VOLUME XXVIII, NO. 6
FEBRUARY 5, 1975

DIVIDED AND DISTINGUISHED WORLDS

HOW shall we get man back into the universe? The question may appear supremely ridiculous, since any discussion of the universe—of all nature and life—quite plainly depends on the humans who discuss it, and it is at least possible that the universe as we think of it would have no existence save for our presence in it and our cogitations about it.

Leaving that problem aside, the fact remains that in the universe—the one, that is, which modern thought has accounted real, which science has designed and philosophy is permitted to reason about—there are no sources for human nature, no recognition of human qualities, no hospitality for the longings and aspirations which animate all men and women. It is a matter for some wonder that, since the seventeenth century, the determination of men to *understand* the world has made human beings *incomprehensible.* The "real world" of Galileo, as E. A. Burtt has said, "must be the world outside of man," since the world of human life, "of pleasures and griefs, of passionate loves, of ambitions and strivings," formed no part of the study of the natural philosophers. They defined the world in the terms they found convenient for the kind of understanding they sought.

Since this modern world provides no account of man's place and part in it, and since, in any area left without definition, no rules apply, it follows that, except for what is marked out by physical laws, we think and do what we please. This is the common practice. A few years ago at least a dozen books were pointing out that the Founding Fathers and the Constitution failed to consider the possibility that the artificial entities known as corporations might need a limit set to their activities. They did not anticipate what would happen in the world of industry and commerce during the next two hundred years. As a result there are now multinational corporations so large and so independent that they sometimes have greater power in world affairs than the policies and actions of nations. With some show of reason, critics have argued that corporations *must* be fitted into a rational structure devised out of regard for the common good.

The parallel is not obscure. Able, allowed—and even instructed, according to Lynn White, Jr.—to do what we please with nature's energies and resources, we broke all past records in material satiety, until the consequences of these unordered depredations now require us to apply some rationality to our relations with the world. For the world, whether as abused machine or long-suffering organism, is in revolt against our "doing what we please." It doesn't work any more, we say, and vaguely add, as might someone who felt an unfamiliar prick of conscience, that an ancient moral law may be involved.

So we are setting out to rationalize our relations with the world. Hardly anyone denies the need, although there is little agreement on a scheme of rational order which takes both man and the world into account. As a Harvard economist remarked, the universe we know, which has definition from science, is "normatively empty." To be normatively empty is to be completely silent concerning what humans *ought* to do. And while the insistence that we define our relations with the world according to some rational standard has the coloring of moral intention, its *urgency* comes almost entirely from pain and fear of disaster. We are haunted by technology-spawned Furies. Our Delphic oracle has put aside the injunction suited to the age of Plato. Not, "Man, Know Thyself," but, "Man, Control Thyself . . . *or else"* is the warning addressed to a world which listens only to hardheaded empiricists. So now we have all those

new books and magazines which give details of the "or else." We are being made into cost-benefit philosophers, saccharine-sampling ascetics, and reluctant reformers, with an eye cocked for plea-bargaining deals with whatever gods there be behind the cosmic veil.

But this is only the frothy side of the picture, a report of the flotsam and jetsam stirred to the surface by the waves of change. Beneath are deeper currents. The very foundations of belief are changing. Old philosophers are getting respectful attention. The mystics are found to have neglected resonances of meaning. Thoughtful writers are looking more carefully at the great surges of the human spirit in other ages. Old controversies are being revived, and one question lately renewed is: Does man live in but one world, or are there two? Hans Jonas, thinking about this problem, asked recently if it is possible to restore the idea of the "holy." How else can we learn to live according to moral statutes as well as by the physical laws which we once thought would suffice?

As we know, Galileo opted for the Book of Nature, in which he read nothing about "morality." The Deists hoped to find in the Book of Nature a contrapuntal line of moral principles, but they could not make them explicit, and the doctrine of Natural Right, which was one of their big intuitions, has lost nearly all its supporters during the past fifty years. In any event, the vein is worked out. It does not seem possible to extract a moral code from the Book of Nature simply because, suddenly, we need it.

