are being exposed. In uncivilized culture there are no nature spirits; these owe their existence to our translations. Thus there is no worship of nature. There are no tree-spirits or rock-spirits. No tree or rock is revered *qua* tree or *qua* rock. It is regarded with veneration because the power in the universe is manifest there, the power being the same whether it be in a rock or a tree. This power is often conceived not as an entity but as a quality, the idea that it is a personified cause being due to. . . our "European lineage."
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> The difficulty is real. When it is said that a native conception is that of a God, we do not know by what criterion it has been judged whether it is a god or not. Is it not plain that Mr. Fewkes was right when he said that "in the use of the words gods, deities, and worship we undoubtedly endow the subject with conceptions which do not exist in the native mind"?

Whether or not Mr. Unwin was right about "nature-spirits," the good sense of his general criticism is obvious. Not until the general breakdown of Christian belief did we begin to get anything approaching impartial studies of earlier or other religions, while, on the other hand, the coldly objective approach of the sociology of religion could only report on the dead bones of ancient faiths.

One generalization, however, seems feasible in regard to certain past religions, not to say present ones. It is that their drama has been regarded as a vast, supernatural event, in which we are hardly more than spectators, although our destiny is involved in the outcome. How much of historical Christianity is taken up with the contest between God and Devil—two very powerful supernatural beings? The drama is *theirs*—not ours. Our part lies simply in being sure to align ourselves on the right side, that we choose the right champion to accomplish our salvation for us. By "belonging" to the right association, one might be added to the number of those permitted to enjoy immortal life, and conformity was far more important than conduct as the means of remaining among the chosen. The religious wars of Europe were fought to settle jurisdictional disputes concerning access to redemption. While the Lutheran reform began as an attempt to restore elements of decision to individuals, it lapsed in time into stress on ecclesiastical authority, with belief becoming more important, finally, than independence of mind and of choice. So the drama of life remained external to man.

We think of the great eighteenth-century struggles for human emancipation as having been mainly social and political, and they were certainly that, but underneath the longings for liberty, equality, and fraternity was a profound determination of men to claim parts for themselves in the struggle toward meaning. We can surely say that in the eighteenth century, *Man* became the mover. In the eighteenth century, too, atheistic materialism got off to an open start in what seemed to its champions a brave attempt to give the world back to human beings. Neither Baron d'Holbach nor Lamettrie dreamed that in the end their doctrines would prove another strait jacket on the human spirit, once again shutting men out of the drama of life. In his preface to *The System of Nature*, d'Holbach wrote:

> Man is unhappy merely because he misunderstands nature. . . . Man disdained the study of nature to pursue after phantoms, that, like will-o'-the-wisps, dazzled him and drew him from the plain path of truth, away from which he cannot attain happiness. It is therefore time to seek in nature remedies against the evils into which fanaticism has plunged us. There is but one truth, and it can never harm us. To error are due the grievous fetters by which tyrants and priests everywhere succeed in enchaining the nations: from error arose the bondage

> to which the nations are subject; from error the terrors of religion, which brought about that men mouldered in fear, or fanatically throttled each other for chimeras. From error arose deep-rooted hatred and cruel persecutions; the continual bloodshed and the horrid tragedies of which earth must be made the theatre to serve the interests of heaven.
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> Let us try, therefore, to banish the mists of prejudice, and to inspire man with courage and respect for his reason. If there is anyone who cannot dispense with these delusions, let him at least allow others to form their own ideas in their own way, and let him be convinced that, for the inhabitants of earth the important thing is to be just, benevolent, and peaceful.

Both Lamettrie and d'Holbach were content to believe that with the abolition of religion and the elaboration of scientific explanation, men would soon be happy and live harmoniously by natural inclination. Well acquainted with the evils of religious bigotry and wars and persecutions in behalf of "spiritual" ideas, they were both convinced that the world could not be happy unless atheistic. In *Man a Machine,* Lamettrie wrote:

> If Atheism were universally disseminated, all the branches of religion would be torn up by the roots. Then there would be no more theological wars: there would no longer be soldiers of religion, that terrible kind of soldier. Nature, which had been infected by the consecrated poison, would win back her rights and her purity. Deaf to all other voices, men would follow their own individual impulses, and these impulses alone can lead them to happiness along the pleasant path of virtue.

