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MORALITY AND CHARACTER

WE know far too little about either history or "morality" to say whether the present epoch is morally worse, better, or about the same as past periods. One thing we do know—the moral decline of the present is being considered with more painful self-consciousness than was possible in other ages. Conceivably, the moral fabric of both society and individuals is more severely tested by this heightened awareness. The connection between what we do and its consequences may be better understood, adding to recognized moral responsibility. Certainly, the definition of moral obligation is more of a subjective and individual responsibility than at any time in the past. We are beginning to see that when the individual sense of responsibility is weak, the only remaining restraint is the coarse and ineffectual rule of legality. Meanwhile, going through Watergate has precipitated a wave of self-examination.

A good example of this is the "Special Report" in the *Saturday Review* for last November 1. After an introduction by Max Lerner, this report, titled "The Shame of the Professions," provides an evaluation of "the ethics of our congressmen, lawyers, businessmen, accountants, journalists, doctors, and educators." Each field is examined by a writer with particular experience and knowledge of its practice. To a man, they all find cause for deep apprehension. In his general discussion Mr. Lerner focuses on businessmen, not because they are any more "immoral" than the rest of society, but because there are so many of them, and their activities have had closer attention. After recalling Louis Brandeis' excoriation of the piratical practices of business early in the century, by which he hoped to make businessmen "see themselves as a new profession, with professional standards and ethics," Mr. Lerner says of the modern industrialists—those who try "to buy Presidents and senators and attorneys general, for their corporate cause, and [use] millions to bribe officials of foreign nations to award them contracts"—

> The point about these businessmen—as about their brothers, too, the politicians and lawyers—is that they do have an ethic, but it is the wrong one. It is, to use the common phrase, a "bottom line" ethic, that of the bottom line profit figure in a quarterly or annual corporate statement. For a politician, the ethic is to get power and hold it, for lawyer it is to win his case and get his fee; for a corporate executive, the thing is to win out in the lethally competitive struggle for profits, markets, stock values. The bottom line is what counts, whatever the means used.

As for the question of what is needed:

> One thing all the professions need to do is to recapture the sense of vocation or calling. It is still implicit in many of the professions, among artists, writers, actors, doctors, therapists, social workers, teachers, politicians—the sense of being called to a work that is fulfilling of self and helps and changes the lives of others.
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> In a number of professions the sense of calling never took root. Even in those I have named, it is in danger of being replaced by the suction force of the business spirit and by its bottom-line ethic. I find it a hopeful sign that on most campuses where I have taught in the last few years the young men and women who are planning to train for the professions are hungry for a sense of calling, along with the living they want to make.

What to do? Mr. Lerner has only a single suggestion, but a good one—the same as the one Martin Buber proposed in a similar connection:

> For most of us, it is a question of the symbols or the models that a profession has for helping its members shape their professional conduct. Call it hero worship if you will, and make a mockery of it, but the saddest thing that has happened in the professions is the loss of heroes and heroines. It goes along with the replacement of the personal by the impersonal, of the human scale by gigantism, of social roots by individual rootlessness, of the

> wholeness of the person by the split between the professional and the personal.

As far as it goes, this seems a useful analysis. The part played by heroes is notable in at least two fields—Ralph Nader in law and Buckminster Fuller in design have exercised an extraordinary effect. We need more such persons—more men like John Dewey and Arthur Morgan and Robert Hutchins in education, more like A. H. Maslow in psychology, and like William O. Douglas on the bench. We might note, however, that the replacement of the personal by the impersonal has two sides—the impersonal could be a step up, by means of an order clearly established on principle, a step initially accomplished by the Founding Fathers but not well sustained in the centuries since. The rootlessness, too, which is bad in one sense may be good in another, since it may be accompanied by a feeling of world community, with spontaneous feelings of kinship with people of other lands. Czeslaw Milosz noticed the gradual spread of this attitude some years ago, suggesting the development of more universal roots. There is also the longing of the young, referred to by Mr. Lerner, but footholds for doing what they dream of doing are hard to find. Frameworks for mounting and applying aspiration have to be invented, since so many of the well-worn channels of human activity are grooved to shut off the flow of spontaneous good will. Meanwhile, the existing mechanisms of social service have been bureaucratized into ineffectual conformity to economic power, and most public agencies are incapable of change. Even the technical forms of guardianship of the public good are geared to the institutions that have grown up in the midst of "normal" bottom-line thinking—which after all, as Lerner says, "built the great industrial empires in America, its big law firms, its major party systems." With obvious justification, he asks: "What shall it profit a civilization if it builds its industrial empires but loses its sense of moral direction?"