Our trouble, to put it briefly, is that, having completely accustomed ourselves to living in a world of physical forces and morally neutral objectivity—we are now confronted by a desperate need for principles of order we have systematically and conscientiously outlawed during some three hundred years.

Did anybody see this coming? Was there ever in the past another sort of rationalist, men who tried, however unsuccessfully, to accommodate themselves to two orders of reality, both moral and physical, to bring a harmony to men's lives?

Actually the seventeenth century is filled with heroic attempts in this direction. This was the time when the one-world view of Galileo and Descartes was beginning to take firm hold of the mind of Western man. The exhilarations of science, of the experimental spirit, and of the mathematic way of thinking were sweeping over Europe. On the way out was the Aristotelian scholastic philosophy and the Elizabethan world-view. The scientists of those days were not irreligious, but they were determined to be scientists above all. They affirmed the reality of Spirit, of Deity, but were careful to give no functions to anything but measurable, physical forces. Descartes claimed it was impious to *reason* about Revelation, neglecting to warn his followers that whatever intelligent men stop thinking about soon pales and dies.

But there were those in England who combined a deeply religious spirit with enthusiasm for the new science—yet who saw, as Descartes did not, what exclusive attention to the mechanics of nature would do to the moral assumptions of mankind. These Englishmen were Platonic opponents of materialism, philosophic defenders of an ancient conception of man as the inhabitant of two worlds. Their language differs from ours, but in their thought they wrestled with the same great issue: How does one combine the physical and the metaphysical? The material with the spiritual? Brooding on this question, Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682) considered the linkages joining nature and man. In *Religio Medici* he wrote:

> . . . to call ourselves a microcosm, or little world, I thought it only a pleasant trope of rhetoric, till my near judgment and second thoughts told me there was a real truth therein: for first we are a rude mass, and in the rank of creatures which only are, and have a dull kind of being not yet privileged with life, or preferred to sense or reason; next we live the life of plants, the life of animals, the life of men, and at last the life of spirits, running on in one mysterious

> nature, those five kinds of existences, which comprehend the creatures, not only of the world, but of the universe.
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> Thus is man the great and true *amphibium,* whose nature is disposed to live not only like other creatures in diverse elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds: for though there be but one world to sense, there are two to reason; the one visible, the other invisible. . . .

He urged his readers to make themselves accountable for these possibilities:

> Live unto the dignity of thy nature, and leave it not disputable at last, whether thou hast been a man; or since thou art a composition of man and beast, how thou hast predominantly passed thy days. . . . Desert not thy title to a divine particle and union with invisibles. Let true knowledge and virtue tell the lower world thou art a part of the higher. Let thy thoughts be of things which have not entered into the hearts of beasts; think of things long passed, and long to come. . . . Let intellectual tubes give thee a glance of things, which visive organs reach not. Have a glimpse of incomprehensibles, and thoughts of things which thoughts but tenderly touch.

Grave moralist and articulate sage, Browne added this caution:

> Behold thyself by inward optics and the crystalline of thy soul. Strange it is, that in the most perfect sense there should be so many fallacies, that we are fain to make a doctrine, and often to see by art. But the greatest imperfection is in our inward sight, that is, to be ghosts unto our own eyes; and while we are so sharp-sighted as to look through others, to be invisible to ourselves; for the inward eyes are more fallacious than the outward. The vices we scoff at in others laugh at us within ourselves. Avarice, pride, falsehood lie undiscerned and blindly in us, even to the age of blindness; and, therefore, to see ourselves interiorly, we are fain to borrow other men s eyes; wherein true friends are good informers, and censurers no bad friends. Conscience only, that can see without light, sits in the Areopagy and dark tribunal of our hearts, surveying our thoughts and condemning their obliquities.