Lamettrie preached an amiably optimistic doctrine, confident that when the minds of men were purified of false beliefs they would have no difficulty in ordering their lives. But as historians of thought have pointed out, a theory of social harmony which rests on the assumption that the natural impulses of men are good and will lead to happiness ought at least to take note of the fact that the *religious* impulse is also spontaneous in human life. We must conclude that the Materialists of eighteenth-century Europe, having had no experience of religion beyond the one they had inherited, found little reason to think that there could be any good religion, and were not moved to consider the difficult task of sorting out true from false religious ideas. So, naturally enough, they cut the Gordian knot by advocating undiluted atheism.

Nor did it occur to either Lamettrie or d'Holbach, surrounded as they were by the sufferings of so many victims of priestly and princely oppression, that anything more was needed than a simple amelioration of these oppressive conditions. A refined Epicureanism was the basis of their happiness, and since mechanistic science was rapidly reducing the nature of man to a purely physical conception, the enjoyment of natural pleasures seemed to them very nearly the highest good.

This was a view that soon caught on. While we cannot accuse science and technology of displacing authentic religion—their rapid progress in the nineteenth century brushed away only the shell of the inherited faith—it is evident that the excitement of the discoveries and inventions of the age made many men feel that they needed no other sort of knowledge or understanding. How could the leaders of this advance, so rich in enthusiasm, anticipate that in another hundred years the cult of personal pleasure and the enjoyment of material things would so distort the lives of the people in the progressive societies that the twentieth century would witness the gathering of the forces of another great revolution—the revolt against a merely sensate and self-indulgent way of life?

Today that revolution is a part of our daily experience, although it is a revolution without an enemy or oppressor. It cannot, therefore, be programmatic or ideological. The term "revolution" may not even apply, since what is happening has so little resemblance to the characteristic patterns of revolution in Western history. Yet it is truly a revolution in the pure and original sense of the term, as a turning back to the foundation, to an original good that has been lost

and must now be recovered. For there is above all a search on the part of men and women for the meaning in their lives.

It is necessary to add that while this fundamental change in human attitudes is getting under way, there is also the hue and cry of scores of self-appointed prophets and hucksters of contrived novelty. The market places of print and media are loaded with improvised, purchasable utopias, and the hungers of the age fill the psychic atmosphere with the mood of longing and the promise of shallow fulfillments. None of this seems avoidable. Fortunately, the rhetoric of such utopianism has small survival value, and will have less and less as time goes on—as empty claims become increasingly transparent and deep human needs are more clearly defined by the failures and casualties resulting from promises that cannot be kept.

Curiously, some of the best reporting of the change appears in staunch, middle-of-the-road publications known for their sobriety and common sense. Take for example the magazine *Business Management*, not exactly an organ of revolution, which in April, 1969, published an article, "Is the Rat Race Really Worth It?" A brief quotation gives the theme: "More and more executives and their families today are beginning to question the whole American ethic of success and its *raison d'être.* Who is the successful man—and why?" The article is based on talks with business men who were growing sick of the dehumanizing effect of their jobs and wishing they could find a way out. Both husbands and wives were increasingly unsure of themselves and of what they had thought they wanted from life. "The platitude of 'getting ahead' as a life goal seems suddenly meaningless," the writer concluded from his sessions with these people. He adds: "It is the rare executive who suddenly stops dead in his tracks . . . jams on his hat and drops out of the rat race, never to return," yet his conversations with recent college graduates indicated their general unwillingness to get into the "rat race" at all. "A lot of us feel life is too damn brief to waste it in an up-tight race for money and status," one of them said.

That was two years ago. This year, the dropouts from business are numerous enough to attract the attention of the *Wall Street Journal.* They are still few, of course, but the *Journal* for Feb. 19 and 22 published long stories headed "The Great Escape," providing sketches of at least a dozen men. All were successful executives, some in their thirties, others in their forties. Some have plenty of money to arm them for the plunge back into lives of their own; others have to struggle. As the *Wall Street Journal* writer puts it:

> But most men are not rich, and their children are not grown and gone. Those who, even so, have made the leap from the world of technocracy and bureaucracy to a simpler world of their own making say that no part of it was easy—not the initial agonizing, not the decision itself, not the working out of a new life after the cord was cut. The path from affluent wage-earner to independent man often requires the forsaking of old standards of success and security. And it can be strewn with emotional crises, personal reassessments, false starts, a struggle for financial survival and a groping for new values.
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> Despite that, most men who have let go and stepped off the corporate ladder say any regrets they have are rare, and fleeting. Their disillusionment with their old way of life and work is so strong that it overrides any thought of turning back. That's true even of those who aren't sure where they're going and of those who are struggling to stay solvent.

