THE OPPOSITE POLE

WE know what happens when a man of Tolstoy's stature loses faith in "historical progress." He focuses his attention on individual accountability, individual self-discovery, and suffers the dilemma of not being able to see—not clearly, at least—how this kind of human growth and fulfillment will be able to remove the oppressive conditions experienced by so many millions throughout the world. Yet Tolstoy was not a man who could remain passive in the face of all this woe. He became an outspoken opponent of violence and injustice, and called for an awakening of the human spirit in people everywhere, as the means to change.

What happens when a political thinker reaches a similar conclusion? This is a more troubling question, since political thinkers, unlike Tolstoy, have a heavy investment in the idea of historical progress; their ideas of "morality" are based upon it. One thing which may happen, if they are humanistic as well as political thinkers, is that they may return to the stance of classical humanism, and adopt a firmly skeptical attitude toward the passions and promises of political systems. Dwight Macdonald is a good illustration of this change in point of view. He wrote in the concluding section of *The Root Is Man:*

> The best approach, intellectually, to the whole problem of socialism might be, simply, to remember always that man is mortal and imperfect (as Hopkinson Smith put it: "The clew of the sea-puss gets us all in the end.") and so we should *not push things too far.* The moderation which the Greeks, as clear-sighted and truly scientifically-minded a race as this earth has ever seen, showed in their attitude toward scientific knowledge should become our guide again. Despite their clear-sightedness (really because of it), the Greeks were surpassed by the intellectually inferior Romans in such "practical" matters as the building of sewers and the articulation of legal systems, much as the ancient Chinese, another scientifically-minded people, discovered printing and gunpowder long before the West did, but had the good sense to use them only for printing love poems and shooting off firecrackers. "Practical" is put in quotes because to the Greeks it seemed much more practical to discuss the nature of the good life than to build better sewers. To the Romans and to our age, the opposite is the case—the British Marxist, John Strachey, is said to have once defined communism as "a movement for better plumbing." The Greeks were wise enough to treat scientific knowledge as a means, not an end; they never developed a concept of Progress.

> This wisdom may have been due to a flair for the *human* scale; better than any other people we know of, they were able to create an art and a politics scaled to human size. They could do this because they never forgot the tragic limitations of human existence, the Nemesis which turns victory into defeat overnight, the impossibility of perfect knowledge about anything. Contrast, for example, the *moderation* of Socrates, who constantly proclaimed his ignorance, with the pretensions of a nineteenth-century system-builder like Marx. The Greeks would have seen in Marx's assumption that existence can be reduced to scientifically knowable terms, and the bold and confident all-embracing system he evolved on the basis of this assumption—they would have set this down to "hubris," the pride that goeth before a fall. And they would have been right, as we are now painfully discovering. Nor is it just Marx; as the quotations from the other nineteenth-century socialist and anarchist theoreticians show, this scientific "hubris" was dominant in the whole culture of that Age of Progress. But it just won't do for us. We must learn to live with contradictions, to have faith in scepticism, to advance toward the solution of a problem by admitting as a possibility something which the scientist can never admit; namely, that it may be insoluble. . . . So it is better to admit ignorance and leave questions open rather than to close them up with some all-answering system which stimulates infection beneath the surface.

Why should a belief in "progress" bring so much trouble and strife? Why should it lead to an "infection beneath the surface"? Belief in progress seems to us a natural way for human hope to

express itself. It also promises the good of all, which we hold to be superior to mere personal development or private salvation.

Tolstoy is not of course an opponent of general progress; he says simply that the *means to progress lies in individuals*—not in the abstractions of "history." And Macdonald, when he refers to "some all-answering system," means some theory of historical progress which, because of human longing, gains the reputation of being infallible, and therefore of being the one source from which all general human good can be expected to flow. For when faith in such a system grows popular, men find it easy to transfer their personal responsibility to the system (which is going to save them, anyhow), and this almost invariably leads to fanaticism and those terrible crimes of man against man which are justified in the name of some religious or social "ideal."

Tolstoy wrote:

The law of progress, or perfectibility, is written in the soul of each man, and is transferred to history only through error. As long as it remains personal, this law is fruitful and accessible to all; when it is transferred to history, it becomes an idle, empty prattle, leading to the justification of every insipidity and to fatalism.

He might have used stronger language, if by "history" Tolstoy meant some kind of sure-thing mechanistic system, whether of politics or technology. For when men suppose that they are able to control or predict the processes of history by scientific knowledge, there comes a kind of confidence in the possibilities of power that can only result in determined fanaticism. Achieving power is seen as the means to justice, equality, and freedom: the *system* predicts it. Hence the ruthlessness of twentieth-century revolutionary movements; the acceptability of words like "liquidation" when applied to those who oppose the system; and the definition of "good" human beings entirely in conformist terms.