For Thomas Browne, as for Bruno, and for Ficino and Pico before him, and as in the Elizabethan world view, man's place in nature was as a kind of cosmic glue or nexus—he held all together in his own nature, variously mixed. This was a doctrine traceable to the Pythagoreans. In his life of Pythagoras, Photius, a Byzantine antiquarian, repeated the teaching:

> Pythagoras said that man was a microcosm, which means. a compendium of the universe, not because, like other animals, even the least, he is constituted by the four elements, but because he contains all the powers of the world. For the world contains gods, the four elements, animals and plants. All of these powers are contained in man. He has reason which is a divine power; he has the nature of the elements, the powers of moving, growing, and reproduction. However in each of these he is inferior to the others. For example, an athlete who practices in five kinds of sports, and diverting his powers into five channels, is inferior to the athlete who practices a single sport; so, man, having all the powers, is inferior in each. Than the gods, we have less reasoning powers; and less of each of the elements than the elements themselves. Our anger and desire are inferior to these passions in the irrational animals; while our powers of nutrition and growth are inferior to those in plants. Constituted therefore of different powers, we have a difficult life to lead. . . . Though it seems easy to *know yourself,* this is the most difficult of all things.

In the analogy of the athletes, we have an interesting explanation of what the great intellectual and moral struggle of the seventeenth century was about. Descartes and Bacon, in their way, had made up their minds. Instead of living "a difficult life," they wanted to be one kind of athlete, and to rule over the limited empire the senses could contain. Both claimed that Revelation, though precious, should be ignored by reason. No division of energies for them. They wanted to be free to think about matter and its motions without interferences or embarrassments from the world of spirit. The idea was to seal spirit off in an irrational area, welcome to reverence but with no subtractions of attention from scientific inquiry. As Basil Willey writes in *The Seventeenth Century Background:*

> . . . what can be asserted with confidence, I think, is that Bacon's desire to separate religious truth from scientific truth was in the interests of science, not of religion. He wished to *keep science pure from religion;* the opposite part of the process—keeping religion pure from science—did not interest him

> nearly so much. What he harps on is always how science has been hampered at every stage by the prejudice and conservatism of theologians. After three hundred years of science we now have writers pleading for religion in an age dominated by science; Bacon was pleading for science in an age dominated by religion. Religious truth, then, must be "skied," elevated far out of reach, not in order that so it may be more devoutly approached, but in order to keep it out of mischief. But having secured his main object, namely, to clear the universe for science, Bacon can afford to be quite orthodox (just as, in another context, he can concede poetry to human weakness).

Descartes had the same basic design. He said in his *Discourse on Method:*

> I perceived it to be possible to arrive at a knowledge highly useful in life; and in the room of the speculative philosophy usually taught in the schools, to discover a practical, by means of which, knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artisans, we might also apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of nature.

This, of course, is precisely what we are complaining of, now. The "lords and possessors" role has proved abortive. Our teachers, however, Bacon and Descartes, were so successful in their persuasions that we are able to conceive of no other role and still remain what we consider to be "rational." But the Cambridge Platonists recognized the dangers in the Cartesian program at the time of its very beginning. How did they oppose the mechanical philosophy?

An illustrious line of thinkers represents this struggle against Cartesian simplification. It begins with the Cambridge Platonists, Anglican in persuasion, Puritan by affinity, and open-minded to science, who saw in the scientific revolution an opportunity to renew the spirit of religion, free from tiresome scholastic casuistry. But they saw, too, that there would be no place for souls, and no immortality, in a universe constructed of Cartesian machinery alone. Henry More and Ralph Cudworth were the philosophical defenders of Browne's Divided and Distinguished Worlds, and they used the weapons of their extensive learning to show that the mechanistic philosophy would destroy the moral life of mankind; and that it was also inadequate to explain much in the physical world that was not machine-like in operation. Borrowing from Paracelsian doctrines, More declared that diffused throughout nature was a plastic power or principle, of which the "astral bodies" of all things were formed. By this principle More explained the growth of plants and embryos, and the instincts of animals evident in the nest-building of birds and the spinning of cocoons by silk-worms. Man, too, partakes in this plastic principle, "and by means of it," as J. A Stewart says, giving More's doctrine in *The Myths of Plato,* man's Soul "constructs for herself a body terrestrial, aerial, or æthereal (*i.e.* celestial) according as the stage of her development has brought her into vital relations with the vehicle of earth, air, or æther." What we call "psychical phenomena" were similarly accounted for by More.