Who are these men, what are they like, and what are they doing? The story tells a little:

> Exuberant dropouts like John Koehne, not so long ago an executive with the CIA, now a long-haired wanderer in search of a commune, and Brown Bergen, once a computer analyst, now a carpenter's helper and ski instructor who lives from food he grows himself, like to describe themselves as "liberated." Bert Markland, formerly an art director at a big New York ad agency, now a sculptor struggling to meet a mortgage payment, describes it differently. "It's rough, damned rough. I'm going through hell."

Some of these men are finding ways to live on the land, partly at least, or on boats. All are improvising, and mostly enjoying it, along with the struggle. One thinks of Kenneth Keniston's definition of youth as applying to people who haven't yet settled in their own minds what is their relation with society. These dropouts must have stayed young in order, as one of them did, to change his entire life at forty-nine. The *Wall Street Journal* writer remarks that for every man who takes this leap, millions of men do not. He adds, however:

> No one knows how many of those millions are trying to gather up the nerve to strike out anew—men who could get by with less than they earn and who, on bad days, wonder if they wouldn't be better off if they traded some of their power and prestige for a simpler life.

Well, if ten per cent of those millions did strike out anew—would *that* be the blossoming of the "revolution"?

The answer, we think, is: not quite. But it might easily represent a necessary intermediate stage between total displacement of meaning by submission to the "rat race," and the more or less complete fulfillment that is at least conceivable for men who regain or achieve a rich sense of drama out of having human existence on the planet. Personal happiness, after all, is not likely to be the highest fulfillment of which human beings are capable.

There is a very old tradition to the effect that men are on earth because they have some *work* to do, a mission to perform, some great labor to complete. It is quite conceivable that the corruptions of religion which are directly responsible for the onset and rise of atheism and materialism were the result of supposing that the great founders or teachers of the religions of the world were somehow unique beings, not like other men. But what if *all* men, in their deepest nature and their highest promise, are latent prometheans suffering the penalties of neglect of the true role in the drama of life? If the best of men cast themselves in this calling, is there not a sense in which every human can serve as messiah to someone else? There were archaic religions that taught as much.

# *REVIEW*
## INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

THERE are hundreds of books about the American Indians, many of them excellent, but one which has never been noticed in these pages, and should have had attention years ago, is Hartley Burr Alexander's *The World's Rim*, published by the University of Nebraska Press in 1953. Technically, we suppose, the book comes under the heading of cultural anthropology. Its subtitle is "Great Mysteries of the North American Indians," which is appropriate, since the author finds many parallels in Indian belief and philosophy with the Mysteries of the ancient Greeks. But as Clyde Kluckhohn remarks in a foreword, the author was as much a philosopher and poet as an anthropologist, and his conviction that human beings change and grow by "adapting to changed situations in terms of discoverable eternal laws" was not regarded with much favor by other anthropologists. As Kluckhohn put it, "Hartley Alexander was not always appreciated by the orthodox." So this book, which was ready for publication in 1935, was still in manuscript form in 1939 when the author died, and did not appear until 1953, when, Kluckhohn suggests, philosophy was beginning to receive some shy recognition and a few anthropologists were beginning to admit that "there are some serious questions which can not be answered in accord with the canons of radical behaviorism."

Kluckhohn had worked with Alexander and ended his preface with material from notes of what the older man had said around a campfire in New Mexico:

> A true view of the world must be cast in the particular—i.e., the dramatic mode. Our understanding of experience must be historical and dramatic rather than abstract and mathematical. This is why Plato was a wiser man than Aristotle. Plato never built his house in a static sense. He used the myth to present a dramatic interpretation. To Aristotle the world was something which could be represented by an intellectual photograph, by an architect's drawing. Hence there was always a contradiction in Aristotle's metaphysics. Today too, philosophers like Russell write as if experience were all finished—as if all we had to do was to catch it as it is and describe it. No such abstract and mathematical models will suffice because of constant flux. Only drama catches things "as they really are."