We are beginning to recognize, at last, the terrible effects of belief in progress through some outside system which can be imposed upon human beings and which, it is claimed, *must* be imposed, because of the good that can be reached only in this way. It is a belief which can allow no patience toward human beings who do not develop correctly according to the theory. So it is a belief the logic of which must include finding and punishing as scapegoats all who stand in the way of its fulfillment. Has there ever been a theory of progress which relied on forces outside individual men, which did not demand the punishment or liquidation of people who are suspected of interfering with the benefits those forces are expected to bring? What is the hunting of heretics but a determination to eliminate persons whose errors obscure the one true source of salvation—a salvation which comes from correct belief about an outside force, and not from the moral energies potential in man himself?

And when men on both sides of the social struggle are convinced that peace and progress will result from the proper political system, and from nothing else, isn't it inevitable that their efforts will be, on the one hand, to suppress or to locate and prosecute "subversives," and on the other, to resort to terrorism and guerrilla war? And assassinations? *All* is seen as depending on the maintenance of the right historical system in power, by those who have the power. And men without power, but advocates of systems they believe would use power justly, are led to single out men who are "symbols" of the evil they oppose, and to try to "execute" them, hoping to shake the existing system through terror, and to attract wider attention to their beliefs. History, so regarded, becomes a comparison of righteous with unrighteous scapegoating.

In today's social disturbances, a great effort is always made to find the "leaders" and to punish them severely as a lesson to all. This is a form of scapegoating, since punishment of a few who "symbolize" everyone behind the trouble is substituted for serious efforts to understand the emotional conflict and pain which underlie such

uprisings. The logic of the system does not cover these matters—in fact does not allow close attention to their actual causes—and submissive conformity is made synonymous with the common good. "Law and order," as we say, must rule. Persistent investigation of why some men have found other men's ideas of law and order intolerable might be threatening to popular faith in the "system"—which, being under fire, must now be protected from all criticism.

Here, perhaps, we have an illustration of what Tolstoy meant when he said that transferring responsibility for progress to history (a "system") would lead to fatalism. Having placed all our faith in it, we *must* make the system work; and alternatives or modifications reducing its power are unthinkable. So it does not seem remarkable that other men—either victims or the angry champions of victims—should confine themselves in a matching pattern of fatalistic thought and respond with desperate acts of nihilism. The system has been made rigid by the over-simplifying faith of its defenders, and hardly anyone is able to imagine, any more, that the key to all wrong, and all correction of wrong and the doing of right, lies, ultimately, in *individual human beings.* The artificial fatalism resulting from blind belief in systems has elevated might and terror to antithetical principles of social (historical) good.

But this is only abstract analysis. It has its truth, but it overlooks the fact that men still have hearts and some love for one another, despite the inroads of system-thinking. The true qualities of being human bring increasing anxiety as the power of systems assumes more and more control over human decision.

A superficial change may be brought about by the supposition that progress comes from finding new or different scapegoats. Many are the political thinkers who "change sides" after suffering impacts of history. This is of course still system-thinking. Yet even within system-thinking there are undeniable manifestations of the human quality: which stirs contradiction and questioning. We know, for example, that long before the Russian Revolution was successful, a kind of intellectual system was evolved to justify terrorism. It had a black logic—the desperate doctrine of destroy, destroy, so that finally, above the cinders of an unspeakable past, men can make all things new and good. Such doctrines grow like weeds in the soil of a tyrannical society, turning into the system-thinking of men become ruthless from heartbreak and pain. A scene in Camus' play, *The Just Assassins,* shows the struggle in these human beings—who think themselves wholly consecrated to mankind—against the terrible acts their system requires of them. One of the members of the terrorist cell in this play had been ordered to bomb the Russian Grand Duke, but he found himself unable to throw the bomb into the Duke's carriage because some children were in it, too. A member of the group, Stepan, condemns him for this scruple. Then a woman, Dora, also a member, intervenes:

> *Dora:* . . . You, Stepan, could you fire point blank on a child, with your eyes open?
>
> *Stepan:* I could, if the group ordered it.
>
> *Dora:* Why did you shut your eyes then?
>
> *Stepan:* What? Did I shut my eyes?
>
> *[)ora:* Yes.
>
> *Stepan:* Then it must have been because I wanted to picture . . . what you describe, more vividly, and to make sure my answer was the true one.
>
> *Dora:* Open your eyes, Stepan, and try to realize that the group would lose all its driving force, were it to tolerate, even for a moment, the idea of children's being blown to pieces by our bombs.
>
> *Stepan:* Sorry, but I don't suffer from a tender heart, that sort of nonsense cuts no ice with *me.* . . . Not until the day comes when we stop sentimentalizing about children will the revolution triumph, and we be masters of the world.
>
> *Dora:* When that day comes, the revolution will be loathed by the whole human race.
>
> *Stepan:* What matter, if we love it enough to force our revolution on it, to rescue humanity from itself and from its bondage?

