

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

WE are the inheritors of the unfinished business of the eighteenth century—of the morning twilight of an enlightenment which never became full day. The revolution that grew out of the Enlightenment was a series of *demands*, and while we have had delivery of a good many of the Rights of Man declared two hundred years ago, there are, we think, substantial reasons for complaint to the management. Our system is not working very well. There is no longer much promise in its future.

To many people of today this seems essentially wrong and unjust. The Eighteenth-Century revolution had a heroic character. Its struggle was supported by righteous emotion. It affirmed high principles and proclaimed the pursuit of happiness, and these ideals and objectives have provided the morale of our undertakings for a full two hundred years. What has gone wrong?

There are several familiar diagnoses, but here we shall attempt to assemble an explanation which is less well known. In an essay on "Authority" (*New American Review*, No. 8), John Schaar wrote in 1970:

The current epidemic of revolts and uprisings, the current challenging of established institutions and processes, the thickening atmosphere of resentment and hostility, the drop-out cultures of the young—these are something other than the romantic, reactionary, or nihilistic spasms which they are seen as in some quarters of the academy and the state. They are cries of people who feel that the processes and powers which control their lives are inhuman and destructive. They are the desperate questionings of people who fear that their institutions and officials have no answers to the questions that matter. They are overt signs of the underlying crisis of legitimacy in the modern state.

It is often assumed that there is nothing but indignant righteousness and repressed good

intentions in these revolts. No doubt there is righteousness in them, along with some honest longing for good, but how much understanding is there of what has actually gone wrong, what really ought to be done? Has anyone offered a programmatic answer to this question? There have been a few such answers—*Blueprint for Survival* by a group of scientists is one—but no proposal has had support sufficient to alter major patterns of corporate decision.

Let us go back a little further in history—to the time when Ortega y Gasset wrote *The Revolt of the Masses* (published in 1930 in Spain, and by Norton in the United States in 1932). In this book the Spanish essayist gave characterization to what seemed to him the prevailing European state of mind—the common mood and attitude resulting from Enlightenment expectations:

. . . the ordinary man, hitherto guided by others, has resolved to govern the world himself. This decision to advance to the social foreground has been brought about in him automatically, when the new type of man he represents had barely arrived at maturity. If from the viewpoint of what concerns public life, the psychological structure of this new type of mass-man be studied, what we find is as follows: (1) An inborn, root-impression that life is easy, plentiful, without any grave limitations; consequently, each average man finds in himself a sensation of power and triumph which, (2) invites him to stand up for himself as he is, to look upon his moral and intellectual endowment as excellent, complete. This contentment with himself leads him to shut himself off from any external court of appeal; not to listen, not to submit his opinions to judgment, not to consider others' existence. His intimate feeling of power urges him always to exercise predominance. He will act then as if he and his like were the only beings existing in the world; and, consequently, (3) will intervene in all matters, imposing his own vulgar views without respect or regard for others, without limit or reserve, that is to say, in accordance with a system of "direct action."

Ortega found this to be a civilization which "allows the average man to take his place in a world of superabundance, of which he perceives only the lavishness of the means at his disposal, nothing of the pains involved." Accordingly—

He finds himself surrounded by marvellous instruments, healing medicines, watchful governments, comfortable privileges. On the other hand, he is ignorant how difficult it is to invent those medicines and those instruments and to assure their production in the future; he does not realize how unstable is the organization of the State and is scarcely conscious to himself of any obligations. This lack of balance falsifies his nature, vitiates it in its very roots, causing him to lose contact with the very substance of life, which is made up of absolute danger, is radically problematic. The form most contradictory to human life that can appear among the human species is the "self-satisfied man." Consequently, when he becomes the predominant type, it is time to raise the alarm and to announce that humanity is threatened with degeneration, that is, with relative death.

This was the warning, the alarm sounded by a philosopher nearly fifty years ago. It attracted some attention among those who had similar philosophical inclinations, but no real concern was aroused. Ortega, after all, was the champion of an extremely unpopular theory of social order and change. In his view, human excellence is achieved by making demands *on oneself*, not upon others. And where, in any of the dominant currents of modern thought, is there ground for support of this conception? There is little concerning individual obligation in modern psychological theory, and nothing at all about it in modern political practice.