This is a book about vision and aspiration. "We judge our own humanity by its white pages," the author says, "not by its black, especially when we are concerned with what most gives us courage to live or what most deeply explains our understanding of life." An effort to understand the inner life of the Indians, he points out, should be equally generous. This seems right and natural. When the direction of inquiry is toward the possibilities of human development, we look to the best examples and the greatest thinkers, for they, more than anyone else, open the way to comprehension of the upward movement of mankind, wherever it exists. There is something we sense about the Indians that we need to understand, and *The World's Rim* is concerned with materials which contribute to that understanding. Alexander says in one place:

> From their first contacts with the red men of North America the white races have recognized that in the Indian's temper of mind there is something commanding, some deep-run human value, which the white man's own philosophy has mainly missed; and this something, rather than any likeness of complexion or any community of custom, is what has given to the red races their unity, making them all "Indian" even in the midst of their tribal variations and the regional development of their native civilizations.

The tribal ceremonies common to a great many of the tribes become Alexander's means of illuminating that "something." Each of the eight chapters of the book is devoted to some aspect of Indian belief, custom, or ritual expression. The Pipe of Peace, the Sun Dance, the Snake Dance, the symbolism of trees and rocks, the Corn Maidens, the relations with children, the dramatic conception of life, and, finally, the meaning of death are among the subjects treated. Scattered throughout the book are long extracts from myths as told to inquirers who won the trust of the

Indians. In a chapter titled "Life as Ordeal," the author shows that, paradoxically, the Indian emphasis on tribal integrity and welfare has not in the least diminished the conception of individual excellence and the ideal of self-reliance. Great ceremonies weave these meanings into the daily life of the people:

> The sun dance of the tribes of the Great Plains goes directly to the heart of the red man's conception of the meaning of life. Essentially this conception has to do neither with length of years nor with accumulations of outer goods nor of sensory satisfactions, but rather with the attainment of a certain quality which is the Indian's idea of manliness. This quality has a background of social loyalty, intense in its devotion to the tribe, and of a profound reverence for the nourishing earth and the fostering universe which so fatefully determine any life's chances; and it is because of the depth and pervasiveness of this sense of the interdependence of man with his fellows and of man with the powers of nature that many students have been led to ascribe to the Indian a predominant, or indeed a tyrannous, social consciousness, with little or no feeling for individual values. This, however, is far from the truth. Even in the Pueblo culture, which in its patent particulars is the most absorbedly social of all, the central polity is democratic and the primary spirit is that of men who cultivate their individual fields and invent their own songs, and in the great dances themselves, where every beat is a throb of the mass, may yet enter in guests and volunteers.

The Indian seeks his own vision, looks for individual guidance in decision. The lonely quest for meaning is a part of every Indian's coming into maturity. The author concludes:

> Indeed, the outstanding feature of Indian character is reliance upon individual visions as fundamental guides in the path of life. The red man is primarily a mystic, and to a degree elsewhere exemplified only in Christian and Oriental ascetics. Life is to him peculiarly personal and inward, with no persistent reliance upon any social sanctions. Even the transmission of ritual is not regarded as a matter of primary moment; each guards his vision as his own, jealously, and to be imparted only as impulse prompts. He is reticent not only in the presence of white men, but among his own people also, and pertinacious secretiveness, above all where things sacred are concerned, has been the source of more than one tragedy of the native life.

Yet tradition and ritual inform the field of experience and provide orientation throughout the ordeal. Life is a drama with several climaxes. These are sometimes outlined schematically, in charts. An Ojibwa chart, the work of one of the great medicine societies, "depicts life with nine turns," each with its trials and temptations. Survival of the ordeals of life is itself taken as evidence of some achievement. On this subject Mr. Alexander writes:

> Indian honor for old age is apparently mainly bound up with the conviction that an elder, by his mere power to endure to the end the ordeal of his human years, has thereby demonstrated a spiritual superiority. Among the most affecting and significant of North American customs are the rituals which mark the four prime moments of an individual's years—the infant's Reception into Life, the youth's solitary vigil and Quest of Vision, the man or woman's Self-Proof and Recognition, often accompanied by a new naming, and finally the old man's ritual Memory and Passing, or for any man his Last Singing. In each of these, from the prayer for the babe to the final hush, there is something intimate and personal, with an inward and spiritual relation at the heart of it.

