

THERE IS REALLY SOMETHING THERE

A TERRIBLE "timeliness" afflicts nearly everything put into print, these days. While the issues of the present are urgent enough, they seem debated with principles acquired as suddenly as the rifle torn from his cabin wall by an early American frontiersman who rushes to oppose an attack by "varmints." In literary criticism, last year's books are forgotten, and an inordinate amount of space is devoted to new books that are not worth reading at all. George Kennan's observation, that we behave as if we had no past and no future, has a much wider than merely political application. Fury replaces reflection, resentment is vindicated by righteousness, and anything but angry impatience is identified as calculating reaction or complacent indifference.

The press is devoted to "performance," as though current history were a theatrical enterprise arranged for the benefit of publishers and their stockholders. A kind of exhibitionism is now expected of talented writers and artists, and retailed by serious magazines. Modern progress, you could say, has run out of "natural resources" to exploit emotionally, and is learning to devour itself. Only the *ad hoc* has relevance; the past is not to be understood in its own terms, but only for partisan applications to the present. History becomes a means to brazenly self-serving ends.

What of the timeless realities and their expression in man? To ask the question thus baldly is almost to nullify its meaning. Yet it ought to be asked, since it represents in principle the only conceivable antidote to the obsessive preoccupation with the present and the "new." However, a less ostentatious approach to the problem might be to consider the fact that everyone has encountered human beings who have a special sort of equilibrium—a balance not dependent on being up-to-the-minute in current styles of thinking, yet which does not, on the other

hand, isolate them from the flow of the common life.

There are men, in short, who have springs of identity that free them from blind subservience to the institutions of the time. They move around the institutional terrain with a certain nonchalance, doing what they set out to do without compulsive fears. These men—and women—are lost by familiar "social" definition. They may be artists, they may be businessmen, they may be teachers or farmers or shopkeepers. They are people of whom it is just to say that their external activities or roles are the least part of them. Perhaps, when circumstances invite, or history permits, they become "great," but this is not what concerns us here. They are simply the sort of people who, when you meet them, you sense that in distinctively individual ways they are living actual human lives. To speak of their qualities, we need to resort to a timeless humanistic language in which we have little natural facility.

Often these qualities are only rudimentary, yet their reality is nonetheless felt. They have the gossamer tangibility of the intangible, existential world. When a man says the truth, not from some pressure of "moral" tradition, but because he tells spontaneously what he sees, you feel the intersecting presence of this world. There seem to be all degrees of self-consciousness in such men. And different realms of existential clarity. So description must be impressionistic, and classification is virtually impossible. One senses the germs of a free human life by a kind of "tacit" knowing.

It is to be expected that, in a time of inner emptiness like the present, there will be those who try to label some offering of access to the world of timeless reality with the signs of the "progressive" spirit. Just as there are Zen Masters who feel

competent to tell you whether you have "made it," so there are psychologists with maps of the psyche and gurus with easy ladders to the ineffable. But the characteristic of the rare people we have been talking about is that they have not been led by anybody else to where they are, may not know they are "there," and never set themselves up as leaders.

At the same time, evident tropisms of the human spirit need not be ignored. Herman Hesse seems an example of an artist who worked his way out of the labyrinth of "progress," and who tried to show how the "progressive" fallacy is inevitably encountered, again and again, by the man who pursues the inner life with spiritual ambition. Human—or are they trans-human?—realities are never tracked down through intermediaries, and the spontaneous discovery, like poetic inspiration, turns into a dull reflection the second time around.

It is clear enough that delicate balances are involved in the relationships an awakened human being maintains between his inner world and the one outside. There is a sense in which "progress" was an honorable motive for the men who settled America. In his distinguished essay, "What Then Is the American, This New Man?" (*American Historical Review*, January, 1943), Arthur M. Schlesinger wrote:

The fact is that, for a people who recalled how hungry and ill-clad their ancestors had been through the centuries in the Old World, the chance to make money was like the sunlight at the end of a tunnel. It was the means of living a life of human dignity. In other words, for the great majority of Americans it was a symbol of idealism rather than materialism. Hence "this new man" had an instinctive sympathy for the underdog, and even persons of moderate wealth gratefully shared it with the less fortunate, helping to endow charities, schools, hospitals and art galleries and providing the wherewithal to nourish movements for humanitarian reform which might otherwise have died a-borning.

The schooling of the pioneer life had remarkable fruits:

These ex-Europeans and their descendants became a race of whistlers and tinkers, daily engaged in devising, improving and repairing until, as Emerson said, they had "the power and habit of invention in their brain." "Would any one but an American," asked one of Emerson's contemporaries, "have ever invented a milking machine? or a machine to beat eggs? or machines to black boots, scour knives, pare apples, and do a hundred things that all other peoples have done with their ten fingers from time immemorial?" As population increased and manufacturing developed on a commercial scale, men merely turned to new purposes the skills and aptitudes that had become second nature to them. Thus Eli Whitney, who as a Massachusetts farm boy had made nails and hatpins for sale to his neighbors, later contrived the cotton gin and successfully applied the principle of interchangeable parts to the making of muskets; and Theodore T. Woodruff, a New York farm boy, won subsequent fame as the inventor of the sleeping car, a coffee-hulling machine and a steam plow. In this manner another trait became embedded in the American character.