In a few words, John Schaar describes the ineffectual impotence of a society lost in its own complexity:

Our familiar ways of thinking prepare us to imagine that a society must have "someone" in charge, that there must be somewhere a center of power and authority. Things just would not work unless someone, somewhere, knew how they worked and was responsible for their working right. That image and meaning of authority has almost no meaning today—as the people in power are the first

to say. Modern societies have become increasingly like self-regulating machines, whose human tenders are needed only to make minor adjustments demanded by the machine itself. As the whole system grows more and more complex, each individual is able to understand and control less and less of it. In area after area of both public and private life, no single identifiable office or individual commands either the knowledge or the authority to make decisions. A search for the responsible party leads through an endless maze of committees, bureaus, offices, and anonymous bodies.

This is the scratchy swan song of the Enlightenment theory of knowledge. It is the ignominious defeat of the "systems" approach by routine bureaucracy, the obliteration of vision by petty rules and mechanical certainties. The theory began, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a bold determination to externalize all knowledge, the means chosen being to insist that no knowledge exists except that which is mathematically deduced from sense experience. By this rule the authority of an outside God would be destroyed, putting a final end to priestly imposture and control. From this point of view, the entire scientific movement was a great moral crusade and polemic—an unceasing campaign against the one, great, arbitrary, subjective entity—God; and if, in the process, all the multitude of lesser subjects—human beings—were logically denied reality, this hardly mattered to leaders intent upon victory over overt psychological and political tyranny. So human beings were omitted from the scientific cosmos—omitted as causes, and studied only as effects. This was a conclusion that gradually became evident, and was finally ratified by the teachings of the Emergent Evolutionists, who denied the presence of subjective causal intelligence at any point in the cosmos. Man, they insisted, is an extraordinary accident—a being whose sense of meaning and capacity for reason somehow emerged by chance from a universe of no-meaning. In this way the scientists preserved their bludgeon for battering down the structures of irrational belief; but they did not anticipate that

their weapon would also render human freedom meaningless.

The practical consequences of all this were clearly seen and described at the political level, in 1948, by Richard Wright, who wrote in a letter to Dorothy Norman (published in *Art and Action*):

I feel that what is happening is no longer a struggle between the Right and the Left. The newspapers call it by the names of Right and Left, but each day the two extremes possess more and more in common. Russia has her cultural purges, and so do we; only in Russia it is official, and with us it is the force and so-called moral power of the community. But the results in the end are the same, that is, the suppression of the individual, the devaluation of personality, and preachments against what they call "subjectivity." Why do both the Left and the Right feel called upon to take such an attitude? I feel that the answer cannot be found in merely examining Leftist and Rightist ideology, but in some social system which is common to both of them, that is, unbridled industrialism, an industrialism which is the yardstick of all value. As things stand now, the only difference is that Russia has taken our industrial methods and applied them with a ruthlessness which we cannot use because of our traditions of individual freedom. What is needed is something which is not of either of these two schools. . . .

What is happening here in Europe is not only a contest between Left and Right, but a total extinction of the very conception of what it has meant to be a human being for 2,000 years. Those of us who worked on the Left helped in making things confused; and those who worked on the Right, bit by bit, did the very thing which they accused the Left of doing. . . .

Indeed, from the way the future looks, one can well ask if freedom is possible in the coming world?

One has to speak in general terms about this question now. Indeed, the fact that one finds that one must speak in general terms shows how elementary the question has become. In the past, we took the general goals for granted, but that is no longer possible. What is happening now calls into question the very conception of man as man, and perhaps at no time since the decline of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages can one ask with more pointedness: What is Man? For upon that answer will depend the kind of world we will build or allow to be built. Those who have no sharp answer cannot influence

what is taking place and what is about to take place. . . .

The Right and Left, in different ways, have decided that man is a kind of animal whose needs can be met by making more and more articles for him to consume. If man is to be contained in that definition, and if it is not to be challenged, then that is what will prevail; and a world will be built in which everybody will get enough to eat and full stomachs will be equated with contentment and freedom and those who will say they are not happy under such a regime will be guilty of treason. How sad that is We all were accomplices in this crime. . . . Is it too late to say something to halt it, modify it?

While the question, What is Man?, that Wright asks—the question largely ignored or confused by the Enlightenment thinkers—is indeed the question before us today, we should take note of the fact that it is no longer possible to assume that "unbridled industrialism" knows how to give everybody "enough to eat." It is now becoming evident that the world of the future will require another sort of science, very different uses of technology, and attitudes and values which support a radical change in both direction and pace. The implicit logic of these requirements—the assumptions from which such changes would flow most naturally—seems an absolute rejection of the idea that man is "a kind of animal whose needs can be met by making more and more articles for him to consume."