Quite evidently, in the days of the formation of modern scientific conceptions, More was contending for an idea which, today, at the other end of the scientific cycle, reformers are demanding recognition for under another name: the *organic* character of all vital processes. The plastic or organic principle was the substantial link between spirit and matter for the Cambridge Platonists. Conceivably, today, the evolution of the idea of "organism," starting with the modern studies of morphogenesis—the conception of fields as applied to biological processes—may eventually bring us back to Paracelsian originals, and by gradual stages develop the philosophy of organism into a philosophy of soul. This, in essence, was what the Cambridge Platonists cared about.

Ralph Cudworth pointed out that Descartes' idea of the soul as "incorporeal substance" was a mere starting-point. Mind must be understood as the prior and self-existent reality—an active

principle, an intelligent force or power—which meant recognition of the mind or soul of man as a real being not dependent upon the body except for earthly experience. The mind, moreover, working through its intermediary, the plastic principle, was the means by which purpose makes itself felt. Stewart pertinently remarks: "The English Platonist of the seventeenth century, with his 'plastic soul,' makes out, I venture to think, as plausible a case for 'teleology' as his successor, the English Idealist of the nineteenth or twentieth century, manages to do with his 'spiritual principle'." Stewart also observes that lack of a deep sense of purpose turns out, in the end, to be deeply discouraging:

> This was how the Cambridge Platonists argued. In our own day, Pessimism is most often disappointed Hedonism. But it may well come from any cause which damps the energies of men: thus, the doctrine of Determinism may produce it by persuading us that our actions are all determined beforehand . . . and that we are but the passive spectators even of our own actions. . . . Logical thinkers, it seems to me, must decide in favour of "Mechanism"; moral agents will always decide in favour of "Teleology." And they are right, because "Teleology" is the working hypothesis of Life, whereas the doctrine of "Mechanism" damps the *vis viva* on which Life, including the logical understanding itself, depends for its continuance.

The Cambridge Platonists sought to preserve a field for distinctively human experience. In what did that experience consist? Basically, it was—and is—the moral struggle which makes our lives into Promethean drama. For this to be possible, two worlds are required—the world of meaning and the world of process. Purpose gives the rationale of meaning, causality the law of process. Vision raises the curtain on the stage of meaning, providing dimensions and depth to human striving, while logic defines the mechanisms. The Cambridge Platonists, using the language of their day, showed that both worlds are needed to give the life of human beings a rational ground. They knew that life to be difficult, but saw that a simplification which denied one world in order to enjoy uninhibited rule of the other was a coward's choice between Quietism and Materialism. They would seek no finite empire at the cost of their humanity.

Their poetic persuasions, however, were insufficient to the times. The fascinations of single vision, of one world only, triumphed, and the intoxications of that victory lasted until the middle of the twentieth century. Now we are confronted once again by the same alternatives. Can humans of the present learn to live in divided and distinguished worlds? Are they ready, at last, to accept the challenge set by Pythagoras: "Constituted therefore of different powers, we have a difficult life to lead"?

REVIEW
AN UNENDING DEBATE

WE have from England a book about an argument that will surely continue for as long as human beings remain constituted as they now are—*Essays on Freedom of Action* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) edited by Ted Honderich. We have attempted to review such books before, but seldom with much satisfaction or sense of accomplishment. They are so hard to read. The language is sometimes difficult, giving the impression that you may need to change your career in order to understand the authors. Then there is the feeling that no matter what a man says in defense of his argument, tomorrow someone will come along to show what grave matters he has overlooked.