During these years of the genesis of American "progress," a magazine cartoon pictured a European complaining to an American hostess that "you have no leisured classes," to which she replied: "We have them, only we call them tramps." A traveler's comment was: "America is the only country in the world, where one is ashamed of having nothing to do."

So far, so good. But what of the artists and writers? What did they think of all this? Well, some of them were of two minds on the subject, but enough of them agreed to make it possible for Lewis Mumford to write the following in 1926 (*The Golden Day*):

In America, it was easy for an Emerson or a Whitman to see the importance of welding together the interests which science represented and those which, through the accidents of its historic development, science denied. Turning from a limited European past to a wider heritage, guiding themselves by all the reports of their own day, these poets continued the old voyage of exploration on the plane of the mind and, seeking passage to India, found themselves coasting along strange shores. None of the fine minds of the Golden Day was afraid to welcome the new forces that were at large in the

world. Need I recall that Whitman wrote an apostrophe to the locomotive, that Emerson said a steamship sailing promptly between America and Europe might be as beautiful as a star, and that Thoreau, who loved to hear the wind in the pine needles, listened with equal pleasure to the music of telegraph wires? That practical instrumentalities were to be worshiped, never occurred to these writers: but that they added a new and significant element to our culture, which the poet was ready to absorb and include in his report upon the universe, was profoundly true . . . These perceptions called, of course, for great works of the imagination; for in proportion as intelligence was dealing more effectually with the instrumentalities of life, it became more necessary for the imagination to project more complete and satisfying ends. . . . None of these men was caught by the dominant abstractions: each saw life whole, and sought a new life.

Today, Mr. Mumford is filled instead with horror at the "instrumentalities of death," and in 1942 Arthur Schlesinger pointed out that the pursuit of happiness had been "transformed into the happiness of pursuit."

When did the change take place? That Whitman and Emerson and Thoreau, all within their lifetime, saw the change coming and spoke of it with apprehension is no contradiction of other things they said, but only shows the ambiguities of human endeavor and the increasingly mixed character of the emerging civilization of the United States. The point is: If there had been more men of this stature attentive to the voices of their existential being, not merely they, but the culture itself, might have felt the same deep grounds of uneasiness and sought reorientation.

If, in such matters, we must wait for the objective verdict of "history," rejecting any sense of the symmetry of life except that finally disclosed by the external scene, then we shall *never* know that we have gone wrong until it is really too late.

How could the passing intuitions of artists, the questioning of poets, the exclamations of a Tolstoy, the broodings of an Amiel, be compiled

and generalized and put to a vote? The idea is ridiculous. But what about the practical necessities which make it so?

It is surely ridiculous to measure the feasibilities of change by the conditions and techniques of a "progress" which has turned the world into a chamber of horrors. Commenting on C. P. Snow, Catherine Roberts says in *The Scientific Conscience*:

. . . the fact remains that whether or not the Two Cultures actually exist, there does lie outside the domain of science a realm of spiritual values that science denies. The moral philosophy, the art, the music, and the literature, which constitute most of the superior knowledge of our cultural heritage, have no place in the scientist's laboratory. Yet does not this realm of the human spirit contain more of the essence of life than even the biologists dream of? Is not the subjective world outlook derived from it more humanly significant than the objective world outlook of science? And if so, would it not be the height of folly to permit contemporary biologists to apply their scientific knowledge to control and direct the further development of human life?

What is wanted is endless repetition of such appeals, and in language which does not ever seem a skillful paraphrase of an advertisement for tranquilizers in a current medical journal. The quickest way to seal off the benefits of the "spiritual world," should it exist, is to advertise its "cash-in" values for this world. The truth is not a specific for anxieties. The presences of human freedom are not a currency that can be exchanged for the depreciated dollars of chastened men in flight. These men know only their terrible longings; they do not look for evidence of how human awakening works.

Evidence? Who can speak of evidence concerning matters as paradoxical as the problem of the Zen archer, who must learn to stop wanting to hit the mark before he draws his bow? Who will accept Socrates' argument in the *Crito*, for refusing to avoid the penalty of the Athenian State?

But are there no half-way houses between the absolute commitment of heroes and martyrs, and the externalizing nonsense of the world in which we live? These are very difficult questions, and we must be careful not to answer them. For to design a half-way house may be the precise specification for excluding the essences we long for. Halfway houses may come about, but not, surely, by design. Who knows enough to model the adjustments of the human spirit to a man's partial vision of the truth?

A "managed" enlightenment is no enlightenment at all, but a device of psychological packaging, and the forerunner of endless sects to take the place of chambers of commerce and service clubs.