This is to say that the self-betrayals of man by expectation of a luxurious technological plenitude are over. The time will soon be here when, even among "prosperous" people, it will no longer be possible for humans to falsify their nature by elaborate consumption. The question, What is man?", will be renewed by emergencies requiring changed definitions of all the relations we have with the world and with one another. Anticipating this confrontation amounts to returning to Ortega, since he, long before the present advocates of reform, saw the self-defeat of a purely sensate life and proposed a contrasting ideal of human behavior:

On the contrary the select man, the excellent man is urged, by interior necessity, to appeal from himself to some standard beyond himself, whose service he freely accepts. Let us recall that at the start we distinguished the excellent man from the common man by saying that the former is the one who makes great demands on himself, and the latter the one who makes no demands on himself, but contents himself with what he is, and is delighted with himself. Contrary to what is usually thought, it is the man of excellence, and not the common man who lives in essential servitude. Life has no savour for him unless he makes it consist in service to something transcendental. When, by chance, such necessity is lacking, he grows restless and invents some new standard, more difficult, more exigent, with which to coerce himself. This is life lived as a discipline—the noble life. Nobility is defined by the demands it makes on us—by obligations, not by rights. . . . Private rights or privileges are not, then, passive possessions and mere enjoyment, but they represent the standard attained by personal effort. On the other hand, common rights, such as those "of the man and the citizen," are passive property pure usufruct and benefit, the generous gift of fate which every man finds before him, and which answers to no effort whatever, unless it be that of breathing and avoiding insanity. I would say, then, that an impersonal right is held, a personal one is upheld.

Quite evidently, in Ortega's view, the rewards of excellence, of nobility, are withered by constraint. They are, so to speak, beyond the law and can have no traffic with the commonplace "rights" which men seek to secure through constitutional guarantees.

There are two reasons why this doctrine of human excellence is not eagerly embraced. First, it seems to recall the presumptions and crimes of the aristocracy of blood which the eighteenth-century revolution was fought to put an end to. Second, it amounts to a claim that we must call ourselves to account, endeavor to become better, wiser persons than we are, and, as everyone knows, the moral struggle toward self-improvement is painful. It hardly seems part of the pursuit of happiness, since happiness by definition is not pain.

Yet by a sure instinct we seek out for admiration those who have shaped their own lives and character through discipline and the pursuit of distant goals. We cherish these ideals, even though thinking about them seriously often brings an uneasy wondering whether pursuing such goals would bring back the moral pressures which made the Puritans so unlikeable. Meanwhile, the compromise with supernaturalism remains an alluring alternative. Supernatural excellence is no threat to pleasure-loving people because they are not required to do likewise. "Sin" becomes almost a moral right if only the gods are able to be splendidly good.

But to reflect on these matters is to realize, sooner or later, that when we speak of the dignity of man and the inviolability of the individual, we are honoring, not what a human being is, but *what he may become*. Only the potentiality of self-creation makes man the wonder of the cosmos and the masterpiece of nature.

Now we are confronted by a metaphysical question rather than a physical one, and we must consult ourselves, not Darwin, for the reply. We need the myths, not the archaeologists, for this sort of understanding of human nature. And in relation to the idea of superior or noble men, we ought to consider not only European history, where we read of the misuse and debasement of noble status, but the teachings of Gandhi, whose doctrines of Ahimsa and Sarvodaya depend upon those transformations in human relations which result from the voluntary resolve by individuals to be better men, superior to what they have been in the past.

There is ground for these ideas in spontaneous human longing and aspiration, and in the example of rare individuals all through history. What we lack, however, is a rational ground for seeking excellence, for thinking ourselves *capable* of it. Can such motives be given believable foundation in the nature of man? The question asked by Richard Wright, "What is Man?" cannot be left to the biologists and anthropologists to

answer, since their Enlightenment background shuts out consideration of what we want to know. Is there, or can there be, in short, a transcendental and a metaphysical answer?