The specifics of this loss are listed in detail by "area specialists." In a review of Congressional morality, Tom Braden concludes that a year after Watergate and much expression of indignation about "corruption" in high places, "Congress has still not gotten around to becoming moral about itself." Irving Kaufman begins an inspection of the legal profession by saying: "Complaints accusing lawyers of unethical behavior have risen to record heights and the charge is increasingly widely accepted that the attorney's loyalty is given totally to his client, often to the detriment of the public interest." In education for the law, skill in legal practice is separated from ethical issues: the tendency of law schools is "to define the lawyer's role in terms of interest-group politics within a 'value-free' society." Could there be a more exact definition of the professional Sophist? The analyst of business practice concludes by quoting Abba Eban: "Men and nations tend to behave wisely after they have exhausted all alternatives," which sums up what happens when businessmen encounter demands for ethical standards.

The writer on accounting practice draws on a report by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, which describes various punishable offenses but neglects to mention the numerous activities which, if not liable to criminal prosecution, constitute, the writer says, the profession's "roll of dishonor," and are responsible for a crisis in the confidence once placed in its members. "Too many of our best accounting minds operate in a kind of ethical penumbra, expertly fudging figures and cooking the books."

Journalism is subjected to many charges, the worst of which may be the irresponsible reporting of the Vietnam war, during which "the newspaper and [radio] station managements of America generally went along with the doctored government accounts of the war's 'progress'."

> The few news organizations that did carry the true account of Vietnam were singled out as troublemakers. Station managers, editorial writers, and publishers who had never talked to a correspondent who had set foot in Vietnam took the lead in pillorying that portion of the American press which most nearly was doing its job.

From the account of the medical profession we take six sentences—headings of sections:

> The ethical values of the medical profession are deteriorating. . . . Medical care is impaired by the ignorance or cupidity of its practitioners. . . . The system of medical care is poorly organized. . . . The process of medical care is technical, impersonal, and dehumanized. . . . The results of medical care are not commensurate with its large costs. . . . Organized medicine is too reactionary and self-protective.

The ethical issues in medicine are sometimes simple, sometimes obscure, going from fee-splitting to the costly keeping artificially alive of a terminal patient with no hope of survival. Many of the abuses in medicine, however, reflect the demands of patients. Here the doctor is himself called a co-victim of "technological, dehumanized practice," while the mistaken identification of health with the application of medical treatment is a delusion fostered by politicians more than by the medical profession. It is well known to the doctor, for example, "that longevity and infant mortality are relatively little influenced by the specifics of medical care, but depend principally on lifestyles, nutrition, and sanitary practices." Finally, there remains the inherent fact that those who enter the healing profession are likely to do so from essentially admirable motives, and the decency of these intentions is still discernible beneath the moral confusions of the age.

Isolation from both money and power, Fred Hechinger remarks wryly, may be responsible for the passive virtue of the educational establishment. His exploring comment is at a level of general cultural diagnosis:

> To say that education's ethics compare favorably with those of other aspects of contemporary America, however, is not sufficient to give it a passing grade. An argument may even be made that education, like the priesthood, ought to be judged by more demanding yardsticks, if there is to be any hope for society s purification.
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> The most common charge leveled against education—schools as well as colleges—is that it has failed to *teach* morality. Are not virtually all the world's crooks the schools' graduates? In up-to-date terms, what did the law schools teach all those lawyers afflicted with Watergate morality? . . .
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> The more serious crisis in education's moral state of mind appears to have its source in a loss of self-confidence, a sense of emptiness at the core. For some two decades, the universities reacted largely to external voices. They responded to demands, without paying attention to the mastery of their own destiny. Sometimes, the demands came from government or industry, and though they often were entirely legitimate and the results were beneficial to the nation as well as to those who made them, the ultimate effect was nevertheless a declining sense of purpose.

It is at this point, when the facts are in—when the specification of ills and weaknesses is more than sufficient for critical purposes—that most examinations of moral conditions collapse for lack of lifting power. There is no positive perspective, no credibly sustaining vision. We feel the ill, expose the ominously spreading emergency, but have no idea what to do. Moral exhortation, accompanied by shocking illustrations of wrong and fault, rises and thins like hot air, or falls weakly at our feet. Even when heard it does not move. So things go on as they have in the past, except for a few twitching responses here and there. Criticism reaches encyclopedic dimensions—practically everybody is able to add to the volume of complaint.

Can we go one step further than this—that is, understand the problem a little more clearly? The issue is moral character—or simply character, since moral qualities are implicit in the term.