A man ought to go to the very greatest sources he can find, or not go at all. The way out of Plato's Cave is not a conducted tour; and the way back, for all the ardor of the newly converted, is fraught with danger. Why should the conditions of technological progress change all this?

The question is: What is true of man, of the human condition, in *any* period of history? And, equally important, what is true of little acorns of men as well as towering oaks? One of the few good things about our time is that it is now possible to find descriptive or anecdotal answers to these questions, even though the answers are not of much help in telling us how to get them into the curriculum. For example, A. H. Maslow says in *Toward a Psychology of Being*:

... one of the first problems presented to me in my studies of self-actualizing people was the vague perception that their motivational life was in some important ways different from all that I had learned. I first described it as being expressive rather than coping, but this wasn't quite right as a total statement. Then I pointed out that it was unmotivated or meta-motivated (beyond striving) rather than motivated, but this statement rests so heavily on which theory of motivation you accept, that it made as much trouble as help.

How do self-actualizing people behave?

... it is much more possible for them to take a non-condemning attitude toward others, a desirelessness, a "choiceless awareness." This permits much clearer and more insightful perception and understanding of what is there. This is the kind of untangled and uninvolved, detached perception that surgeons and therapists are supposed to try for and which self-actualizing people attain *without* trying for.

Especially when the structure of the person or object seen is difficult, subtle, and not obvious is this difference in style of perception most important. Especially then must the perceiver have respect for the nature of the object. Perception must then be gentle, delicate, unintruding, undemanding, able to fit itself passively to the nature of things as water gently soaks into crevices. It must *not* be the need-motivated kind of perception which *shapes* things in a blustering, over-riding, exploiting, purposeful fashion, in the manner of a butcher chopping apart a carcass.

The most efficient way to perceive the intrinsic nature of the world is to be more receptive than active, determined as much as possible by the intrinsic organization of that which is perceived and as little as possible by the nature of the perceiver. This kind of detached, Taoist, passive, non-interfering awareness of all the simultaneously existing aspects of the concrete, has much in common with some descriptions of the aesthetic experience and of the mystic experience. The stress is the same. Do we see the real, concrete world or do we see our own system of rubrics, motives, expectations and abstractions which we have projected onto the real world? Or, to put it very bluntly, do we see or are we blind?

What Dr. Maslow is talking about here is both communicable and non-communicable—always the case when the quality of being is at stake. Whatever you say, it is always incomplete, yet, in another way, it is always too much.

It is important, however, to recognize how Dr. Maslow bends the modern vocabulary to an investigation that is essentially timeless in its significance. All that may be "contemporary" is a certain height of self-consciousness, and even this may be the case only for cultural history. What do we really know of the powers of introspection of individual men who lived long ago?

In any event, the *dynamics* of self-actualization and the climactic "normality" hinted at by the peak-experience have no dependency at all on the present, which has contributed no more than the words used in speaking of these things.

How do self-actualizers qualify as the sort of people we referred to earlier in this discussion—people who move around freely in spite of the confinements of an over-specialized, over-organized civilization; people who do what they set out to do and are not afraid; who see quite accurately, sometimes, what is wrong and within their competence do what they can to change things for the better? Well, Dr. Maslow found his—

healthy subjects to be superficially accepting of conventions, but privately to be casual, perfunctory and detached about them. That is, they could take them or leave them. In practically all of them, I found a rather calm, good-humored rejection of the stupidities and imperfections of the culture with greater or lesser effort at improving it. They definitely showed an ability to fight it vigorously when they thought it necessary. . . . The mixture of varying proportions of affliction or approval, and hostility and criticism indicated that they select from American culture what is good in it by their lights and reject what they think bad in it. In a word, they weigh it, and judge it (by their own inner criteria) and then make their own decisions.

No more than you can find out from Socrates how to "teach" virtue, can you get anything here to put into the curriculum. Yet there is this: people need to learn, somehow, to develop their own "inner criteria." Because it may take a lifetime is no reason not to begin. Dr. Maslow also wrote:

I once suggested the principle that if self-actualizing people can and do perceive reality more efficiently, fully and with less motivational contamination than others do, then we may through their greater sensitivity and perception, . . . get a better report of what reality is like, just as canaries can be used to detect gas in mines before less sensitive creatures can. As a second string to this bow, we may use ourselves in our most perceptive moments, in our peak-experiences, when for the moment, *we* are self-actualizing, to give us a report of

the nature of reality that is truer than we can ordinarily manage.

A dangerous doctrine, this, yet what other doctrine is there to go by? The "canary" reference is like telling us to read Blake instead of nothing but contemporaries; and to speak of our "most perceptive moments" is to declare the common potentialities of man. But the fundamental communication in this psychology is that there is *really something there*, inside of us, that needs to learn how to speak.