At once we are confronted by the vast confusion of religious claims and philosophical speculation. Yet the question has undying validity, since the most engrossing part of human history is the history of human transcendence. And the most engrossing studies of metaphysics deal with the problem of immortality and the mysteries behind birth and death. Here, it seems right to say, may be found the most important inquiries into the complexities of the nature of man. It seems right to admit, also, that we have ignored this crucial area of inquiry for centuries. For example, we have restricted our studies of psychology almost entirely to physiological investigations. Curiously, William James set the pattern for subsequent generations of researchers by declaring that only by concentrating on physiology could they prove that a psychology which does not begin with metaphysical assumptions is bound to end in bankruptcy! Can we now say that this bankruptcy has at last come about, and that a beneficent conspiracy of natural and human events is compelling attention to metaphysical inquiry?

If so, there are serious methodological questions to be answered. What are the appropriate sources or means of verification in metaphysical theory? We hardly know. What are the resources in past, pre-scientific investigation? The Brahmin teachings? Buddhist psychology, which is subtler than any Western investigation of subjective dynamics? The Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines of the soul and its embodiments? Or should we rely on our own inventions?

We are certainly rank beginners in considering such matters, as the extravagance of beliefs now so suddenly embraced makes plain. But we may at least and at last be going in the right direction, having decided to look seriously at

the vast subjective region of the universe that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment ignored.

REVIEW

FOOTNOTE TO PLATO

PEOPLE are very largely formed in their intellectual and feeling life by what they read or take into their minds by other means. In the oral culture which preceded Plato's time, Greek character was shaped by the ideas and feelings obtained from Homeric poetry. Actually, Plato's quarrel with the poets. was mainly for the reason that the Greeks accepted the Homeric version of the good life without critical examination. The martial strains of the epic unfitted them for this. As Eric Havelock says in *Preface to Plato*:

When confronted with an Achilles, we can say, here is a man of strong character. definite personality, great energy and forceful decision, but it would be equally true to say, here is a man to whom it has not occurred, and to whom it cannot occur, that he has a personality apart from the pattern of his acts. His acts are responses to his situation, and are governed by remembered examples of previous acts by previous strong men. The Greek tongue, therefore, as long as it is the speech of men who have remained in the Greek sense "musical" and have surrendered themselves to the spell of tradition, cannot frame words to express the conviction that "I" am one thing and the tradition is another that "I" can stand apart from tradition and examine it, that "I" can and should break the spell of its hypnotic force, and that "I" should divert at least some of my mental powers away from memorization and direct them instead into channels of critical inquiry and analysis.

Mr. Havelock makes plain the meaning of Plato's attempt at reform of Greek life and thought—the central intent, actually, of Platonic philosophy:

The Greek ego in order to achieve that kind of cultural experience which after Plato became possible and then normal must stop identifying itself successively with a whole series of polymorphic vivid narrative situations, must stop re-enacting the whole scale of the emotions, of challenge and of love, and hate and fear and despair and joy, in which the characters of epic become involved. It must stop splitting itself up into an endless series of moods. It must separate itself out and by an effort of sheer will must rally itself to the point where it can say "I am I, an autonomous universe of my own, able to speak,

think and act in independence of what I happen to remember." This amounts to accepting the premise that there is a "me," a "self," a "soul," a consciousness which is self-governing and which discovers the reason for action in itself rather than in imitation of the poetic experience. The doctrine of the autonomous psyche is the counterpart of the rejection of the oral culture.

In Plato's time it was the philosopher who became effective critic of the "media" of those days and who attempted to free his students from the bonds of custom and tradition. In our time this task is performed by the artist and the essayist. A writer in the *Paris Tribune* (July 29) tells what happened to James Baldwin after working on an assignment from *Esquire* on the movies. He looked at screenings of old movies and recent ones, starting with *Birth of a Nation* and ending with *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*, and although these films were about half a century apart, he noted that both had the same stereotyped character, "the same loyal nigger maid, playing the same role and speaking the same lines." Baldwin told the *Tribune* writer:

I started to examine the power of a legend that creates you and you create it. . . . I was formed by those films. So was Ronald Reagan, for example, and the whole American consciousness. In that sense it's sad. I've watched my country for a long time. . . . Nothing is going to be accomplished in the case of black-white until people who think of themselves white stop seeing themselves that way. My danger does not make you safe. You're dealing with the bottomless question of identity, with the Other. . . .

Baldwin's new book, *The Devil Finds Work*, is a study of the stereotypes in films which produce fixed conceptions of identity. "People," he says, "who cannot escape thinking of themselves as white are poorly equipped, if equipped at all, to consider the meaning of black: people who know so little about themselves can face very little in another: and one dares hope for nothing from friends like these. . . ."