The vision-seeking fast of the youth is the initiation into the Indian's inner life, and ever thereafter, when confronted by difficult decision, he may fast and purify himself, retiring to some solitary place in search of inward help. He may sacrifice some prized personal possession or give up some blood from his body to elicit a response to his need.

Some Indians are agriculturalists, but most have been hunters. Their dependence upon food animals is, curiously, only a part of their relationship with the rest of nature:

> Indeed, his sincerest vital prejudice is for a kind of sympathy with wild life itself, which, while he slays for need, is nonetheless cherished and felt even in its humblest forms to be participant with man in nature's rights. He will not rob the bee of all its honey; with the field mouse he traffics maize for the rodent's store of beans, being careful to leave the

> kernels in the nest whence the store of prized wild beans has been accumulated; and he erects tabus against the slaughter of animals with young, or the needless diminution of the herd. The white hunter, to the Indian, who slays for sport and beyond food need, is a criminal against nature and blasphemous of the meaning of life.

There is much more along these lines—how the Indian has no notion of the idea of the accumulation of property as an end in itself, and how, in the final analysis, he thinks of his life as a pursuit of wisdom, which is wrapped up with the use of songs in which he embodies what he learns.

While the classical background of the author is often made use of throughout this book, in the epilogue his philosophical temper and knowledge become especially evident. Here, generalizing, Mr. Alexander notes that the Indian's cosmos has man at the center, although he is encircled and held by the material realities the same as all other men. Then he adds:

> But certainly the physical cannot mean for the Indian what lately it has come to mean for the Occidental of the Old World. It is not a material labyrinth in which the soul of man has been incidentally trapped, but it is rather a sense-born phantasm, as Plato held it to be. Nothing is more obvious in Indian thinking than his belief that the Powers are the realities, and that shapes and functions of things are primarily the exercise of these powers. It is Pythagoras that the metaphysics of the Sioux suggests, and for the American as for the sages of the Ancient East the stars are fates. Nor should the glamor of myth conceal from us the fact that a world which is "held up" by the Spirits of the Quarters and the Elders of the Kinds is essentially a world of ideas, of agents, not of things. In the language of our own metaphysics the Indian is an idealist, not a materialist. Were this false to his instinct, all this ritual symbolism would jibber into nonsense, but since it is true to it, this symbolism mounts into a poetry of cosmic understanding.

The best recommendation of this book comes from those Indians who know both the culture of the white West and their own. Such readers say that Indians have been understood by Hartley Alexander.

# *COMMENTARY*
## DECISIONS ABOUT "NEWS"

THE inutility of rules, while we cannot do without them, is often illustrated in William Rivers' book, *The Adversaries* (see Frontiers). A question to ask when established rules seem wrong or senseless might be: Does this decision come within the scheme of values the rules were devised to cover, or does it bring in hitherto unconsidered factors? A reporter's duty is to gather and publish facts of public interest, but sometimes disclosure of a fact may threaten widespread disaster. Rivers gives an example:

> How this works is suggested by the experience of Charles Michelson of the late, great New York *World* in the 1920's. Michelson had learned of the plight of a group of Western banks, which were near collapse. He sought out Eugene Meyer, who was then chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and told Meyer what he had learned. Meyer responded:
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> "Your information is absolutely correct. Perhaps their situation is even worse than you describe. You are perfectly safe in printing your story. If you do, every one of those banks will close tomorrow. If you don't, we can save three-quarters of them. Now, damn you, it's up to you."
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> Michelson later wrote, "Naturally the story was not printed."

Rivers, however, thinks that Michelson should have pursued the question further, instead of relying only on Meyer's judgment. Perhaps the RFC banker's hope was vain, and by trying to save those banks he would waste a great deal of money which could be put to better purposes. And so on. At any rate, Rivers shows that what Michelson did was at least debatable. And this, one could say, is likely to be true of all those decisions where rules are called into question: they are debatable.

It would be interesting to have more discussion of the "debatable" matters now before the world. Or, if they are not before the world, to have a journalism that would put them there.