REVIEW

PROMETHEUS BOUND

GEORGE STEINER comes well armed to the task he set himself in *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* (Knopf, 1959). These two, one could say, are the greatest novelists we know, and even if this is debatable, it is close enough to the truth to give classic dimensions to the comparison. Readers who are well acquainted with their major works will find pleasure and value in all of Mr. Steiner's book; those who have read only enough to have a "feel" for their contrasting intensities will profit greatly from musing over Mr. Steiner's dramatic polarization of the differences between them.

What, first of all, had they in common? Both accepted without qualification the Promethean burden of reading for themselves the meaning of human life. Neither would accept any second-hand truths. Tolstoy rewrote the Christian religion almost as though he had invented it himself; Dostoevsky made Ivan Karamazov his spokesman in *The Brothers Karamazov*, declaring that he would accept of no one, not even "God," an order or dispensation involving injustice to any human soul. If these two were to be delivered from the tortures of existence, it would be by their own labor, and they would suffer their own pain.

Years ago, an obscure modern poet, Frederic Faust, ended a version of the legend of St. Christopher with these lines,

But Oferus for himself hath died
And for him Christ will weep.

In this voluntary sacrifice, it may be, lies the power of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky over the minds of other men. Mr. Steiner has this passage:

The works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are cardinal examples of the problem of belief in literature. They exercise upon our minds pressures and compulsions of such obvious force, they engage values so obviously germane to the major politics of our time, that we cannot, even if we should wish to do so, respond on purely literary grounds. They solicit from their readers fierce and even mutually exclusive adherences. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are not only

read, they are believed in. Men and women all over the world undertook pilgrimages to Yasnaya Polyana in quest of illumination, and in the hope of receiving some message of oracular redemption. Most of the visitors, Rilke being a notable exception, sought out the religious reformer and prophet rather than the novelist whom Tolstoy himself had seemingly repudiated. But the two were, in fact, inseparable. The expounder of the Gospel and the teacher of Gandhi was by virtue of an essential unity—or, if we prefer, by definition of his own genius—the author of *War and Peace* and of *Anna Karenina*. In contrast to those who proclaim themselves "Tolstoyans," yet also in analogy, there are the disciples of Dostoevsky, the believers in the Dostoevskian vision of life. Joseph Goebbels wrote a curious but not ungifted novel, *Michael*. In it we find a Russian student saying: "We believe in Dostoevsky as our fathers believed in Christ." His statement is born out by what Berdiaev, Gide, and Camus have recorded of the role of Dostoevsky in their own lives and *prises de conscience*. Gorky said that the simple fact of Tolstoy's existence made it possible for other men to be writers; existentialist metaphysicians and some of the poets who survived the death camps have testified that the image of Dostoevsky and their remembrance of his works made it possible for them to think intelligibly and endure. Because it is the crowning action of the soul, belief demands a commensurate object. Could one say that one "believes in Flaubert"?

What, then, is the polarity? Tolstoy is a "this world" lover of his fellows. He wants to make a heaven on earth. He will settle for nothing else. His pain is from mundane failure. In a sense, Mr. Steiner is right in casting him as a much reformed Grand Inquisitor—an *anarchist* Grand Inquisitor; naturally, a contradiction in terms. Tolstoy is a utopian who will use none of the means habitually employed by the impatient utopian planners of "good societies." He sends his missionaries forth unarmed. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, you could say, were each crucified on the cross of the other's truth. Mr. Steiner sharpens the comparison:

"O make of the spiritual realm of Christ a kingdom of this earth" was Tolstoy's principal endeavor. In *The Possessed* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky asserted not only that "this is impossible," but that the attempt would end in political bestiality and in the destruction of the idea of God.

But Tolstoy insisted that the impossible must be attempted, or life could have no meaning. So, with this reading of moral necessity, the Communists claimed Tolstoy as their prophet. Yet Tolstoy's unrelenting honesty was suspicious of the revolutionary means. As Mr. Steiner says:

Lenin described Tolstoy as a "mirror of the Russian revolution," and in November 1905 Tolstoy seemed to have adopted some of the special theories of Marxism about the coming insurrection and the ultimate "withering away" of the state. But on all these points, his self-lacerating intelligence and lucidity led to contradictions. Even at a time when he was preaching most vehemently on the text of the perfectibility of men and the foundation of a radical utopia, he glimpsed that possibility of disaster which haunted Herzen and Dostoevsky. He noted in his journal for August 1898:

"Even if that which Marx predicted should happen, then the only thing that will happen is that despotism will be passed on. Now the capitalists rule, but then the directors of the working people will rule."