So much for complaint. Now and then one finds in such books ideas which bring clarification to old philosophical questions. Now and then there are lively, comprehensible passages which ought to have much wider circulation. They won't get it in these books published for other academic philosophers to read. The scholars who write the books know this; they know that they won't have a general audience unless they become mavericks or deserters, and then, unless they turn out to be geniuses, they may become professional outcasts. It is a sad situation. (A great deal of what Lewis Feuer said in his *New York Times Magazine* article [April 24, 1966] applies here.) Well, we have the book and will try to make the best of it.

What we need, first of all, is not a flat answer as to whether or not there is freedom of the will, but a better understanding of why the argument seems so difficult to settle. One contributor to *Freedom of Action*, David Wiggins, helps a great deal. He shows, in effect, how little we know about the being or "self" who tries to decide whether or not he is "free." What, in short, is the *self?* Is the self only the naked, unarmed self-consciousness which Descartes allowed to the soul, after making his persuasive argument for completely mechanistic rule of the "natural" world of extended substances? How about Ortega's "I am myself and my circumstances"? Are the framing endowments of the self in any sense a part of the self? Mr. Wiggins points out that a great deal of the obscurity concerning freedom of the will versus determinism results from "confusion between what lies in the agent and what lies outside of him." Is a man's character a part of his self? How much of him is free and how much determined? Mr. Wiggins says:

> The conviction of freedom is not by any means the only conviction human agents experience. Equally common is the feeling of unfreedom, the feeling that one is not really deciding a certain issue at all; or the fatalistic presentiment habitually experienced by men with the courage to recognize their standing incontinence in the face of certain temptations. These feelings or presentiments establish nothing either way. The objection seems in fact to rest on the idea that there can be two standpoints or perspectives, P(1) and P(2), upon some act of mine, my perspective and another's, such that P(1) is incompatible with P(2) and yet both are defensible. But what has this defensibility to do with the truth? The law of non-contradiction assures us that one or other standpoint must be based on an illusion. If the supposition that real alternatives exist is an integral part of normal deliberation, and if determination is true and shows that it was already fixed long beforehand which action the man would choose, then deliberation itself must involve some kind of illusion, however necessary an illusion.

The implication here is that man is both free and not-free—which the law of non-contradiction will not tolerate. Apparently, to understand ourselves, it may be necessary to suspend the law of non-contradiction in relation to peculiarly human activity. Mr. Wiggins quotes from Sartre his defense of the idea of freedom—a passage of particular interest since it explains Sartre's puzzling admiration for Genet:

> For the idea which I have never ceased to develop is that in the end one is always responsible for what is made of one. Even if one can do nothing else besides assume this responsibility. For I believe that a man can always make something out of what is made of him. This is the limit I would today accord

> to freedom: the small movement which makes of a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him. Which makes of Genet a poet when he had been rigorously conditioned to be a thief. . . .
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> For Genet was made a thief, he said "I am a thief," and this tiny change was the start of a process whereby he became a poet, and then eventually a being no longer even on the margin of society, someone who no longer knows where he is, who falls silent. It cannot be a happy freedom, in a case like this. Freedom is not a triumph. For Genet, it simply marked out certain routes which were not initially given.

Freedom, various sages have declared, is knowledge of necessity. Knowing necessity means awareness of alternative possibilities. Genet had to know what it meant to be a thief in order to choose to become something else.

There is a sense, then, in which awareness lifts (part of) us out of the causal chain. To be unaware of the chain is to be its creature, only a link, or a cog. It seems quite legitimate, then, to say to oneself: "Today I am not free in the way in which I shall be free tomorrow." And what am I? Am I the man of today or the man of tomorrow? Or the next day? A working answer must be that I am both free and unfree, both creature and creator. The law of non-contradiction may make it possible for us to understand the world, but it shuts out understanding of ourselves. The rule must be: Man is not a Thing. Freedom is substantially a function of where you stand on this question.

When I thought I was my circumstances, I was ruled by the law of circumstance. Realizing this, until I choose other circumstances, I exist in a limbo of doubt where I am neither one nor the other: the limbo Kenneth Keniston called "youth," the time when freedom has yet to be used—used and therefore lost by the act of decision. But every wise act of decision is also a redefinition of freedom—the recovery of youth, a time of birth.