For example, we learned recently that the astronauts who go on trips to the moon all suffer from a loss of weight in their bony structure. When they return, their bones weigh about twelve pounds less than they did at the moment of take-off. This, apparently, is an adjustment which takes place in the body when normal life in the earth's gravitational field is suspended.

This is not a fact that has been "suppressed." It has been duly noted in scientific journals. Yet it seems of considerably more than technical interest, leading to various questions, such as: How long could a human being live out in space without doing irreparable damage to his body? What sort of time-ceiling does this put on any sort of "space travel"? And, finally, why haven't there been some news stories on the weight loss of the astronauts?

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY

TO have the habit of thinking, spontaneously, in behalf of wholes is a rare gift, one that is difficult to acquire and hardly appreciated in our time. Characteristically, the holistic thinker, when he deals in human affairs, concerns himself with issues of responsibility and authority. The meaning of these terms is seldom well understood. Responsibility usually gains only narrow, particularist definition, while authority has turned into practically an epithet. The abuse and betrayal of positions of authority in the modern world has reached a point where the difference between authority and the abuse of power is hardly noticed. Authority has a natural role in human life, we depend upon it in countless relations, yet because of the loss of the legitimacy of political authority we are no longer willing even to use the word. It has only, so to speak, a clandestine existence and exercises an invisible rule.

What creates authority? In human affairs, it comes into being only as the other face of responsibility. The man who accepts responsibility, understands it, and fulfills it, has natural authority. There is no other way to get it. It seems a pity that an almost obsessive preoccupation with failing political processes had led to serious neglect of the psycho-moral realities of human relations which politics attempts to conventionalize and render into statutes.

In *Between Past and Future,* a book published ten years ago (Viking), Hannah Arendt has a chapter, "The Crisis in Education," in which she speaks of the relation between the educator and the child. The task is to make the child acquainted with the world. Miss Arendt says:

> Insofar as the child is not acquainted with the world, he must be gradually introduced to it; insofar as he is new, care must be taken that this new thing comes to fruition in relation to the world as it is. In any case, however, the educators here stand in relation to the young as representatives of a world for which they must assume responsibility although they themselves did not make it, and even though they may, secretly or openly, wish it were other than it is. This responsibility is not arbitrarily imposed upon education; it is implicit in the fact that the young are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world. Anyone who refuses to assume joint responsibility for the world should not have children and must not be allowed to take part in educating them.

What Miss Arendt is getting at, here, is the connection between the breakdown of authority and legitimacy, on the one hand, and responsibility on the other. When people no longer sense responsibility in others, they are unable to repose trust in them, and without trust authority becomes an empty shell. The substitution of power does not work; it only hastens the general collapse of normal social relations. In Miss Arendt's words:

> Now we all know how things stand today in respect to authority. Whatever one's attitude toward this problem may be, it is obvious that in public and political life authority either plays no role at all—for the violence and terror exercised by the totalitarian countries have, of course, nothing to do with authority—or at most plays a highly contested role. This however, simply means, in essence, that people do not wish to require of anyone or to entrust to anyone the assumption of responsibility for everything else, for wherever true authority existed it was joined with responsibility for the course of things in the world. If we remove authority from political and public life, it may mean that from now on an equal responsibility for the course of things is to be required of everyone. But it may also mean that the claims of the world and the requirements of order in it are being consciously or unconsciously repudiated; all responsibility for the world is being rejected, the responsibility for giving orders no less than obeying them. There is no doubt that in the modern loss of authority both intentions play a part and have often been simultaneously and inextricably at work together.

Can we accept the statement that anyone who refuses to assume responsibility for the world "should not have children and must not be allowed to take part in educating them"? When a person thinks of all the things going on in the world that he would like to see stopped or "changed," the idea of "taking responsibility" for the world may seem wholly unreasonable. But perhaps responsibility, in this case, means deliberately choosing one's relation to

both the good and the not-so-good. Taking responsibility need not mean accepting other people's definitions of responsibility. But to reject it out of hand cannot help but produce weakness and disorder in all relationships. Miss Arendt continues:

> . . . modern man could find no dearer expression for his dissatisfaction with the world, his disgust with things as they are, than by his refusal to assume, in respect to his children, responsibility for all this. It is as though parents daily said: In this world even we are not very securely at home; how to move about in it, what to know, what skills to master, are mysteries to us too. You must try to make out as best you can; in any case, you are not entitled to call us to account. We are innocent, we wash our hands of you.