Some observations by Martin Buber may help us to see why what is now being said and done about "moral decline" is so ineffectual. In *Between Man and Man,* he considers present-day thinking about character and its formation. Taking for a start a definition which says that character is the voluntary assimilation of maxims acquired by experience, teaching, and self-reflection, acquiring the unity of habit from practice, he continues:

> The concept of habit was then enlarged, especially by John Dewey in his book, *Human Natare*

> *and Conduct.* According to him character is "the interpenetration of habits." Without "the continued operation of all habits in every act" there would be no unified character, but only "a juxtaposition of disconnected reactions to separated situations."
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> With this concept of character as an organization of self-control by means of the accumulation of maxims, or as a system of interpenetrating habits, it is very easy to understand how powerless modern educational science is when faced by the sickness of man. But even apart from the special problems of the age, this concept can be no adequate basis for the genuine education of character. Not that the educator could dispense with employing useful maxims or furthering good habits. But in moments that come perhaps only seldom, a feeling of blessed achievement links him to the explorer, the inventor, the artist, a feeling of sharing in the revelation of what is hidden. In such moments he finds himself in a sphere very different from that of maxims and habits. Only on this, the highest plane of his activity, can he fix his real goal, the real concept of character which is his concern, even though he might not often reach it.

This conclusion, despite its imprecise terms—which indeed may be inevitable seems exactly right. Actual *changes* in human beings, self-energized, strong, enduring in consequence, come about in no other way. The personal experience of thoughtful individuals is confirmation—perhaps the only confirmation—of this reality. In psychological theory Buber's idea is supported by Fromm's conception of the therapeutic leap, by Maslow's linking of self-actualization with the peak experience, and Eugene Gendlin's "activity of reflective attending," which sometimes leads to a decisive *shift* in feeling and outlook, as a result of which "thousands of implicit facts have changed."

It would be foolish to discuss further this conception of inner movement or change—foolish because flattening to its meaning. Such meanings are enriched, rather, by the flash of poetic vision, and dimensioned by the resonances of great scriptures. Yet we *can* give deliberate attention to the circumstances, mood, and intellectual temper which establish hospitality for transforming inner experiences. Buber also addresses himself to this need, since, in his view, the lack of such hospitality is at the root of the ills of the age. We do not—are hardly able to—think of human beings as being open to high inspiration, for we have constructed or embraced a universe in which this possibility, admittedly mysterious, is not permitted to exist. Our outlook, Buber says, has resulted in a common predisposition—the denial of deeply powerful inward norms of moral action. This rejecting spirit has spread like an infection, becoming, not a reasoned attitude but a constitution of mind. "Argument," therefore, brings only the response of indifference. To argue would be to assume that the denial is a result of reflection, that the one who denies is open to argument, or ready to consider "material for renewed reflection." But, Buber says, the indifference or denial is due to the disposition of "a dominant human type of our age."

Therefore:

> We are justified in regarding this disposition as a sickness of the human race. But we must not deceive ourselves by believing that the disease can be cured by formulae which assert that nothing is really as the sick person imagines. It is an idle undertaking to call out, to a mankind that has grown blind to eternity: "Look! the eternal values!"

Even a brief inspection of the sections in the *Saturday Review* under the heading, "The Shame of the Professions," will confirm the accuracy of Buber's view. Nearly all repeat, or report on, the cry, "Look! the eternal values!", while at the same time showing that the effects of this exhortation, over the years, have been negligible.

What else, then, can we do? Buber offers a prescription for individuals: "One has to begin by pointing to that sphere where man himself, in the hours of utter solitude, occasionally becomes aware of the disease through sudden pain: by pointing to the relation of the individual to his own self."

This is the Socratic solution: Consult yourself, attend to the inner voice, the conscience, your *daemon,* and be faithful to its monitions. In an age like ours, this inner voice almost always

causes us pain, and Buber says: "To keep the pain awake, to waken the desire—that is the first task of everyone who regrets the obscuring of eternity. It is the first task of the genuine educator in our time."

Encouraging other people's consciences to become more active is both unpopular and unfruitful, and Buber can hardly mean just that. But the placing of human decisions in a context of timeless meanings and values is something educators can do, if *they* have any conviction concerning such meanings and values. The matter requires determined attention. These meanings and values are more than the clichés of religious tradition.

What is the framework of all such efforts? Well, there is an optimistic framework, suggested by the judgment of wise doctors—they say that most human ills are self-limiting. The body has its own restorative powers, with which the physician tries to cooperate. What about the ills of the soul? Are they self-limiting, too? Conscience may be the principle of limitation in moral behavior—if we dare suggest that conscience is a natural endowment. Conceivably, the moral impulse to service that Mr. Lerner and others discern in the young of today marks the beginning of the process of recovery from what Buber calls "a sickness of the human race."