How can we organize for review this conception of the human being?

Plato made one suggestion in the *Timaeus:* "There are two kinds of causes, the Divine and the Necessary, and we must seek for the Divine in all things, and the Necessary for the sake of the Divine." Reflective knowledge is required for distinguishing between the two. But these words, Divine and Necessary, are by no means clear. What meaning shall we assign Divine? Well, Divine is free—that is, uncompelled. A divine act is an act we are able to elect because it is good to do. And since *demon est deus inversus,* a diabolical act is an act we choose although we know it is evil. Because reflection is needed for freedom, Morality, as W. P. Ker has said, "depends upon intelligence, on contemplation; the deadliest error is to misinterpret the world by means of second causes, corruptible, fragmentary things."

But the world is *there,* and how dare we call it fragmentary and corruptible? Because, for a being of potential divinity—capable of continually being freer than it was before—to fail to recognize that the world is imperfect and changeable is to bind ourselves to the constraining wheel of necessity, to which only a part of us, the lesser, circumstantial part, belongs. The highest or all-inclusive reality, as a *Upanishad* says, is both supreme and not supreme—supreme as cause, not supreme as effect. Both the finite and the infinite must be included in the highest reality—both poles, that is, of subjectivity and objectivity. The principle of non-contradiction has force only in time—since time, after all, is an illusion generated by the sequences of causal chains. Time is counted by those sequences. But the generator of causes—indeed, the *creator* of time—makes new beginnings, and is therefore outside time. An originating act, therefore, invalidates for an instant the principle of non-contradiction. But the act once done, the universe, small or large, consequent upon the act goes on and on in its causal chains until the act's energy is exhausted, until entropy sets in. We encounter that act as a continuum, spread out in time, as concrete Necessity. But since it has existence in time—

being, that is, finite—it can be modified by other acts. And so the great web of life unfolds, and as both self and web are recognized, understood, defined by men, they become as gods.

Well, there are other ways to think about these matters. Literature is filled with examples. Another contributor to *Freedom of Action*, Anthony Kenny, quotes Dr. Johnson's cavalier judgment: "We know our will is free, and there is an end to it," then offers for contrast the last words of Tolstoy's *War and Peace:* "It is necessary to renounce a freedom which does not exist and to recognize a dependence of which we are not personally conscious." Perhaps one could say that people who study history tend to become determinists, while people who study themselves become free-willers.

Another formulation: All that we *know* relates to cause and effect, all that we *care* about relates to freedom. You can't have a motive about a fact; motives have to do with choosing or altering facts. Determinism establishes what is, freedom is devoted to what might be. Like past and future, neither would have meaning without the other. The strength of one's sense of being free (what is this but the will?) can hardly be applied without knowledge of the world—intimate, exact, and particular knowledge of the world and its parts. Brave acts of freedom come ludicrous croppers without knowledge of the field of action, or the world. Being all heart is as aberrant as being all intellect, but the heart comes first since it is our *raison d'être*, while intellect is only the processing tool. Powerful tools without direction from an informed heart can only spin their wheels.

Since we are or have both hearts and heads, and make faulty use of both, we are capable of folly, nonsense, hypocrisy, and immeasurable evil, but also of habitual generosities, delighting kindness, rippling humor, brave persistence, self-effacing sacrifice, startling insight, and enduring good. It may be noted that all these terms of description depend for their meanings on knowledge of both freedom and necessity, of both choice and constraint.

COMMENTARY
WHAT IS MAN?

THINKING about what Doris Lessing says about education (see the quotations in "Children"), we began to wonder why so few writers on education take on the questions she raises. What good will more "learning theory" do us so long as the young continue to be taught "by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors"?

The best of the young, Mrs. Lessing says, just leave. If that is the case, then it seems far more important than anything else to look at the background of assumption in present-day education. What is taught and how it is taught depends, as Forest Davis has pointed out (in *Return from Enlightenment*), on the prevailing philosophy of human nature.