Dora: And suppose mankind at large doesn't want the revolution? Suppose the masses for whom you are fighting won't stand for the killing of their children? What then? Would you strike at the masses, too?

Stepan: Yes, if it were necessary, and I would go on striking at them until they understood. . . . No, don't misunderstand me; I, too, love the people.

Dora: Love, you call it. That's not how love shows itself.

Stepan: Who says so?

Dora: I say it.

Stepan: You're a woman. and your idea of love is . . . well, let's say, unsound.

Dora: (passionately): Anyhow, I've a very sound idea of what shame means.

This dialogue is now repeated every day, in all lands, in all languages, although the words may be so different that we could not easily recognize them. Today the Women's Strike for Peace is saying that its members have "a very sound idea what shame is," and it is very difficult to send people who say this to jail. Within the human beings who are living under social orders constructed around theories of historical progress, and which pursue their objectives in rivalry, and sometimes in war, with those defending other theories of progress, this argument must naturally go on, so long as people remain human at all. And men must ask themselves, anxiously, even wildly, Can't there be a system which isn't so *extreme* in its necessities for survival? Or, Isn't there a way to install such a system, or even defend our own, without all this brutal destruction?

Such thoughts were in Camus' mind when he wrote this play. He said in his Preface:

I merely wanted to show that action itself had limits. There is no good and just action but what recognizes those limits and, if it must go beyond them, at least accepts death. Our world of today seems loathsome to us for the very reason that it is made by men who grant themselves the right to go beyond those limits, and first of all to kill others without dying themselves. Thus it is that today justice serves as an alibi, throughout the world, for the assassins of all justice.

One is driven to wonder whether the theory of "moderation" can be made to work, ever again, in the framework of system-thinking. One is driven to ask whether we dare wait until all the women in the world feel so much shame that they outlaw and completely defy the cruel logic of "progressive" history-making. Or until all the men become Dostoevskian enough to reject any means to the survival of their system which requires the suffering of a single child. Tolstoy, it is true, dealt in absolutes, but so, we are beginning to see, does historical-system-thinking. In a world, then, where compromise means loss of every humane cause to absolute ignominy, where is the fault in choosing the absolute which lies at the opposite pole?

Letter From
THE MIDDLE EAST

WHAT really happens to people, inside, when confronted with overwhelming, continuing and unavoidable tension?

Years ago a young refugee in Gaza, struggling with his English, said: "This life is no life." When I went back to Gaza last week, after seventeen years, I thought of him.

Yesterday I visited at some length with a former Cabinet Minister of an Arab country, whom I have known for some years. A strong person from a good family—educated, able, cultured:—he was known as honest and wise in a company not overly marked by these qualities. "Fifty of my fifty-five years," he said, "have been filled with strife. This is impossible. What is the future of my children, of the children of my son's young wife? Whatever may be the demands of ideology, the first and vital necessity is peace."

Another long conversation was with an Israeli youth worker and his pretty, intelligent wife, a teacher. They are Sabras, the Israeli-born Jews supposed to be marked by toughness and ability in this Jewish State. They described their feelings when the walls in Jerusalem came down after the six-day-war last June, and they were able to visit the Wailing Wall after twenty years. She said:

> I am not religious. I do not believe in things I cannot see or study. At the Wailing Wall I watched: I could not pray. Then we went to the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, in which all the synagogues and most of the buildings were destroyed by the Arabs in 1948, after all the few defending Jews were killed in the battle for the city. I looked at the heap of stones which were once synagogues. I said to myself: "What are these? only stones !" Suddenly I wept. If I could pray, I would have prayed.

Last week I talked with an elderly Arab, a responsible government official. He said "We killed King Abdullah; we killed him ourselves." He has lived with that for seventeen years,: but has not come to terms with it.

A responsible Israeli official revealed another dimension of the current problem when I asked about the Fattah, the terrorists. He said a considerable proportion of those captured have had some sort of higher education. Someone quoted figures for me: less than 10 per cent are illiterate; 40 to 50 per cent have completed secondary school; significant numbers are students, recruited during their university education terms in Beirut or in Europe. It is bad enough to face unorganized infiltration, with its seemingly directionless violence. Vastly more serious is an organized deliberate campaign of what must be reckoned an honest if confused renascent nationalism.