These things are difficult to discuss coherently because we have no conceptual vocabulary for the elements of experience involved. "Soul" is available as an honorific term, but it embodies only vague good feeling or hope, not disciplined conception. The questioning by the young—the questioning by us all—needs a framework of philosophic reference. We need ideas having inner structure that match up—by hypothesis, at least—with the inner experience on which self-initiated change depends.

Buber wrote what we have quoted from him in 1939, and there have been many alterations in the fabric of thought since that time. The world has suffered nearly overwhelming horrors and the "predisposition" to indifference and denial is no longer uniform or strong. Has the time arrived for another kind of "argument"?—for consideration, that is, of philosophical views of nature and man which have in them both place and role for conscience, soul, and high ethical sensibility? For a philosophical psychology which takes account of the moral states as well as the intellectual and emotional states? The moral states are *real.* Moral psychologies have been taught and were functional in the past, and even if we can't borrow them whole, the working truth evident in them might become foundation for the moral psychology we are required to make for ourselves.

Plotinus, for example, as R. T. Wallis shows in his recent book, *The Neoplatonists,* provides a metaphysical scheme in which the various levels of consciousness in man are recognized. Leibniz' *Monadology* affords majestic, virtually cosmic, structures for thinking along these lines. An article, "The Hindu Dharma," by S. Radhakrishnan, in the *International Journal for Ethics* for October, 1922, gives a brief but thorough introduction to a system of life and thought in which world responsibility is woven into the fabric of daily life. Here the ethical order blends naturally with both metaphysics and the realities dealt with by the natural sciences. Such studies, by those drawn to think of these things, would help to establish hospitality for the moral convictions on which all deliberated change will depend.

REVIEW
TRACTS FOR ALL TIMES

WHAT do you do with another book by Milton Mayer? Sit down and enjoy it. Enjoy the deft, incisive, and entertaining use of clear, philosophic intelligence. Think about how few there are—is there anybody else?—who can do what Mayer does with current events. In his latest, *The Nature of the Beast* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1975, $12.50), there is a story about his encounter with the Communist authorities of Prague that is better than any Len Deighton.

The Mayers had checked in at a Prague hotel the day before the police came. Their visas, they said, were not in order. Mistakes had been made. Czech Passport Control at the airport had slipped up. The Mayers shouldn't have been admitted to the country. Mayer had to go back to the airport to straighten things out. Now, with police escort. Would he take Mrs. Mayer—"Pany" Mayer—this being Czech for wife? "No," he said.

> Pany has a somewhat lower boiling point than mine, and in the face of any injustice tends to tear the place apart something that, under the circumstances, would never do. Besides, they might go easy on me if they had a hostage for me—this on the false assumption that the police in Prague or Attica are only human after all.

So, back to the airport, where it developed that the Mayers were in Czechoslovakia illegally. Milton Mayer, incidentally, is no stranger in Prague. For years he was the only non-Communist American—an articulate and expressive non-Communist who writes all the time in Czechoslovakia, so they had him on some kind of list. Well, at the airport there were delays, and more delays. Mayer made phone calls, pulling such wires as he could in Czechoslovakia. He had ten dollars with him at first—the rest of their money he had left with Pany—but that small amount was diminishing fast. He had to put coins in the telephone box and eat. (They had left the hotel just after breakfast.) What should he do to get the right kind of visa? Nobody knew. Nobody around the Passport Control office, that is. So he waited while night fell and traffic thronged the airport.

> Incoming planes were filled with French and Italian hippies in outlandish American costumes, all coming to Prague to debase the socialist morals of the Czechs. (Czechoslovakia needs the hard Western currencies, among which the dollar is still stupidly numbered, worse than it needs to protect itself from Western contamination.)

The crowds pushed past Passport Control in droves. The checking of visas practically lapsed as people were hurried through.

> The same thing had happened to Pany and me the day before. We could have brought a bomb in. We could have brought Solzhenitsyn in. We could have brought Lenin in, saying, as he did, "While the State exists, there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no State."
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> I phoned Pany from my office at the Transit Desk and asked her if she missed me. She said she did and could she bake a cake? I thought not though she had been trying for twenty-five years. "Why don t you talk that sassy to the police?" she said. "Why don't you tell them you're sick?"