This is a Platonic comment, or at least an application of Plato's idea that self-knowledge is always the result of an emancipation from the

narrowing effects of cultural conditioning. It is the revolutionary business of the artist to resist and expose this conditioning, even while using its effects as his raw material.

Another distinguished black writer, Ezekiel Mphahlele, who was born in Johannesburg, not Harlem, makes the same point in another way. In *The African Image* (Faber, 1962) he rejects the attempt of sentimentalists to romanticize African identity. Reviewing a book by a Sierra Leonean author, he says:

Mr. Conton's novel, *The African*, is a beautifully written and highly polished book and it shows a keen sensitivity. It is also a good example of how political slogans, if made a principle of art, can destroy the impact a work of art might have had. He is all the time advertising the African way of life to the foreign reader, with an air of discovery. His hero does say he is rediscovering the African in himself. The purity and innocence of Africa . . . naked cold feet . . . a girl soaping her body and laughing in the rain. The damnable old *cliche* that we have come to associate with the colonial or European who comes to Africa with that back-to-the-womb expression on his face. A number of experiences Mr. Conton's hero goes through in order to rediscover his Africa, to "project the African Personality," are contrived, and this is the stance that spoils the author's good writing. Must the educated from abroad come back to recolonize us? Must he walk about with his mouth open, startled by the beauty of African women, by the black man's "heightened sensitivity"? It's all so embarrassing.

The façades of political propaganda are an offense to the artist. The human integrity of black people is all that needs defense, and there is plenty to do in this area. Mphahlele puts it well:

We are not going to help our artist by rattling tin-cans of the African Personality about his ears. The dial of response in him will quiver in the way the dial of a balance does when you throw a weighty object on it instead of placing it gently. And while it quivers it does not register anything at all. That's how slogans act on an artist. In the final analysis, the battle must be resolved inside himself as a result of his own effort. Every artist in the world, African or not, must go through the agony of purging his art of imitations and false notes before he strikes an individual medium. Leave the artist to this process of evolution; let him sweat it out and be emancipated by

his own art. He is after all the sensitive of his community and the cultural impacts about him must, if he has the make-up of an artist, teach him how to express the longings, failings and successes of his people. He will also know that if he wants to list the good qualities of the African, a monograph is the place for that.

In an article in *Foreign Affairs* (July, 1964), Mr. Mphahlele went even more directly to the point:

I refuse to be put in a Negro file—for sociologists to come and examine me. And yet I am no less committed to the African revolution. Art unifies even while it distinguishes men; and I regard it as an insult to the African for anyone to suggest—as the apostles of *négritude* often do—that because we write independently on different themes in diverse modes and styles all over Africa, we are therefore ripe victims of Balkanization.

Let *négritude* make the theme of literature if people want to use it. But we must remember that literature springs from an individual's experience in the context of the culture and assumptions of the group. In its effort to take in the whole man, literature also tries to see far ahead, to project a prophetic vision, such as a writer is capable of, based on contemporary experience. . . .

If African culture is worth anything at all, it should not require myths to prop it up. These thoughts are not new at all. I have come to them after physical and mental agony. And this is of course not my monopoly either. It is the price Africa has to pay. And if you thought that the end of colonialism was the end of the agony, then it is time to wake up.

It is the capacity of the artist to create legends—legends in which people often believe, altering their lives for better or worse—that gives the artist his great moral responsibility. In *The Need for Roots* Simone Weil illustrated this responsibility by recalling that readers of Gide's *Caves du Vatican* had been known to imitate the gratuitous act of Lafcadio, the "hero" of this story, who pushed someone off a moving train to prove to himself that he could commit any act whatever, however motiveless or unrelated to preceding events. There is no reason, Simone Weil observes, "for placing such books behind the inviolable barrier of art for art's sake, and sending

to prison a young fellow who pushes someone off a train in motion." Gide, she maintains, was quite aware of the effect his work was having, and was proud of the power of his prose.

It is no exaggeration to say, as Simone Weil does, that in our time the position formerly occupied by priests is now held by novelists. James Baldwin would add the makers of Elms. Commenting on *The Exorcist* in *The Devil Finds Work*, he spoke of "the terrifying way it makes evil banal and ends with the little girl who will remember nothing and her movie star mother who will, presumably, go off to make another film." Fortunately, we have artists and writers, although not enough of them, who mark for identification the real horror in such work.