Dostoevsky was more explicit, and more accurately prophetic, since his vision contradicted no strong utopian longing in him. Shigalov's "mythology of the total state" (in *The Possessed*) becomes in *The Brothers* the passionate apology of the Grand Inquisitor, with its "realist" acceptance of human weakness, its rationalization of élitist "management," and with the old priest's searing contempt for Jesus' expectation that men could learn to be "heroic." This chapter in *The Brothers*, Mr. Steiner says—

testifies to a gift of foresight bordering on the daemonic. It lays before us, in precise detail, a summation of the disasters peculiar to our times. Even as earlier generations opened the Bible or Virgil or Shakespeare to find epigraphs for experience, so ours may read from Dostoevsky the lesson for the day. But let us not mistake the meaning of this "senseless poem of a senseless student." It does foreshadow, with uncanny prescience, the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century—thought control, the annihilating and redemptive powers of the élite, the brutish delight of the masses in the music and dancelike rituals of Nuremberg and the Moscow Sports Palace, the instrument of confession, and the

total subordination of private to public life. But like *1984*, which may be understood as an epilogue to it, the vision of the Grand Inquisitor points also to those refusals of freedom which are concealed beneath the language and outward forms of industrial democracies. It points to the tawdry cheapness of mass culture, to the pre-eminence of quackery and slogans over the rigours of genuine thought, to the hunger of men—a hunger no less flagrant in the west than in the east—after leaders and magicians to draw their minds out of the wilderness of freedom. "The most painful secrets of their conscience, all, all they will bring to us"—"us" being either the secret police or the psychiatrists. Dostoevsky would have discerned in both comparable attainders to the dignity of man.

But the Grand Inquisitor emerges as an archetype of evil only because he has turned his practical ideas of human need and good into a ruthless absolute. He is not content with waiting for men to learn cooperation and rational behavior. He will *make* them behave, by a sagacious combination of cajolery, threat, and manipulation of their consciences. And Tolstoy, who had the practical man's longings, and something more—call it irrepressible brotherly love—wholly rejects the practical man's means. So his project is lost, and seems, finally, as impossible as Dostoevsky maintained. Mr. Steiner says: "In his shrewd empiricism, Tolstoy must have known that the pure and rational ethics which he expounded would be freely accepted only by a handful of chosen and kindred spirits."

Yet neither of these magnificent men would give up. Neither would accept unacceptable solutions, neither would pretend to have reached behind the contradictions which tormented them. Nor would they have a "God" who would diminish the human struggle through simple acts of "faith." They insisted upon being their own "Gods" in this. Tolstoy loved Jesus, but loved him completely only after he had edited out of the New Testament all trace of apocalyptic paradoxes—had made him, so to speak, into Tolstoy. And he would have none of a God who could plan this world and all its unresolved evils.

Gorky is quoted effectively by Mr. Steiner on this mood in Tolstoy:

In his diary which he gave me to read, I was struck by a strange aphorism: "God is my desire."

Then on returning him the book, I asked him what it meant.

"An unfinished thought," he said, glancing at the page and screwing up his eyes. "I must have wanted to say: 'God is my desire to know him'. . . . No, not that. . . ." He began to laugh, and rolling up the book in a tube, he put it into the big pocket of his blouse. With God he has very suspicious relations; they sometimes remind me of the relations of "two bears in one den."

Mr. Steiner says:

The very existence of God seems to have been acceptable to him only in terms of human identity. This idea, compounded of poetic egotism and spiritual hauteur—Tolstoy was every inch a king—led him into various paradoxes.

But it also enabled him to escape worse, and the profoundest pantheism may on occasion seem like "spiritual *hauteur*." So Christ was Tolstoy's hero, as he was Dostoevsky's—making two ways of thinking of divinity embodied in man. The greatness of these writers does not lie in their solutions, but in their uncompromising spirit and their fierce daring. Is there a resolution of this problem? Only, it now seems, in symbolic peak experiences, in mythic memories of lost Arcadias, and in the dream of Prometheus Unbound.

COMMENTARY

THE GOOD IN CHAINS

WHY, in Ivan's long tale in *The Brothers Karamazov*, does Dostoevsky have the silent Jesus kiss his ruthless opponent, the Grand Inquisitor, and then, during the night, take miraculous flight?

Why didn't he at least *tell* the cruel old man how wrong he was? We, at any rate, do not hesitate in our denunciations of evil. If Jesus was the man Dostoevsky thought he was, this loving-kindness denouement seems an evasion that is out of character, making an anti-climax of the confrontation.

It depends upon what you can expect of Dostoevsky—or of any man who tries to come to grips with the central issues of life. The novelist has to decide between making an explanation which has only a specious completeness or wrapping the insoluble questions in a mystery as secure in its tangle of secrets as the Gordian knot. His greatness does not lie in plausible solutions, but in pointing to where the unsolved problems really lie.

Jesus, one supposes, could have gone out and raised an army and put down the evil old man. Then what?

If we know anything about Jesus, we know the answer to that; but why couldn't he have at least said something? If he was so wise and good, he ought to have left the Inquisitor with a deposit of things to think about.

Dostoevsky is no longer here to help with such questions, and if he were, he might remain silent, too; but one possibility is that Jesus understood better than we do the embattled mood of self-approbation which cannot hear any voice except one of complete agreement; he knew, that is, the overwhelming righteousness felt by the man who is convinced he embodies not only power, but truth, and not only truth, but also exact knowledge of human good.