At about 1:00 A.M. it became apparent that Mayer, sick or well, would have to stay the night at the airport. He could sleep in a room set apart for nursing mothers. They couldn't lend him a baby but they would make an exception, they said. Meanwhile the place was bubbling with repressed friendship for Mayer, and he began to cherish the experience:

> If I'd never got into Prague and had never been there before, I'd have known, on the basis of the night's adventures, how bitterly the Czechs hate their tyrants and their tyrants' tyrants. I was, for the first time in my life, an *innocent* victim, and the word had got around the airport. Some of the civilian personnel dared to do no more than smile at me, some with their eyes alone. One put a hand on my arm as I passed. One wanted to know if he could do anything for me. One sat down next to me and said, in slow English, "we have nothing in commune (sic) with them." *Them*, always *They* and *Them.*
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> Their tyrants' tyrants were now providing them with Western goodies, in the fond, foolish hope of

buying their allegiance; as if to say, "See, we deliver what Dubcek promised." But the great goodie that Dubcek promised was freedom, which is in all-time short supply. There is a somewhat greater variety of clothing, shoes, and food. And automobiles galore; at long last it is hard to find a parking place in Prague. The Czechs know how to take it: deadpan. They are the grand masters of psychological retreat in depth. Always yielding and never surrendering, they have worn down their every conqueror. They will wear down this one too, in ten years, or a hundred, or a thousand.

In an essay on things we don't know but ought to because they are so obvious, Mayer says:

> Look at the general disorder of our time. When most men have less than a hundred dollars a year and the per capita expenditure on war in "peace-time is fifty, what is there that intelligence can tell us?
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> When the most knowledgeable (and therefore the richest) societies, with the longest history of civilized institutions, lead the world in suicide, insanity, alcoholism, divorce, crime, and delinquency, what critical need have they (or, for that matter, the least knowledgeable societies) of knowledge? What is it that the Communist needs to know who wants free elections in Mississippi but not in Germany, or the anti-Communist who wants bases ninety kilometers from Russia but not ninety miles from Florida? . . .
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> Our search for the connection takes us at once to the epistemological commonplace that descriptive knowledge accumulates and normative knowledge does not. Twentieth Century man does not have to learn that the seat of fever is the blood—or that the world is flat—before he can learn that it isn't. He starts with the latest breakthrough. But there are no breakthroughs in the moral realm: Relativity is new but moral relativism is as old as Thrasymachus. . . .
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> We know what goodness is, and we always have; Machiavelli knew, and Moses. But we do not know how to make men good. It is going on two-and-a-half millennia since the first discussion of education opened with the question, Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice . . . or in some other way?" Perhaps the question is not to be answered; in which case we may concentrate on a succession (better yet, a continuum) of gaieties in contented conscience. But perhaps another two-and-a-half millennia of unrelenting inquiry will produce the answer; all the more reason for getting started at once.

Is this one of those brief intervals of history when more than the usual tiny minority begin to listen to people like Mayer? Are we in the bewildering sort of "golden age" when honest wondering gets the better of total confusion for more than a moment or two? What does he (Mayer) do? He doesn't pretend to answer, but he puts priorities in the right order. The evidence for this is in the book—heaped up, pressed down, and running after us.

With a skill that rings in our ears Mayer shows us the things we need to look at, but would prefer to ignore. He does this by a process of unlikely association that has dramatic unity. He knows the thought of wise men and the jargon of both the streets and today's academy. They merge in his writing; emerging are lucid prose and accurate illustration—his examples aren't lugged in, they fit.

One could say that Mayer writes for those who run. He tries to catch them on the wing. At his best Mayer is both profound and catchy. He has probably made a lot of people stop running for a while and take time out to think. He often performs such services for us (MANAS scribes). There are lots of good things in this book, but the chapter called "The Last Time I Saw Selma," which we reviewed years ago (as a *Progressive* article), may be the best.

Who, wanting to make friends and influence people in the 1960s, would be so foolish as to celebrate the virtues of people like Booker T. Washington? Mayer did it. Mayer did it because in any forward movement of history, there is some loss of the good along with the gains. The lost good doesn't *need* to be lost, but it almost always does get lost because, when you beat on the drum for righteousness and justice, you keep people from hearing certain gentle, kindly words with truth in them. A crusade always tromps on the green along the way. Political action shuts out paradox, but in paradox is hidden the way, the truth, and the light—and, alas, nobody wants to stop to search among paradoxes when all the

good people are marching along. But Mayer stops. He can endow a paradox with the fascinations of a three-ring circus and, given two minutes or so, get you to see the point. He is for the Right *and* understanding the paradox.

The point is that at any moment of history, there are decencies, generosities, and loveable people on the scene along with the manifest injustices of the time. The imperfect are not necessarily *evil*. The morally lame, halt, and blind are still human. They do good things. Little germs of integrity grow up into honest acts, once in a while. The "revolution"—the mission-oriented, right-side, tough-minded and noisily brave revolution—is concerned with larger matters. The revolution is going to change bad circumstances into good ones, never mind the small moralities of everyday life. But do these moralities *have* to decline when we put the larger matters in order? Can't there be growth which consolidates *all* that is good?