> Is man an animal inheritor of a biological past, whose ideals are deceptive accidents in the flowing of his hormones? Then schools will be formed accordingly, perhaps with special attention to psychological chemistry. Or is man a walking echo of other men, bouncing off his fellow humans, picking up spots and slivers of reality, creating an amalgam of the pseudo-real from a wide array of nasal noise? Then the schools will be formed accordingly, their stock in trade the skills of communication.
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> Educational theories and practices are concerned with assertions of the real; they constitute the end-continua of metaphysical positions. If the beginning is made with educational theory the corresponding metaphysic is implied. If the beginning iS made with a metaphysics a corresponding educational theory is implied. The envelope for all this is the world-view, which is at once the common ground of religion and education.

What is the present situation? In another of his books, *Journey Among Mountains*, Mr. Davis says:

> . . . 20th-century progressive education along with pragmatism has adopted a poor relation of the natural sciences, to wit, physico-social environmentalism, and permitted it to abstract from itself any romantic and rational content. Thus liberalism has been left aligned with deterministic philosophies. Environmentalism has seen human nature as creature of its surroundings. . . . A philosophy of originality is missing. Change is ascribed to random physical and social motions amid selective forces and circumstances. . . .
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> For present purposes the crucial concern is the redefinition of human nature and the relation of the self to the object.

These are the real problems of modern education, for both children and youth; the rest is detail. Indoctrination is the resort of the specialist who hides himself away from the fundamental questions.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

NOTICING THE UNNOTICED

TO what extent does our feeling of living in an orderly world—a world subject to presumably intelligent management—depend upon the stability of institutions?

There is a sense in which social understanding is gained by having definable institutions. People are differentiated by their activities, and institutional classification enables us to generalize about these differentiations, and to shape opinions and decisions.

On the other hand, the more maturity people have, the less easy it is to "classify" them. The best of men are practically unclassifiable.

Is "order," then, little more than a reflection of classifiable mediocrity?

Many of our feelings about order are doubtless grounded in external classification, but there is another sort of order—the self-determined order of independence and originality—based on individual distinction and versatility instead of formal classification or control. One might think of the present as in some measure a heroic attempt to move out of the old category of order to a new one created by self-definition. It seems natural and inevitable that this effort should be attended by confusion.

In her Preface to *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing speaks of the difficulties of this sort of transition:

> By the time a young person has reached the age when he has to choose (we still take it for granted that a choice is inevitable) between the arts and the sciences, he often chooses the arts because he feels that here is humanity, freedom, choice. He does not know that he is already moulded by a system: he does not know that the choice itself is the result of a false dichotomy rooted in the heart of our culture. Those who do sense this, and who don't wish to subject themselves to further moulding, tend to leave, in a half-unconscious, instinctive attempt to find work where they won't be divided against themselves. With all our institutions, from the police force to academia, from medicine to politics, we give little attention to people who leave—that process of elimination that goes on all the time and which excludes, very early, those likely to be original and reforming, leaving those at tracted to a thing because that is what they are already like. A young policeman leaves the Force saying he doesn't like what he has to do. A young teacher leaves teaching, her idealism snubbed. This social mechanism goes almost unnoticed—yet it is as powerful as any in keeping our institutions rigid and oppressive.

It seems not unreasonable to say that the ones who leave—who leave, that is, for the reasons Mrs. Lessing gives—are probably the most promising members of tomorrow's society. Yet they have become unclassifiable. We don't know where they are, or how to "reach" them. Perhaps we shouldn't want to; perhaps they should be left to their own devices—but people do want to reach them. A few years ago MANAS had a letter from a small book publisher in another country who wanted to reach the best of the American students. We told him that quite likely this would be impossible—that the "best" ones had mostly dropped out. Like all generalizations, this one was certainly false in spots, yet it was worth making. Meanwhile, those young people are giving their energies to innovative projects that haven't "surfaced" yet, institutionally speaking. The impact of their lives may not be felt for another ten years or so. Moreover, the institutions they bring into being will be less formal, less classifiable, than the old social forms. They may create attitudinal *fields* instead of institutions.