It wasn't long, of course, before the children were saying the same thing. Like father, like son.

These are very difficult matters. One can hardly give up being critical of the management of national and technological affairs, and the ills flowing from the abuses at these levels are so massive as to seem to justify blanket condemnation. How do you raise children in such a setting? How do you explain the presence of so much evil in the world—it can hardly be hidden—without bringing them up as self-righteous prigs filled with "we/they" assumptions about the moral issues of life?

Assuming a man is willing to "take responsibility" for the world, in some reasonable fashion, how does he go about it? We are not the first to find this predicament oppressive:

> Hamlet's words, "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right," are more or less true for every new generation, although since the beginning of our century they have perhaps acquired a more persuasive validity than before.
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> Basically we are always educating for a world that is or is becoming out of joint, for this is the basic human situation, in which the world is created by mortal hands to serve mortals for a limited time as home. Because the world is made by mortals it wears out; and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming mortal as they. To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants it must be constantly set right anew. The problem is to educate in such a way that a setting-right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured. Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which, however revolutionary its actions may be, is always, from the standpoint of the next generation, superannuated and close to destruction.

One might add to this that in times of accelerating change, institutions are bound to prove less and less useful in the educational process. And the bigger the institution, the harder it becomes to make it flexible and capable of adaptation. The growing interest in Ivan Illich, these days, may have resulted from a slowly dawning realization that we ought to stop defining our educational problems and objectives in terms of institutions or schools. The ideal school, in short, is at best a sometime thing.

Education and teaching have to do with our attitudes toward one another. And, as Hannah Arendt shows, their quality, which determines what we can do for others, depends upon how we feel and think about the world. From what she says about responsibility and authority, one might be led to reflect on the difference between a man with knowledge but little sense of responsibility, and the man with knowledge who has also a strong sense of obligation to use it in behalf of the general good. You don't take the first man seriously. He doesn't inspire respect for his knowledge. He isn't doing anything with it.

This is a very abstract way of speaking, of course. But a teacher who accepts as part of *his* problem the dilemmas and contradictions of the modern world, and who is able to consider them thoughtfully without rushing to separate the good from the bad men in the world, is in his way taking some responsibility for the world. His hearers are likely to listen to what he has to say with close attention. Children who come under his care will have some chance of learning to think about the world as *theirs*, and to become links in the chain of a new sort of responsibility. Such a teacher has authority.

# *FRONTIERS*

## Government and the Press

THE current attack on the press and the media is making material for books and articles. The contention of most of these discussions is that the press represents the interests of the people and must be kept independent of government control. If the people are to rule themselves, they must know what is happening or what the government is doing, and this will often require publication of reports which government officials object to and sometimes attempt to suppress. This being the case, a press devoted to the public good will find it necessary to regard all officials as potentially adversaries of the proper function of the press. There may be occasions when a responsible publisher or reporter will hold back a story that might, if it appears, prevent the completion of some generally useful undertaking, but even here mistakes can be made.

Cases of this sort are given by William Rivers in his book, *The Adversaries,* published last year by Beacon. In his last chapter, Mr. Rivers discusses various instances in which the "morality" of what the reporter decided to do is at least open to question. For example:

> It sometimes seems to those who are impatient with conventional journalism that only "The Washington Merry-Go-Round" column is fearless enough to slay the real dragons. And the ambivalence about it is aptly revealed by James Reston's comment on the case of Senator Dodd. The late Drew Pearson had exposed Dodd's easy morality with documents taken from the Senator's office. Reston pointed out that it was difficult to judge whether Pearson should be awarded the Pulitzer Prize or thrown in jail.
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> And what, for example, is the political reporter to do when he discovers that his government is flying U-2 planes over Russia? That question confronted James Reston of the New York *Times* a year before a U-2 was brought down in Russia in 1960. Rather than following the "publish and be damned" tradition of the old thunderers of journalism, Reston placed above it what he considered the national interest. He did not disclose what he had discovered, and we learned of the U-2 flights only when Francis Gary Powers confessed to his Russian captors.
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> In another case, the *Times* elected not to disclose everything it had learned about the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. Well before the scheduled invasion by Cuban refugees the *Times* knew enough to publish a detailed story. The editors decided to publish a much less revealing account because the United States government was sponsoring the invasion. Again, a presumed national interest was placed above the public's interest in full disclosure. (Later, President Kennedy confessed to the *Times* editors that they would have saved the United States from the embarrassment of a fiasco had they published: everything their reporters had learned.)