A very senior Moslem religious official, in his office at the mosque, tipped his tarboosh, revealed his completely white hair, claiming an age between 43 or 45 years. "I am a refugee, too," he said. "In the old days I had an annual income of from £5000 to £7000 Sterling from my lands, my houses, and my shops. Now I must live on my salary." The incongruity of the self-pity could not hide his pain. I did not find out how he felt about the other refugees, in wind-blown tents and without salary.

Some good friends whom we have known in an Arab capital city for fifteen years are finally giving up. They lost a shop in Jaffa in 1948, then started again here. Successful after a struggle, they opened new shops in Jerusalem and Baghdad. In 1956 the Baghdad shop was lost in the revolution, and since June, 1967, the Jerusalem shop has been operated by the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property. After such a twenty years, would you try to go on?

And now I have met either a prophet or a crazy man, I don't know which. Is there, indeed, a way to tell them apart? Born in Palestine, he went to the U.S. in the 1948 wave of refugees. He taught for some years at a major American university, struggling to find a solution to the problem of the refugees:

Why should these people suffer? Give me one good reason. People in ruling positions in Cairo, in Damascus, in Amman are not thinking about these people. Fighting will not help. Fighting only creates problems; it does not solve them. Feeding them will not help; they are living a death-in-life, inhuman, degrading, hopeless. I am against feeding them more. Let them march in thousands—singing—across the Jordan. Each will read his Bible or his Koran as he marches. I do not think the Jews will shoot them down. They may use tear-gas: not more. And if they do, what then?

"But," I said, "aren't you calling for a Martin Luther King, or a Gandhi? Is he to be found in the ranks of the refugees? That is not where either King or Gandhi was really found." "No," was his response. "He was not." After a moment he added: "I have resigned my job in the U.S. In September I am returning to Jordan."

A Gandhi with a pipe. A Gandhi carrying a large plastic bag from the Tax-Free Shop at Amsterdam Airport.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
MAN OF IMAGINATION

Two sorts of men offer means for the defeat of evil and pain. There are the history-makers, who try to tell us how to construct an environment from which pain will be absent, and there are the men who believe in the power of imagination—who would abolish the weight of pain, but not its essence, by penetrating its meaning. Of the two, the men of imagination may be the more valuable, if less popular, because they achieve as individuals a kind of triumph which, if it is left out of the ideals of history-making, can only create insatiable hungers which history-making cannot nourish.

The men of imagination, when they succeed,—and even their failures have dignity,—instead of totally condemning the present turn it into usable building materials. They make something promising out of their pain. Some day, the history-makers will learn this secret from the men of imagination, and then it will become possible to plant the seeds of Utopia in the soil of some existential present.

These are thoughts aroused *by* contemplation of the life and work of William Blake. Blake restores to usefulness the analogy between art and life. Art, for Blake, included all human expression in response to life, and he gave his own work a beyond-good-and-evil transcendence.

In MANAS for May 9, 1956, Review discussed Harold C. Goddard's essay, *Blake's Fourfold Vision* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet No. 86—unfortunately now out of print). Just recently, a reader in a distant city sent us what is apparently a mimeographed version of the same material—originally a lecture given in 1935 by Prof. Goddard, at Swarthmore, where he taught English for thirty-seven years. Reading the essay again, we thought it deserved further attention. (Mr. Goddard is also the author of *The Meaning of Shakespeare,* published by the University of Chicago in 1951.) Behind his essay on Blake lies this inspiration:

I believe William Blake was one of the wisest men who ever lived. I believe in him for what he thought, for what he saw, for what he wrote and designed, and for what he was. But I believe in him also because of the other men who confirm him. When the greatest of the sages agree, if their agreement is not the truth, what is the truth?

Take Dante for instance. When he exchanges Virgil for Beatrice for guide he is dismissing reason in favor of Imagination. His Paradise is simply Blake's fourfold vision expressed with a sustained perfection to which Blake would not pretend. Or Shakespeare. He went through a longer period of rebellion and tragedy than Blake. He, too, in his Hamlet stage, found life "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," but he emerged in the end with an identical doctrine in *King Lear* and *The Tempest.* In *The Tempest,* as I read it, Prospero is the intellect, or reason, and Ariel is the imagination. While Ariel is the slave of Prospero, we have material wonders: the raising and stilling of tempests, magic banquets, weapons arrested in air by unseen hands. But when Ariel is set free and Prospero becomes *his* servant, the spiritual miracles and forgiveness and reconciliation begin.

We live, today, under the shadow of these two aspects of mind, or rather, of one of them. We have brilliant critics who describe minutely the oppressions of technological rationalization, but there is little imagination in the works of these men. They fill us with feeling, but it is the emotion of despair. Prof. Goddard finds an antidote to this despair in Blake:

Our forefathers believed in individual salvation. We believe in social salvation. Either without the other is futile, Blake believes. Indeed "society" and "the individual" are simply two more of the abstractions of the Reason that he abhorred. Like Heaven and Hell, they must be married before there can be creation. Social changes founded on anything else are sterile—or rather they are pure illusion. They undo themselves.