COMMENTARY

A BETTER ENLIGHTENMENT

THERE are two prongs of present-day attack on the philosophy and influence of the Enlightenment. One, an obscurantist rejection of its first principles, is organized and aimed by the advocates of sectarian fundamentalist religion who deplore the elimination of a personal anthropomorphic God and object to the humanist contention that man has within himself all needed resources for self-improvement. The other critique calls the Enlightenment to account, not so much for what it affirmed as for what it left out, maintaining that these omissions have led to fatal distortions in prevailing ideas about the nature of man.

What were the first principles of the Enlightenment? In *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, Carl Becker states them briefly:

(1) man is not natively depraved, (2) the end of life is life itself, the good life on earth instead of the beatific life after death; (3) man is capable, guided solely by the light of reason and experience, of perfecting the good life on earth; and (4) the first and essential condition of the good life on earth is the freeing of men's minds from the bonds of ignorance and superstition, and of their bodies from the arbitrary oppression of the constituted social authorities.

We see here, sharply outlined, both the strength and the weakness of the Enlightenment doctrines. Affirmed is the essential conviction that man must rely upon himself. Help from supernatural sources is ruled out. Denied, however, is a conception of self which transcends ordinary sense experience. The world of the Enlightenment philosophers was not truly an *open* world because it did not include the region of transcendent possibilities. In time, therefore, it became the closed-system world of the mechanists in science, the behaviorists in psychology, and the hedonists in morals.

Is it possible, then, to maintain openness to transcendental conceptions and explanations without inviting return of all the infections of supernaturalism? From some of the present-day critics we have the reply of a cautious "yes." Lewis Mumford was perhaps the first to chart a course in *The Condition of Man*. Among later contributors and elaborators of this possibility have been Theodore Roszak (*Unfinished Animal*) and Jacob Needleman (*A Sense of the Cosmos*). To be candid, however, this balanced reassessment and exploration of human possibilities is an enterprise hardly begun.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE INSTRUMENT OF CHANGE

THE War Resisters League Peace Calendar for 1977—a wire-bound engagement book of the sort busy people find useful—has education for its theme. Copies (\$3.00 each) may be ordered from the WRL, 339 Lafayette Street, New York 10012. A preface by Grace Paley makes this comparison between public and private schools:

The public school served the industrial needs of a society which required workers who could read and write, it socialized their souls into an American value system. But it also amazed the immigrant with the possibilities of language, science, literature, history.

Private "progressive" schools came from a rising class of families with the loving wish to reform the rigid classrooms of their childhood and with enough money to do so. They hoped their children would be more creative, more fulfilled than they, but—a continuation of their own high reforming intelligence—just as Catholic school parents educate for a continuation of the Catholic household and upperclass schools for upperclassness—the sense of owning the world which precedes actual grownup inheritance.

Even when the local public school was fairly good, the class decision was to extract its children from among others. In some cases, this turned the local school into a ghetto. In other cases, an array of exclusive schools was established. (We wrote lots of angry articles about that kind of thing when it happened in the South.)

The results were particularly noticeable in my own neighborhood. While there were once half a dozen public elementary schools, there are now two. There are five or six exclusive schools and as many Catholic schools. The public schools are not only fairly good but offer choice—that is—in one, children work in open classrooms and broader age groups; the other is more conventional and some neighbors prefer it.

These two schools exist in all their interesting difference as a result of passionate (and continuing) struggle around the ideas of education, teacher responsibility and neighborhood control. Some of my radical friends, whose children attend exclusive schools, had strong opinions and great longing to take

part in these struggles as they have in more furious ones—like busing. "Who's that guy? When'd he get into the act?" neighbors have asked. Who will listen to people who have abandoned the people?

One last remark: There are examples of alternative or "free" schools that made sense—the First Street School (on the Lower East Side of New York) for instance, where Mabel and George Dennison and Susan Goodman persevered for a couple of years. The lives of *those* children required the most "private," the most attentive of schools.

Some of the energy of the Free School Movement was in that useful direction. The pressure of that movement persuaded some Boards of Education and State and National Arts Councils to fund non-authoritarian educators who were able to teach in public schools one or two days a week.

But very often the rhetoric of that movement served as an excuse for loving parents to withdraw their child from the community—abandoning the local school. What was just ordinary self-concern and ambition in the middle class, was my Puritan nature suggests, wickedness in the radical parent.