Mayer asks questions like these, and often they do not harmonize with tracts for the times. Can anyone write a tract for *all* times that will still be catchy, hold your interest, engage your moral sense, satisfy your longing to do right and serve the cause? That's about all that Mayer tries to write, when you think about it—and he connects the timeless material with the stuff of today and tomorrow in a way that holds the attention even when it becomes embarrassing. One shouldn't have to be told these things, you say to yourself.

But you may be very glad Mayer is doing the telling. Glad that *somebody* can do it so well.

COMMENTARY
IF ONLY . . .

WHAT, asks Milton Mayer, can "intelligence" tell us—"When most men have less than a hundred dollars a year and the per capita expenditure on war in 'peace-time' is fifty. . . .?"

He is talking about the whole world, in which most men try to live on less than a hundred dollars a year. For many readers, this will be hard to understand. Who, in a country where people who make less than a hundred dollars a week feel underpaid, can imagine what it is like to live on less than a hundred a year?

Well, there is one kind of intelligence—effective description—that can help us to understand what this means. In *The Golden Bowl Be Broken* (Indiana University Press, 1973), Richard Critchfield describes the daily life of people who live on less than a hundred dollars a year. His reason:

> We have considerable information today about the geography, history, economics, politics and customs of such people. Yet we know little about *them.* How they think and feel, what they worry about, argue over, anticipate and enjoy, the pain and suffering, the fun and laughter, the avid intense living of life in the unreported villages and slums all around us.

For years a reporter for the *Washington Star-News,* Critchfield chose four subjects to write about:

> These include a Bedouin on the Mesopotamian desert, whose way of life has endured ten thousand years but is now vanishing; an African Creole fisherman on the southern Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, where over-population has led to social breakdown and visions of the Apocalypse; a newly prosperous Sikh farmer in a Punjabi village in northern India, who is making the transition from subsistence agriculture to modern commercial farming; and a poor Javanese rice peasant, who must migrate to the city of Djakarta to survive.

We learned about this book from reading Critchfield's article in the *Los Angeles Times* (Dec. 7, 1975), in which he reported that today world food reserves have fallen to a new low of one month's supply. He says at the end of his article: "If only a fraction of the $250 billion or more that the world spends for military purposes each year went instead into agricultural development, the world food problem might be solved quickly."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THEY ARE WAITING

THERE are various reasons, all of them good, for going back to Carl Ewald's *My Little Boy,* a classic which is too good to be classified (available now in *My Little Boy/My Big* Girl, translated by Beth Bolling, Horizon Press, 1962). Years ago we reprinted here some of the chapters, or parts of chapters, and just recently we heard of a case where a parent went back to Ewald in a whimsical search for help.

The circumstances were these: A small boy—a little bigger than Ewald's was at the end of his book—had just about persuaded the parent that there are problems without solutions. This little boy could draw. He did child's drawings, of course, but always they had a twist of imagination. The submarines have curious expressions, the seagulls are really flying around. The total disasters—and right now he will draw nothing but total disasters—show a flare for the dramatic. One day he brought his parent a drawing of submarines *and* sharks *and* drowning people, with a bomber overhead to make sure that nothing and nobody would "survive." "Will you put it up on the wall?" he asked. In this house especially good pictures get put on the wall. Some of the boy's mother's drawings are on the wall.

So this picture, having peculiar worthiness, went up on the wall. Days went by. "Is it safe to take it down?" the parent wondered.

Weeks later the boy came to this parent, mission-oriented and eager. "Will you take me out in the car and show me how to drive?" He has of course been "driving" for years, and his pharynx has perfected the sound of every gasoline-powered vehicle known to man, including the mini-motorcycle, for which no sound-barrier can exist.

Naturally, the proposal had little appeal for the parent, who began a circuitous reply, saying, "Well, let's see, you're practically eight years old, but it will be eight more years before you can have a license, so we really have plenty of time, don't we?" It didn't help. How could it? He does get to start the car—turning, that is, the switch—and is allowed to rest his hand on the wheel in untraveled areas. This is what he wanted more of, *right then.*

Reason went out the window. It had never really been there. The small boy stormed from the room, slamming the door. He reappeared a few minutes later, exhibiting stern purpose. Looking in no other direction, he went to the wall and tore down his picture, then marched all over the house, collecting other items of his design. He didn't just destroy them, he tortured them first, punching holes in the paper with a sharp pencil.

Then he went to his room and *sat.* The other parent followed him there. "Do you feel better, now?" she asked him.