What goes in the door comes out the window. Out go the capitalists, for example, and in come the bureaucrats. "Revolutions," says Bernard Shaw, "have never lightened the burden of tyranny: they have only shifted it to another shoulder." But not so with imaginative change. Why? Because vision uncreates evil by forgiveness. This is the theme of Blake's last great poem "Jerusalem."

Dive down into your experience and I am sure you can bring up an incident to make this clear. Once upon a time something happened that brought you unadulterated joy. At almost the same time you chanced to be the victim of some unjust act or unprovoked attack. At an ordinary moment you would have retaliated hotly. But you were so happy you found it beyond your power to work up the wrath that all common morality called for. 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.

This could be given a sentimental reading, but it need not be. (Yet there must be a better word than "forgiveness"!) All really great writers have an intimate, personal knowledge of evil; what Prof. Goddard is saying is that they do not let it distort their lives or reduce their humanity. It does not make them declare enemies. It cannot make them hate other men, although they will certainly resist the ignorance and heartlessness in other men. But mainly they fill the vacuum left by evil with wonderful constructions—and if they cannot make good things they at least make good dreams:

I use the word "uncreate" because "forgive" and "forget" are not strong enough terms. Imagination is Dante's River of Lethe in Purgatory. It can literally obliterate. Imagination can not only cause that-which-was-not, to be; it can cause that-which-was, not to be. It is this double power to annihilate and to create that makes imagination the sole instrument of genuine and lasting, in contrast with illusory and temporary, social change. . . .

Force cannot be overcome by reason. Force can be overcome only by a higher order of force. Imagination is that force. And Blake believed from the bottom of his heart that if a nation of warriors were confronted by a nation of imaginative men, the weapons of the former would fall uplifted from their hands.

It is not difficult to translate this into the terms of Gandhian conviction.

If we look at the world, today, there is plenty of evil in it to be inventoried and denounced. The question is: How much of this evil is due to plain human cussedness, and how much of it results from the passionate differences among men concerning *theories* of good and evil? Concerning what must be done to reduce the evil and increase the good? Obviously, a great deal of the evil in the world comes from fights over definitions and explanations and remedies. Even if there is an irreducible minimum of suffering or pain that cannot be abolished on any hypothesis, it should be clear that the conflict between men of reason, about their reasoning, is far more productive of evil than evil's "natural" causes. Blake, Prof. Goddard shows, attacked this problem in terms of a familiar symbolism:

God's account is that Lucifer fell and formed a Hell in the Abyss of what he stole from Heaven. But the Devil's account is that Messiah fell and formed a Heaven of what he stole from the Abyss. In Milton Satan is a divine criminal who is flung far out of Heaven for his pride, establishes a kingdom of evil and tempts Eve, and through her, Adam, to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But in the Greek myth Prometheus is a sort of divine Robin Hood who steals from Heaven and at the price of being crucified by Zeus bestows the gift of the gods on suffering humanity. Plainly, these are opposite versions of the same story. It is the greatness of Blake that he accepts both and reconciles them. "Heaven Earth and Hell henceforth shall live in harmony."

Blake, of course, cannot be read literally. He is a poet, a man of imagination. The transcendent vision of Prometheus will not translate into the systems-control logic of Zeus. Finite systems can never accommodate the breath of the eternal, and men, as yet, have not learned how to create open systems that really work. To do this, they will have to acquire a seasoned faith in the power of individual imagination—an incommensurable reality—and devise loose-jointed institutions whose main purpose is to give the imagination fields for its labors. Only a free imagination can encompass and reconcile the conflicting truths about evil.

Prof. Goddard offers suggestive analogues to show the two sides of the truth about living processes. One is tempted to demand more "clarity" of him, or at least an unequivocal outline

of what to do. But that of course is not provided, for it would have to be done in the logic of Zeus (who was an earlier incarnation of the Grand Inquisitor), and a man of imagination will not use that logic concerning *human* matters. Such directions can be given to believers in confining systems, but an awakened imagination wants no directions and will not use them; the imagination needs only provocation, by which it is moved to find its own way and then to do its own work. Blake knew this and repeated it endlessly, which makes him a man of our time and a prophet of our New Jerusalem.