Only time and the erosions of long experience can weaken the confidence of such men. They have to learn, at last, to question themselves. "Arguments" are their specialty. They know them all. Like Atlas, whose strength was increased every time he touched the ground, they wax more certain of their views with each engagement of opposing forces. The resistance they encounter only proves the reality of the evil in the world, and of their obligation to wipe it out. Such men will last as long as the righteous warriors of another persuasion supply them with "enemies" to cope with or logicians to refute.

Perhaps Jesus knew this about the Inquisitor and his party, and kissed him out of compassion for their long, predestined blindness as prisoners of misconceived good.

It is not that sound arguments against Grand Inquisitors are undiscoverable. As a matter of fact, we have heard these arguments many times. It is only that, for many, many men, these arguments are not persuasive. Among the various issues between Jesus and the Grand Inquisitor was the Socratic proposition, "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong." Those who brood long over this proposition may come to the conclusion that it is true, but there is also a companion realization. As Hannah Arendt has said:

To the philosopher—or rather, to man insofar as he is a thinking being—this ethical proposition about doing and suffering wrong is no less compelling than mathematical truth. But to man insofar as he is citizen, an acting being concerned with the world and the public welfare rather than with his own well-being—including for instance his "immortal soul" whose "health" should have precedence over the needs of a perishable body—the Socratic statement is not true at all.

So, to such men, the fact-supported contentions of the Grand Inquisitor may seem much more reasonable than the lonely obligations laid upon them by Jesus.

Today, however, the evidence for the ideas of Socrates and Jesus is quite a bit stronger. It is beginning to appear that there is no health for any

of us—neither for our souls nor for our bodies—in violent or coercive methods of social control. Thus even the "practical" argument against the Grand Inquisitor accumulates some force.

But curiously, the practical argument is not as compelling as we expect it to be, in the case of those who believe themselves to be practical men. Speaking of the arms race between the Communist and "Free World" powers, John Kenneth Galbraith made this observation:

Even a calculation that the competition may, at some point, lead to total destruction of all life is not a definitive objection. Liberty, not material well-being, is involved. This is an ultimate value that cannot be compromised in the face of any threat. Thus the competition is protected against even the most adverse estimates of its outcome.

This puts the issue back where it was in the first place—at the bar of moral vision. It asks, once more, the meaning of freedom; and—since the idea of freedom and the idea of man are inseparable—it raises the question of the nature of man. It was on his argument concerning the nature of man that the Grand Inquisitor rested his entire case.

The study of the nature of man is the long-haul approach to human good. To untangle this mystery is to begin to become what we truly are. Jesus doubtless felt that there was no use talking to a worldly wise man like the Grand Inquisitor until he was ready for the long haul, and willing to put aside the far easier project of running other peoples' lives for them. So Jesus kept still. He saw the blinded and manacled good in the old man, and he was willing to wait. With his principles, what else could he do?

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

DRAMA IN LONDON

THE May 1967 issue of *Anarchy* (No. 75) is devoted to the efforts of two women to conduct an improvised drama class in a youth club in North London. The boys and girls of the group—which was open at both ends, with people always dropping out and new ones coming in—met weekly for two-hour sessions. The improvisations were done in a large room in a building which provided a dance floor, an area for TV-watching, a coffee bar, ping-pony tables, and a discussion area. The Quiet Room, where the drama class was held, was *never* quiet, since sounds from other parts of the building seeped in all the time. So did wandering teen-agers. In short, all the preoccupations and effronteries of twentieth-century youth were in indifferent conspiracy against the project. Yet some wonderful things happened in this drama class. You couldn't call it a "success." There was no room for success in the circumstances. The amazing thing was that it happened at all.

In an introductory note to her account of the experiment, Kate Vandegrift says this:

. . . over the course of [ten] months, working under conditions more akin to a street corner than a school room, a very mixed bag of sensitivities learned to cooperate (if only sporadically) in the creation of highly personal and original interpretations of their private world. In order to give an idea of the techniques used, the reactions and results, a general description of each session is set down—emphasizing the more significant details, and passing over redundant material.

A few preliminaries: June Judson (producer and actress) and myself (playwright and designer) decided to cooperate on the experiment. Domestic and professional commitments limited our free time to one evening per week. We applied for admission to the Drama Teachers' Panel of the Inner London Educational Authority at County Hall, were accepted and eventually found a position conforming to our specifications. These were that the class should consist of ten to fifteen boys and girls ranging between 14 and 19 years of age, and should, as far as

possible, offer a cross-section of the *average* teenage community. We further specified that the aim of our venture was not to set about rehearsing and producing a nice play from the bookshelves, but rather to stimulate the expressive creativity of individuals by prompting the group to cooperate in improvisations born of their own experience and fantasies.