"No," he answered glumly. "I feel mean."

That seemed promising. A little later, however, his irritation returned. He recited the pleasure he found in beating people up. He listed the smaller boys he could easily vanquish, told how he would do it, and what fun it would be.

"And what," the parent asked, "does that make you?" A slow smile came over his face. "A *bully,"* he said joyfully, and ran outdoors.

There wasn't anything to say. If you asked him was he *proud* of being a bully, he would of course go further. He would revel in it. So they let it go. He, they decided, was mostly teasing, even though he is very much of a bully at times, when he isn't being bullied himself by older, stronger boys, or even older, stronger girls.

One wonders, sometimes, in matters of this sort, about the value of the Direct Approach. In a limited environment, the independence of a child is hard for him to demonstrate. He has to use what means are available, and shocking—or trying to shock—his parents is about the most available

thing he can do. So he does what comes naturally at seven going on eight.

Skillful parents and teachers seem able to disarm small boys by a little cajolery and a covert suggestion or two, but these parents don't feel skillful. They decide to wait. And wait. And to bone up on Ewald.

Even Ewald, it was pleasant to find, had now and then to wait. Father and boy were out in the park one day. They saw some birds, a snail, and other park inhabitants, and then—"the very air is shaken by a tremendous roar."

> "What was that?" my little boy asks.
>
> "That was a lion in the Zoo," I say.
>
> Instantly I curse my stupidity.
>
> I might have said it was a cannon shot announcing the birthday of a prince—an earthquake—a large china pot falling right out of the sky and breaking into pieces—anything but the truth. For now my little boy wants to know what the Zoo is.
>
> I tell him.
>
> "The Zoo is a horrid place where they lock up wild animals who have done nothing wrong, who are used to running about freely in distant, foreign lands where they come from."

And so on. All the cruel things done to catch the animals for the Zoo. Even to the lion who, now in a cage, "paces up and down, up and down, gnashing his teeth in sorrow and rage and roaring so that he can be heard far, far away."

> "Dad, let's go see the lion."
>
> I pretend that I do not hear, and go on talking—about the strange birds in there. Great eagles who used to fly high. . . . Now they sit in cages, on a perch, like canaries, with clipped wings and blind eyes. . . .
>
> "Dad, can't we go and look at the birds?" . . .
>
> "Let me tell you something. It costs fifteen cents for you and twenty-five cents for me to go into the Zoo. That is forty cents altogether, which is a lot of money. We won't go in there now, but we'll buy right away the largest piggy bank we can find. We'll put forty cents into it and every Thursday we'll put another forty cents into it. That is going to mount up to quite a fortune—so much money that, when you grow up, you can go to Africa. . . ."
>
> "Dad, I'd rather go to the Zoo now." . .
>
> "Let's go and have some cake at Josty's?" I say.
>
> "I want to go to the Zoo." . . .
>
> "You are not going to the Zoo."

Gloomily, they went home, although father did buy the boy a piggy bank.

> But later in the afternoon I find him in the bedroom playing a pitiful scene.
>
> He has made a cage for the piggy-bank. He sneers at it and hits it with his whip while he yells:
>
> "You can't get out and bite me, you stupid pig—you can't get out. . . ."

So he has to wait—the father, that is, has to wait; which in a book means a change of subject. In life you just wait.

Everything probably came out quite nicely for Ewald's little boy, almost a hundred years ago, in pleasant, gentle, and respectable Denmark. Things are different now. Intensified and coarser, it seems. But the principle is the same. Ewald's boy was a lucky fellow. When the time came for him to start school, and all the other grown-ups were repeating proper things about going to school, Ewald, overcome by conscience, said to the child he loved:

> "I want to tell you that school is a dreadful institution. You have no idea what you will have to put up with there. They are going to tell you that two and two are four. . . ."

FRONTIERS

Economics: Two Sides

THERE are various "frontiers," and writers who define them intelligibly are our most valuable critics and commentators, since we are all, one way or another, living on these frontiers and have to decide from day to day what to do. There is the frontier of personal philosophical decision, rather luminously outlined by Jacob Needleman in *A Sense of the Cosmos.* There is the cultural frontier that Lewis Mumford and Theodore Roszak have mapped so well, and the socio-political frontier that Richard Goodwin has described in *The American Condition.* Then there is the economic frontier, to the understanding of which E. F. Schumacher has been a major contributor. These frontiers represent various levels of our being; almost certainly they are all facets of one fundamental situation, but it seems necessary to examine them, each in its own terms, in order to find out how this is so.