COMMENTARY
HEALING IN COMMUNITY

IN Guy Endore's new book, *Synanon* (Doubleday), the founder and developer of Synanon's intensive community style of life, Charles E. Dederich, is quoted on the difference between the social welfare approach to human problems and what happens at Synanon in relation to typical urban disorders. A report on mental health in Boston cited "the case of a family where the husband is an alcoholic, the wife uneducated and manic-depressive and completely defeated by the job of taking care of three children, one of whom is hydrocephalic." Driven to despair, the mother asked for help. Commenting, Mr. Dederich said:

> What does Boston do about this? The city authorities have set up all sorts of agencies to look after every aspect of this situation. It's an almost total failure. One agency sends out a marriage counselor to work on the family. Another agency looks out for an asylum that will take in the hydrocephalic child. Still another agency sends out a psychologist to treat the manic-depressive symptoms of the mother, while a person from A.A. [Alcoholics Anonymous] gets to work on the drunken husband, and a child expert moves in on the two children.

> Of course all these separate activities can't help. They keep hacking away at it, of course, but it's like trying to sweep back the tide.

> Synanon's method will be completely different. It would not administrate such a situation. It would absorb it. It would take in such a family and introduce it to a completely new style of life, a life in which all those people would mingle with people who have succeeded on the outside, people who have education and achieved a measure of success, but who are now exactly the same as the people of that family; that is to say, paid-up members of the same club. All first-class citizens of Synanon. All living the same life-style.

The operative word here is *absorb.* At Synanon such people would be caught up in the momentum of the common community life. They would not be "segregated" as objects of charity but given countless ways of showing their own potentialities for cooperative, constructive activity. In addition to its infectious "going concern" spirit, Synanon rejects welfare-approach definitions and provides general security and undifferentiated friendliness and acceptance for everybody there. This genuine *hospitality* really reduces the symptoms which the welfare approach balloons to monster proportions by denigrating "diagnoses" followed by inadequate treatment in a setting so futile and destructive that the help given can only be described as orderly, systematic neglect.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE LOST HUMANITIES

FROM all points the word came in—James H. Billington's article in *Life* for May 24, "The Humanistic Heartbeat Has Failed," is a "must" for notice in MANAS—and our friends and correspondents have some justification: Mr. Billington, who teaches history at Princeton, has drawn an accurate picture of the death-in-life of today's higher education. Probably no one has put more urbanely the case against the modern university. Moreover, when *Life* Magazine solicits a contribution of this sort, which says some really bad things about the state of the nation, you can be practically certain that the judgment is no longer arguable.

Early in his discussion Prof. Billington says:

> The blunt fact is that liberal education is largely dead. Its humanistic heartbeat has failed, and rigor mortis is setting in throughout the giant educational system. The humanistic ideal of involving the whole man in the quest for order and beauty through the ennobling exposure to other men's accomplishments has been mostly replaced by the training of task-oriented technicians.

The causes are neatly set out—commercialization, competitiveness, compartmentalization, and scientistic delusions of grandeur. First of all, the desperate fund-raising necessary to keep those enormous plants going is a corrupting influence:

> In its relentless search for money, the modern university has let concern for "image" replace aspiration for an ideal. Public relations with the outside world has become more important than human relations within the university itself. Plato deliberately left the marketplace of ancient Athens to set up his academy; modern America has thrust its academicians back into the commercial arena. Marketability—not truth—has become the criterion of intellectual value. Almost no one in the status-conscious education industry has seriously challenged Clark Kerr's view (*The Uses of the University*, 1963) that the "really modern university" is simply "a mechanism . . . held together by administrative rules and powered by money"; that academic subjects will

ultimately survive only if they can earn their own money; and that "it only pays to produce knowledge if through production it can be put into use better and faster."

Which makes scholarship into a really competitive business. No one, Mr. Billington says, complains. Well, a few complain. William Arrowsmith complains. The contributors to *The Dissenting Academy* complain. And, of course, the students. They complain, too. We mustn't forget the students.

Before going further we have a puzzlement to voice: Does Mr. Billington really believe there is a cure for this situation? Does he think that these enormous institutions can be *reformed* around viable humanistic ideals? On what grounds can this be expected? How would anyone go about engineering the change?

In the latter part of his article Mr. Billington collects a few good signs—nice things are happening at the new Santa Cruz campus of the University of California; several colleges are adopting the small-college cluster system; and some of the smaller colleges are trying the Antioch plan—but equally to the point is his remark about the danger of experimental programs producing "conscience-salving tokenism rather than opening a continuing process of radical innovation."