This argument for—and defense of—the public schools seems well stated. Parents with a tendency to suppose that *their* children deserve something better than the common lot may find it food for thought. Probably *some* private schools are better than a lot of public ones, but there is that other dimension of the question—what if experiencing what the majority of young experience is more important than we think, as preparation for the future? Left out of all such equations is the variable factor of the individual response of children. Certainly some of them may need and be strengthened by a somewhat protected and cherished childhood, while others are weakened (taught cultural egotism) when their isolation from the usual school environment is linked with the motives Grace Paley deplors.

There are other considerations. One could say, for example, that the constructive changes which finally come in the public schools are largely the result of experiments in smaller places, privately conducted, which are free to innovate and become models. That this happens is hardly debatable. The freedom of the private school is precious. That

private schools may make either a good or a bad use of their freedom is also not debatable.

However, Grace Paley speaks of the value of the "open classrooms" in the public school in her neighborhood. Someone might argue that this illustrates the value of having private schools to pioneer such methods, but it wouldn't apply. The open classroom was a development of the British public school system at the "infant" (four to seven) level. This obliges us to notice that the British, with their Plowden Report and the quality of their teachers and "heads," do better at this sort of education than we do. It causes us to remember that British schools for the young are not run from London by curriculum planners for the "system," but that individual public schools in England have a lot of freedom to try what they think is good, that *teachers* have the enduring respect of the children's parents. In short, there is a kind of coherence and dignity in British society which makes it possible for public infants' schools to make their own innovations. They didn't have to separate into public and private and then hope that the private ones would show the way. The public schools can show the way.

But in America they haven't done it. (There are of course exceptions.) And the American schools, one learns from at least half a dozen books by American educators, often have major difficulties in getting open classrooms going. Conceivably—just conceivably—our larger, more heterogeneous, less tradition-guided mass society needs the strong example of some private schools.

Well, if the people who have started private schools in America had gone into or remained in the public school system, expanding their talents there, would we now be better equipped for change? This is certainly possible. Or would most of them have failed to accomplish much by reason of the bureaucratic obstacles, etc.? And lost heart? We don't know. Such questions always have yes-and-no answers.

A side-argument that ought to be raised would be based on the small-is-beautiful principle, which certainly applies to schools. City public schools, one

could say, just *can't* be small. Not now. Not soon. They nonetheless ought to be, just as the cities themselves ought to be smaller. When circumstances are all wrong, there is the distinct possibility that the first steps in changing them will seem upside-down or a backward way of doing things, simply in order to get started, to make a beginning. There are compromises which go in the right direction and others which only make things worse. Telling the difference is sometimes very difficult indeed.

A quotation from Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Teacher*, farther along in the *Peace Calendar*, is too good to leave out:

I can't disassociate the activity in an infant room from peace and war. So often I have seen the destructive vent, beneath an onslaught of creativity, dry up under my eyes. Especially with the warlike Maori five-year-olds who pass through my hands in hundreds, arriving with no thought in their heads other than to take, break, fight and be first. With no opportunity for creativity they may well develop, as they did in the past, with fighting as their ideal of life. Yet all this can be expelled through the creative vent, and the more violent the boy and more I see that he creates, and when he kicks the others with his big boots, treads on fingers on the mat, hits another over the head with a piece of wood or throws a stone, I put clay in his hands, or chalk. He can create bombs if he likes or draw my house in flame, but it is the creative vent that is widening all the time and the destructive one atrophying, however much it may look to the contrary. And anyway I have always been more afraid of the weapon unspoken than of the one on a blackboard.

This is an application of the Blakean principle so well explained by Harold Goddard:

Blake is right. Imagination uncreates not only anger, but all the other seven deadly sins. A little of it mitigates evil. A little more forgives it. A little more yet forgets it. And still more uncreates it. . . . It is this double power to annihilate and create that makes imagination the sole instrument of genuine and lasting, in contrast with illusory and temporary, social change.

FRONTIERS

Beyond the Orthodoxies

THE present is a time of open challenge to ideologies. In the United States the assumptions of the market economy, of the "growth" idea of progress, and of private property as the bastion of personal freedom are being called into serious question. Solzhenitsyn, an illustrious victim and survivor of Soviet penal camps and prisons, has attracted worldwide attention through his articulate advocacy of simple truth-telling, in contrast to the requirements of ideological conformity. Others whose work is pervaded by this quality come to mind—Czeslaw Milosz and Milovan Djilas, two courageous upholders of the dignity and integrity of European civilization.