The economic frontier, for example, has two sides: The "total," over-all condition of the country or world, known to us mostly in terms of statistics, as compared with the personal relationships of the individual to his material environment. It is surely of some importance to have a general idea of the over-all condition. Although it is difficult to see what "one person" can do single-handed about famine and agribusiness and unemployment, the individual must still act at the economic level, and he may conceive it of some importance to act in harmony with general human needs.

A brief, pithy article by Sam Love in the November *Progressive,* "Let the Old Order Die," is useful for grasping the general condition. This writer details four basic assumptions of the existing economic order, then shows why they will no longer work in practice. They are: (1) Capital investment is good for society; (2) More energy will improve society; (3) Big is best; (4) Standardization pays. Here we can give only samples of the flaws in these assumptions. First, then, capital investment may help industry to improve its services and economic position, but if "improvement" is defined as more production from fewer people, then the program is self-defeating for all. "To the corporation, the change means increased capability and reduced labor costs; to the society, it means more unemployment." What, one wonders, besides extreme disaster, can alter the corporate outlook on this question?

The second assumption—that more energy is good—falters and breaks down for about the same reasons. Energy runs machines and machines, as we use them, displace people. Energy as we use it also displaces nature in the form of pollution, and meanwhile increases in cost.

Bigness produces and requires bureaucracy, and development in this direction becomes counter-productive beyond a certain point. The evidence is all about.

Finally, standardization, thought to be the key to universal prosperity, turns out to be stultifying at the cultural level, except for the talented manipulators of parts and people. Standardization has a place in economic process, but for us it has become a panacea with runaway tendencies. The monocultures of the Green Revolution, while participating in the justifications of the other assumptions, "invite epidemics" through lack of resistance to the ills of plants. They also make it almost impossible for small farmers to survive.

Mr. Love suggests that the economic undertakings based on these assumptions will get sick and should be allowed to die, while intelligent legislators ought now to plan for intermediate economic forms designed to lead us back to decentralization. "We have a choice: We can patch up private corporations with infusions of public capital through Reconstruction Finance Corporation schemes, or we can build a cooperative, people-oriented future."

Question: What sort of people need to be numerous enough to oblige legislators to adopt the latter course?

Answer: Nobody knows, but we do know, at least, that people learn by doing.

In *The New Pioneer's Handbook* (Schocken, 1975, $8.95), James Bohlen writes about the forms of self-sufficiency and self-reliance that one grows into by returning to live on the land. He says in his introduction:

> It is the purpose of this book to acquaint the potential new pioneer with a feeling for the materials and technology which will be available to aid in the development of these survival techniques. Granted a much-reduced scale of usage, one may say that the materials presently employed will be used in the future, provided they are available at some exchange rate most people in the world can afford and in sufficient quantity that there be enough for all.
>
> In essence, our problem is this: we have no independent source of fuel, food, clothing or shelter, but are forced to rely for them upon the good offices of benevolent leadership and the uninterrupted supply of vast quantities of energy and materials. The necessities are based on a world-wide ordering and presume upon efficient extraction, manufacture and transport. Moreover, apart from any political considerations, our entire material culture presumes the existence of an infinitely available quantity of cheap fuel. We have lately seen just how much a presumption that is.
>
> This is not the place to discuss the origins of the problem, but the problem is rapidly becoming more evident and the need for a solution more pressing. We must rule out as an intelligent answer the concept of conserving energy or developing large-scale alternative energy sources while maintaining the same cultural thrust. One would only succeed thereby in buying some time while the increased population consumes the conserved materials and fuels. Man must learn to occupy this planet without depleting the earth's material stock or its life support systems, the water and the atmosphere. We must therefore develop a new material culture, indeed, a new society.

No one, of course, who reads this book will find it a blueprint for his own life. The individualized character of decentralized, personal effort and self-sufficiency prohibits "standardization" of remedies. Yet books like this are based upon a *rationale* that the new society will also be based on, and a book on pioneering is bound to have in it ideas and suggestions that people will be able to adapt to their own use. There may be a need for such books; Greg Whitten, a teacher who learned how to farm his Quebec acreage (Frontiers, Nov. 5), found his best counsels in some pictures in *Irish Folkways!*

But what we are after—what we are all after—is a new cultural mood, and books, whatever their practical limitations, are instruments for its spread. Once the mood is established, ways and means flow more naturally from one individual to another, and such collaborations lead to practical activity by groups and communities.

James Bohlen, incidentally, is an engineer—a research design engineer. Engineers have an enormous contribution to make to the intermediate technology E. F. Schumacher advocates, and successful application of technological know-how to a decentralized, humanly-scaled society will turn all the participating engineers into teachers. The restoration of individual competence will require this sort of education.