Obviously, the time has come for new beginnings. But where, when, how? Hardest of all is the "how" question. How will experimenters and innovators get the money to do new things in education? They can't expect to get it from the educational establishment, and then to be let alone. They aren't going to get it from the Government, which, as Mr. Billington's figures show, is much more interested in learning how to make war. And they won't get it from the banks. These are all conservative institutions. Conservative institutions don't experiment in ways that might and probably will fail. Did a bank back Black Mountain College? It failed, didn't it? Well, it doesn't exist any more, which is, doubtless, a bank's definition of failure. However, a couple of years ago, somebody put up a lot of money to make a "study" of why Black

Mountain was so good while it lasted. The beginning was a part of its excellence:

> Students and teachers pooled their personal book collections and called the result the college library, and agreed to contribute manual labor voluntarily according to ability. That first year, the teachers drew out of the treasury only what they needed for clothes and incidentals, which averaged $7.27 per month per person. But even so, the college nearly collapsed twice for lack of money, and was saved only by the joint resourcefulness and self-denial of both the faculty and the students.

Just try going to a bank for money with a plan and a budget like that! They'll want to know where you are getting the slaves to do the teaching. The idea of people working for nothing because they want to does not normally occur to banks. And who would dare *plan* on anything like that?

From Louis Adamic's account of Black Mountain (just quoted, from *My America),* we learn that "Black Mountain has no trustees, no president, no dean." The only person in the office who was not a teacher was a typist. You can't find out much about the place, institutionally speaking; it didn't have much structure, and nothing now remains except a roster of illustrious graduates.

So, if you want to do something for the higher learning in America, don't read Clark Kerr. Read Louis Adamic. Read him about Black Mountain, and if you find anything better in print about it, please write.

You don't really have to read Mr. Billington, although he may help you to decide that nothing but some kind of Black Mountain is worth attempting. About the only serious objection to reading Mr. Billington is the same as the one quoted in Frontiers two weeks ago, from Allan Graubard, against Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man:* "the real help we need is not in giving nightmares an intellectual structure." For Mr. Billington does just that: he really proves that our educational system cannot be made to work the way it is; and that half-hearted attempts to change it into something better are not going to work, either. He is particularly effective on what the delusions of scientism have done to the university:

> The heaviest death blow to the humanities, however, has come from the sycophants of science. They have spread within the traditional humanities a crippling inferiority complex that has led to a loss of confidence in dealing with qualitative problems of value, taste, and belief. The advent of the computer has often encouraged the trivialization of scholarship and the belief that the things that count are those that can be counted. The largest of the humanistic guilds, the mammoth 25,000-member Modern Language Association has computers in its headquarters but few readable articles in its publications.

> "Not only are there no real men *teaching* history," one Ivy League graduate complained, "but there is a resentment against those real men who *made* history. The lecturer in our course on modern European history discussed every social class and psychological complex known—but never even mentioned the name of Napoleon. . . ."

> Accepting a naive positivist view of science which is largely rejected by modern scientists themselves, the behaviorists have largely taken over the academic study of politics. One no longer reads the works of great political theorists in "professional" political science, any more than one reads noncontemporary philosophers in "professional" philosophy.

Major evidence of the decline of the humanities is seen in their tiny appropriations. "A paltry one out of every thousand dollars of government funds given for basic research in 1966 went to the humanities." Sounds terrible, doesn't it? But think of how many Black Mountains could be founded and fostered with all those paltry one-dollar bills! If men interested in the humanities could get them. They won't, of course. The civilities, the decencies, the humanities, and the men who really want to teach them, are routinely starved out of existence in our official society. Anything that happens for genuine and far-reaching good in education will almost certainly have to be unofficial, for a long time to come. We don't say that Black Mountain was the greatest thing that ever happened in education. We say it was good; and, what may be more important, that it showed what could be done by people without money, but determined to teach. Such things can be done again, and almost certainly will. The idea is to make it a little less impossible.

FRONTIERS
The Primacy of the Person

THE current issue of *Our Generation* (Vol. 5, No. 4) has a follow-up by George Benello on his "Wasteland Culture," which appeared in *Our Generation* for last September (reviewed in MANAS for Jan. 3 of this year). While the follow-up comes as an answer to critics of "Wasteland Culture," it is mainly an elaboration and explanation of what was said in the earlier paper. Actually, several of the critics don't seem to grasp what Benello is talking about. This is not remarkable, since he is concerned essentially with the same problem that was discussed in MANAS recently (June 5), under the title, "Psychology of Revolution." The difficulty lies in Benello's stress on the importance of being-needs. He argues, in effect, that there is not much use in solving problems of deficiency-needs, unless being-needs are recognized and fulfilled in the process. For while deficiency-needs can be defined programmatically, and their satisfactions set up as concrete revolutionary objectives, being-needs have a subtler, once-removed relationship to the socio-economic scene, and in the ardors of revolt they tend to be ignored. Yet they are at the root of all ennobling and humanizing longings for change.

For the man who has thought only of deficiency-needs in relation to a revolutionary program, Benello's views are likely to seem empty or concerned with "frills." To him, programs concerned with satisfying deficiency-needs tend to become entirely manipulative, and therefore are designed to accomplish little but an exchange of power.