In Africa the few remaining colonial governments are invited by clear voices to moral self-examination. Last summer the *Paris Tribune* (June 24) reprinted from the *Johannesburg Star* a letter by Alan Paton, addressed to Prime Minister Vorster, in which he held the South African white people responsible for the killing and destruction at Soweto. The crimes were apparently committed, he said, by outcasts of South Africa's affluent society, but "unless we understand our guilt we shall never understand anything at all." Who, he asked, are the "agitators"?

They are the discriminatory laws.

It is fantastic that a minister should accuse anonymous polarizing forces. They are not anonymous, they can all be given names.

They are the Group Areas Act, the separate universities, the Mixed Marriages Act, the abolition of parliamentary representation for colored people and a dozen other laws.

That there are human agitators as well, no one can doubt. But their weapons are the discriminatory laws, the laws of apartheid.

Do you think that our immutable doctrine of the separation of the races has brought peace and concord to South Africa?

Do you as Christians believe that the poor should pay for the poor, that you should spend

between 400 rands (\$462) and 500 rands a year on the education of each white child, and between 30 rands and 40 rands on each black child?

Do you as Christians believe that white industry should be maintained at the cost of the integrity of black family life?

Do you believe that your separate universities have encouraged the growth of wholesome national identities, cooperating gladly with others in a multinational country?

Do you believe that you can move away from racial discrimination until you repeal discriminatory laws?

There are other questions, but these are enough.

..

You must be able to transcend your racial origins in a time of crisis, such as this undoubtedly is. Instead of declaring that you are determined to maintain law and order, could you not assure us that you are determined to find out—without prejudgment—why law and order have broken down, and to put the wrong things right?

A challenge of another sort comes from a British journalist, Geoffrey Taylor, who has lived in Rhodesia and reported on Rhodesian affairs for the past fifteen years. In the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* for April 25, he wrote of the psychological difficulties of those who are still in the grip of ideological belief, and of the need to distinguish between their ideological misconceptions and their moral character. After listing the major injustices against Africans enforced by the ruling whites in Rhodesia, he said:

All these accusations are true. Yet, leaving aside some equally manifest iniquities in black Africa, they fail to present a fair picture of Rhodesia. . . . They portray a master race dominating a sullen peasantry which is one of the many popular caricatures of Rhodesia. If that were a true portrait the country could hardly have enjoyed the unquestioned peace which has marked it for most of the time since it became a self-governing colony in 1923. Nor would black troops be entrusted with so much of the defense against guerillas. . . .

The whites may be blinkered according to the standards by which they are judged. They may fail to realize that the system of government which they impose . . . prevents many Africans from developing

their full potential. But these are political offenses, not personal ones. I would like to make a plea that although we should continue to point out to white Rhodesians that their position is politically indefensible, and that a system which places emphasis on color rather than personality is wrong, we should not condemn them as individuals. The white Rhodesians, or at least a great many of them, see themselves as being protective and generous towards Africans for whom they believe themselves in some way responsible. These are old-fashioned attitudes, but Rhodesia is an old-fashioned place.

Mr. Taylor believes that attitudes toward South Africa should be the same. Concluding, he says: "I would admire the criticism of South African practices which appear, to take one famous example, in the *Rand Daily Mail*, as worth more than all the censures that emanate from countries, including our own, to which the job of developing a multiracial country is only a paper exercise."

Another thoughtful appeal for patience with the gradualism of actual change is made by Jean-François Revel in his concluding Author's Note in *Without Marx or Jesus*. He says:

I may be forgiven for repeating, once more, that effective revolution consists in changing reality, and not in working within the framework, and with the blessing, of orthodoxy.

It is true that one can deny the existence of such changes if they do not conform to one's idea of orthodoxy. In that case one must deny all progress, on the grounds that, since capitalism has not been abolished, all progress is but "alienation." . . . If the worker has no money, he is being exploited. If he has money, he is alienated. If he lives in a slum, he is the victim of capitalism. And if his employer gives him a decent place to live, free of charge, he has "sold out to the system." . . .

People who reason thus are less concerned with knowing *what* is happening than in knowing whether what happens is in conformity with a Plan. But this mentality is not peculiar to our own time. In one of Molière's plays, a patient is recovering his health by following an unorthodox method of treatment. His outraged doctor tells him: "Sir, it would be better to die according to the rules than to live in contradiction to the Faculty of Medicine."