Well, as Rivers says, such cases "can be multiplied by hundreds of others." No matter what rules you make, a time will come when it seems in the public interest to break them. Persons with power or in a protected position may not suffer for doing this, but others may go to prison for years for following their consciences, or at the least lose valuable jobs.

Mr. Rivers writes a long book on the presumptions and arrogance of those in political power. He makes a strong argument for thinking of reporters and politicians as "adversaries." Yet this general conclusion, while based on a phalanx of facts, is vastly dissatisfying. One wishes that, somewhere in this book, the author had recalled what Walter Lippmann once said about the habitual exaggeration of the importance of the press, which can never be more than a sharpshooter in relation to the weaknesses and failures of government.

He might also have taken the time to review Plato's observations about best and second-best government in the *Statesman.* In a rather long discussion Plato's spokesman, the Stranger, shows the young Socrates that the best government of all is that of a truly wise man, who rules above the law, since law can never be made to apply justly to all cases. Laws are, he says, only "imitations" or copies of wisdom, although they are certainly better than nothing. And when there is a universal tendency to corruption, democracy is the best

form of government under law, since power is more widely distributed. There are really three forms of government under law, the Stranger says. These are the rule of one, rule by a few, and rule by the many. The three become six when the forms of their failure are given names. The seventh can prevail only in a society where wisdom exists and is recognized and honored. Following is a portion of Plato's discussion:

> STRANGER: The rule of one man, if it has been within the traces, so to speak, by the written rules we call laws, is the best of all the six. But when it is lawless it is hard, and the most grievous to have to endure.
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> YOUNG SOCRATES: So it would seem.
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> STRANGER: As for the rule of a few, just as the few constitute a middle term between the one and the many, so we must regard the rule of the few as of middle potency for good or ill. The rule of the many is weakest in every way; it is not capable of any real good or of any serious evil as compared with the other two. This is because in a democracy sovereignty has been divided out in small portions among a large number of rulers. If therefore all three constitutions are law-abiding, democracy is the worst of the three, but if all three flout the laws, democracy is the best of them. Thus if all constitutions are unprincipled the best thing to do is to live in a democracy. But when constitutions are lawful and ordered, democracy is the least desirable, and monarchy, the first of the six, is by far the best to live under—unless of course the seventh is possible, for that must always be exalted, like a god among mortals, above all other constitutions.

Another observation by the Stranger is especially pertinent here:

> And yet we must never lose sight of the truth that we stated before. The man with real knowledge, the true statesman, will in many instances allow his activities to be dictated by his art and pay no regard to written prescriptions. He will do this whenever he is convinced that there are measures which are better than the instructions he previously wrote and sent to people at a time when he could not be there to control them personally.

The idea of *never forgetting* the ideal situation, especially when we are deciding on practical arrangements for a very bad situation, seems of the highest importance. It is perfectly evident that in a democracy, not just the king or ruler, but every man may at some time feel it necessary to "pay no regard to written instructions." When a President does it, he may be hailed as a hero or condemned as a tyrant. It all depends. When a citizen does it, he may go to jail for three years for committing civil disobedience. When a reporter does it, he, like anyone else, chooses to be king for a day. The laws aren't really good enough. And laws can be used to punish good men for being honest, for following conscience, for serving their idea of the public good.

This is the way it works now. And in our competitive society, it is perhaps natural that the facts of life should seem to indicate the "adversary" system as the best way of resolving difficult decisions. We use it in business and in the courts and in politics—why not in the relations of reporters to the sources of news?

This is the way it works now, but it is not a very good way. The compromises of natural decency and inclination that are necessary to prevent this system from breaking down altogether do not, can not, and will not, shape a good way of life. This we should *never forget*, when justifying what now seems either "feasible," "practical," or "inevitable."