Now the high qualities of being wholly human are extremely difficult to discuss in causal terms, and they are not disclosed at all by mechanistic analysis. So, Benello does the next-best thing: He talks about the values of authentic community—which means, in traditional revolutionary language, the classless society. Revolts which don't produce community—and to produce community they must be conceived and carried out *through* community—cannot bring about a classless society. This is Benello's contention in a nutshell.

The two objectives—external social reconstruction, and inner, psychological reorientation—when separately conceived generate means which are in *formal* contradiction with each other. Perhaps this is the form/content problem of art and literature transferred to politics. Since content is essentially subjective in origin, unpredictable, uncoerced and, when it occurs, spontaneous and free, you can't plan it, although you may be able to plan *for* it. "Community" is symbolic of this sort of planning *for* it. But in politics encounters on barricades and other confrontations can themselves be planned; they can be organized, and you can tell other people exactly what to do for greatest effectiveness. 'The goal of community is sought by other means; the making of community is essentially a teaching activity: you clear away debris, reveal open spaces, try in some modest way to inspire, and then let things occur. Sometimes they do and sometimes they-don't, and one seldom knows exactly why, in either case.

The principle of revolt is schism and antagonism, while the principle of community is wholeness and reconciliation, and to make these two principles operate in tandem, without one spoiling the effect of the other, calls for an imaginative social insight that very few men possess. (Gandhi had it; Dolci seems to have it.) Revolts need to be organized if they are not to appear ridiculous or abort, while communities are usually stultified by organization. Resolution of this dilemma will obviously depend upon the kind of people who are involved, and not upon the excellence of the plans. Meanwhile, the development of authentic community is a gradual and idiosyncratic process that does not prosper in an impatient atmosphere.

Yet somehow men must learn from and in community to strive for social change. George Benello writes:

> If new organizational structures embodying the primacy of the person can be developed and at the same time establish their capacity to carry out the key purposes of society there is excellent reason to believe that these styles would be widely propagated with a maximum chance that they could avoid societal oppression. For one thing, while posing a fundamentally radical challenge to the current organizations and their ideology, they would in other respects clearly accord with the purposes of society, which involves a commitment to progress and prosperity. . . . To challenge liberal ideology, one must challenge its view of human nature which sees man as only minimally capable of collaborative and social purpose. . . .

> Resistance is necessary, but is not enough. . . . Seen negatively where resistance takes the form of attacks upon the social order, the repressive response will be proportional to the threat represented, not to the justice or injustice which forms the motive for the attack. The average citizen possesses a deep and unthinking commitment to law and order, no matter how repressive, where the alternative is the prospect of a future that is totally unknown. The psychoanalyst knows the power of individual defense mechanisms which seek to ward off the threat of change. The reason social systems are much the same is precisely because the systemic character of the interlocking parts means that beyond a certain point the system cannot change and still maintain its fundamental identity. . . .

> The analysis holds that confronted with the problem of organizing for a high technology, the response in both the East and the West has been to develop centralized bureaucratic, hierarchic organizations which are authoritarian and hence, stultifying in their effects on people. Technology, rather than being used to create a more humane society, has become the chief determinant of the forms and goals of human organization, and thus the societies of East and West wage battles around their GNP's, and respectively create mythologies around heroes of production or consumption. In approaching the problem at this level, the distinctions between bureaucratic collectivism and corporate liberalism are seen as secondary to the fundamental similarities of style, structure, and value system. The fundamental authoritarianism exists in both cases, although expressed in different mixes of ideological appeal, bribed manipulation, and implicit or explicit coercion. But both systems diverge grossly from a libertarian ideal and fail to establish some of the basic conditions for a social order capable of maintaining the primacy of the person.

This "primacy of the person," structurally evident in the ideal of community, is Mr. Benello's fundamental theme. The failure of Marxism to provide a free society, he says, results from a historical determinism which seems accurate enough, given suppression of the person. However—

> . . . this determinism is . . . not a fated necessity of history but precisely a failure on the part of a social order to assert the primacy of the person in the face of the machine. As a consequence, when technology is permitted to dominate the social order, a subtle, rationalized and even more extensive form of domination of man by man is made possible by virtue of an appeal to productive and organizational efficiency.

Mr. Benello is saying that whatever the successes of resistance or revolt, before there can be "primacy of the person," actual persons must exist, as distinguished from people ("masses") so denatured by submission to the technological process that they cling to the authoritarian structures they are familiar with, as preferable to the frightening unknowns of a revolutionary ideal. Inventive and fertile social intermediaries, conceived in terms of community, he thinks, are the means for the restoration of human persons and the development of relationships and modes of action characteristic of community—out of which may grow forces of change that will not efface the human person, but allow and even press him to take the lead.