Aware that the teenage sector of our society is probably the most inhibited, the most beset by uncertainty, and the least likely to participate in hazy artistic programmes having little definable purpose, we were not anticipating miracles of released creativity. We had each a background of work with teenagers, though admittedly, not in this "average" category. And perhaps it is relevant to mention that we are both American and that our previous work with young people had been conducted in the U.S.A. We had never before worked together, and our decision to do so in this case was fired by kindred ideas about the theatre, and the assumption that two minds and two energies are better than one in such an experiment. The idea was that we would plan each lesson together in advance, altering our course as required by the problems arising in the class. June was to do the major part of the directing, while I was to observe reactions and later record them. Our goals were clear, but we hadn't the vaguest notion of what to expect.

Even the twenty-five pages in *Anarchy* which tell what happened can hardly convey either the high points or the low points of the adventure. The two young women found that the girls were most difficult to involve, while the boys soon divided into good guys and bad guys, with the good actors invariably among the bad guys. Parties unknown stole from the teachers. They took small change, props brought for scenes, cigarettes out of purses, and one night a leather coat disappeared. Any form of coercion or pressure was a total failure. Authority could have no role in this setting, and least of all, it seemed, in an attempt at the practice of an art. Yet exciting characterizations were achieved on the spur of the moment, with unpredictability the rule. Somehow, some of the young people learned. And some of them seemed to know without learning the essence of dramatic portrayal. The teachers tried a little of everything. One night it was script reading:

Unfortunately the group assembled was too large to cope with as a single unit. June took the quieter

ones to one end of the room and distributed copies of Noel Coward's *Fumed Oak*. I corralled the tough boys at the other end and started on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. These plays had been carefully chosen to appeal to either the law-abiding or the rebellious types that comprise the class. Each struck the wanted chord.

Beckett's tramps held the interest of 10 or 12 of the sardonic teenage boys for a solid twenty minutes. This was a marvel. For the first time a Negro was present: he read Vladimir and was so entranced with his prominence in the circle (and perhaps by the character) that he refused to give up the part through three readings of the first section. Several others read Estragon. Still others simply listened. All the readings were clumsy, but as the idea of the play began to come through, in however elementary a way, a quite evident sympathy for the characters emerged.

Coward's broad satire of suburban *mores* was ideal material for the other group. After two or three readings with several cast changes, an improvisation of the play was tried. The result was good and the kids knew it. Inhibitions of speech were markedly reduced, boys and girls worked together without embarrassment, and the portrayal of known types was clearly a pleasure to them. A second improvisation of the same plot was embellished with additional characters and incidents to accommodate more of the group into the play. The rumble of disappointment that sounded at the end of the class showed us that we had made our first real break-through.

From week to week, discoveries were made about the youngsters. Shy boys showed unsuspected ability; boisterous gang leaders exhibited control. There was this scene of a phone call:

Finally Barry agreed to try a phone call with Mac. Mac was nervous, despite his comic gifts, for Barry is older and a big cheese in the club—his wit is subtler and more sophisticated. Indeed, Barry led all the way. He adapted immediately to the limitations of the telephone, while Mac, who thrives on gesture, found himself inhibited. Barry tried a second call with his friend Robin. This boy, a trouble-maker and relatively inarticulate, was delighted to find us asking him *please* to perform. He had never before agreed to do so. Now he fell into the role of stooge to Barry's quips and functioned very neatly—better by far than Mac because of his close relationship with Barry. Barry has a remarkable ear for his audience he goes to the brink of vulgarity, but never falls over, never seriously offends. He is, by now, aware of our

dependence on him. He can make or break a meeting, and he knows it.

Many of the kids will follow his lead—but his lead is neither predictable nor controllable.

One night the talented Barry demanded opportunity to direct a plot he had thought of. It was a robbery of a jewelry shop, in which the owner interrupts and catches the robber. Barry was tense, and his direction so specific, as if from memory, that it became fairly obvious that he was acting out a real experience of his own. In the final court room scene, "Barry's jaw was strained as he loudly demanded the Not Guilty verdict."

Another time, everything worked at once:

It was necessary to start on a fresh theme with the new larger group. We suggested Carnaby Street. Just that and no more was said. Suddenly we were witnessing Instant Drama. All the results of the months of work seemed to be on exhibition. A small shop complete with tailor and manager appeared in the middle of the floor. Another was established in a corner. Shoes and accessories found an outlet in still another corner. Everyone in the room got involved, either in buying or selling. Obviously there was a good bit of camp acting—fellows ordering blue suede or puce mohair outfits, from neck-tie to jock-strap. It was a three-ring circus with dialogues sprouting from here, there, everywhere. The din was terrific, and nobody minded. Occasionally we had a frantic demand for a character idea: try being a one-legged pop star, or try a ballet dancer, we might suggest. In the main, however, it burned steadily on like a self-fuelling furnace. Even a few girls got into it.

That had to be the night the writer's leather coat was stolen.

Anarchy is 30 cents a copy and \$3.50 a year. Order from Freedom Press, 17a Maxwell Road, London, SW6, England. You don't find people who do such things, or who write about them, just anywhere. No one gets paid much for such freedom-developing activities, and, needless to say, anarchists get no grants-in-aid. Some of the best material quoted in MANAS first appeared in *Anarchy*, through the years.

FRONTIERS The Innocent Eye

SOME wise man—we forget who—spoke of the obligation to think as if no man had ever thought before. This is a declaration of war on all "ready-made" philosophy. It has its greatest validity in times when the pressure of conventional opinion becomes so strong that people get born, grow old, and die without ever discovering that they can entertain thoughts of their own.

In such periods, the phenomena of psychological mutilation are commonplace. The attack on "conformity" has as much acceptance as any other cliché, while deviations gain immediate respect only because they constitute some kind of rebellion. Shallow utterance sometimes succeeds as deep insight merely by sounding unfamiliar, and philosophers and nihilists are found together in the ill-assorted company that has been exiled to the streets of the world.

Because bravery is the need of the hour, the air is filled with the cries of pseudo-heroes, and men who do indeed think for themselves grow shy, since whatever they say seems to add to the general carnage. Others, however, may find opportunity to write of simple uncontroversial things.

Whatever the rush and conflict of opinion, the world around us hardly changes at all. There is a calm constancy in the physical environment, and there are analogues between the deepest moral problems and the ways in which a man relates to the physical world. So there are things that are well said about seeing the world in both good times and bad, and bring a refreshment of being. Sometimes brief asides based on simple necessities have more use in them than the attempts at major solutions—as, for example, an existentialist's comment that he found he could get through the winter with less pain and discouragement after he knew there was an "invincible summer" within himself.

Much of the sensuous basis of life on earth involves color. A little book by Robert Jay Wolff, American painter, called *Seeing Red* (Scribner's), done for children, is also a book for all ages and seasons. To turn its pages is to be drawn into reflection about primary visual experience. Mr. Wolff enables his readers to muse on the role of color in seeing—its majors and minors and its tonic chords. A "picture book" simply about color has its uniqueness and indispensable contribution no matter how much you have studied "perception" and learned to grasp the phenomenological point of view. A special kind of learnedness seems needed, these days, to reach back to simplicity, but Mr. Wolff by-passes all that. He shows you *red*—red red, and a lot of other kinds; and red alone and in company. Well, you look at his book and willingly you become a child again; many unnecessary privations of sight seem overcome by this volume.

Eventually, of course, you leap to the incommensurables: *Why* is there color, anyhow? It is a permissible but fruitless folly to ask such questions. The world is filled with color, and that is that; but *seeing* color more consciously, and letting its overtones and beat notes work their way through your senses might add substance to the "invincible summer" we all need to create. Red, like the other colors, has great complexity of role. Does one have to go to *school* to know this? Or does it matter? We know what Mr. Wolff thinks; he made this book.

Another start-from-scratch book is Ross Parmenter's *The Awakened Eye* (Wesleyan University Press, \$8.50), a much larger volume and for adults—but not really. That is, it invites the reader to a wonderful "prolonged adolescence" in which things we ought to have learned in childhood are told about simply by Mr. Parmenter and his innocent eye. He discovered he wasn't really *seeing*, and set out to change his ways. The project becomes an Odyssey; its climax a kind of "enlightenment," and the pleasant side of this recital is that there is nothing of the

specialist or the authority about it at all. All you need to do what Mr. Parmenter did is to have two eyes, or maybe only one. Readers who remember his *The Plant in My Window* will also take pleasure in this book.

The Awakened Eye is an essay in amateur alchemy. You look with your physical eyes, trying to see all there is, and maybe you'll see something more. Mr. Parmenter is a retired music critic who taught himself to draw. His awareness of tonal and visual nuance doubtless gave him a head-start in learning how to "see," but his feeling of rank is nonexistent and his enthusiasm as a beginner infectious. Apparently it never occurred to him to find out what the experts have to say about seeing, and there is a "Look Ma, no hands!" delight in his report of what he found out by himself. The experts have their place, but they would be menacing presences without people like Mr. Parmenter, who seems not to know about them; this makes his book a far richer experience for the general reader. It isn't specialized knowledge we need, but some correction of the darkness that our times have been laying on us for lo these many years:

The cub reporter, with one small assignment after another begins to feel frustrated by his publisher's lack of interest in the visual side of minor stories. When a story has to be compressed, description is generally the first thing to go, so the cub's frustration is likely to be intensified by noting again and again that his prized pictorial touches are cut. Unless he is a fellow with great natural curiosity—a curiosity that adapts itself to almost any new situation—he will tend to fall into the habit of seeing no more on an assignment than he knows his paper will use.

A working man, he eventually succumbs to the blindness of his job. This suggestive diagnosis alone makes the book worth while. One's "invincible summer" might grow perceptibly from such reading.