In any event, they won't be touched by benevolent efforts to make existing places of higher learning more effective. They have found other ways of gaining maturity—better ways, we suspect, than those afforded by *any* institution of higher learning. Should, then, our best thinking and energy go into the reform of institutions? Should we even discuss education as an institutional issue?

Continuing her discussion of conventional education. Doris Lessing says:

> It may be that there is no other way of educating people. Possibly, but I don't believe it. In the meantime it would be a help at least to describe things properly, to call things by their right names. Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this:
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> "You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best

> we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show you how impermanent this must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others, will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself—educating your own judgment. Those who stay must remember, always and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society."

Is this, one wonders, the *only* way to do it? What if we could develop a population strong with people like Doris Lessing—wouldn't they figure out a way to build into the teaching of the young the safeguards against uncritical assumption that she has put into a denigrating preface to the whole affair? It makes her point, but could or would our kind of "system" ever do what she proposes?

What we have here, apparently, is the old problem of the originators, the autodidacts—the self-reliant ones who are bound to know for themselves—in contrast to the majority who prefer to have someone in authority tell them what to think and do. Well, if this is the actual situation, then good education would teach broad and humbling responsibility to the self-reliant ones—their obligation to put their superior qualities at the service of others—while it would try to shake up and stir out of their various ruts the ones content to become conformers and true believers. Ortego is almost the only writer on education who openly faced this problem (see the first chapter of *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*).

Mrs. Lessing is already doing some "teaching" along this line. As a writer of some eminence, she is now continuously bombarded with letters from young people seeking her help. They ask for a list of what she has written, about the critical reaction, and "for a thousand details of total irrelevance, but which they have been taught to consider important, amounting to a dossier, like an immigration department's." Mrs. Lessing gives a sample of her replies to such requests:

> Dear Student: You are mad. Why spend months and years writing thousands of words about one book, or even one writer, when there are hundreds of books waiting to be read. You don't see that you are the victim of a pernicious system. And if you have chosen my work as your subject, and if you do have to write a thesis—and believe me I am very grateful that what I've written is being found useful by you—then why don't you read what I have written and make up your own mind about what you think, testing it against your own life, your own experience. Never mind about Professors White and Black."

Her correspondents, however, are persistent:

> "Dear Writer—they reply. "But I have to know what the authorities say, because if I don't quote them, my professor won't give me any marks."
>
> This is an international system, absolutely identical from the Urals to Yugoslavia, from Minnesota to Manchester.
>
> The point is, we are so used to it, we no longer see how bad it is.

Our point would be that it seems practically hopeless to try to "reform" such tendencies out of organized education. It seems far better to repeat what Doris Lessing says. Individuals have *some* chance of getting through. Why does Doris Lessing get through? Because she didn't have to work through any organization:

> I am not used to it, because I left school when I was fourteen. There was a time I was sorry about this, and believed I had missed out on something valuable. Now I am grateful for a lucky escape. . . .

Interestingly, Lafcadio Hearn, an exquisite writer, performed a similar service for his Japanese students at the University of Tokyo. He ended his extraordinary lecture on Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* with these words:

> . . . the reforms advised [by Tolstoi] are at present, of course, impossible. Although I believe Tolstoi is perfectly right, I could not lecture to you—I could not fulfill my duties in this university—by strictly observing his principles. Were I to do that, I should be obliged to tell you that hundreds of books famous in English literature are essentially bad books, and that you ought not to read them at all; whereas I am engaged for the purpose of pointing out to you the literary merits of those very books.

FRONTIERS

Forest Epic

IN 1913 a young man who would become a writer of distinction was wandering on foot through southeastern France where the "Low" Alps spear into an arid and desolate part of Provence. It was a lonely region, mutilated by violent floods from the Durance River, marked now and then by the roofless remains of tiny villages from which the inhabitants had long ago fled. The traveler was thirsty. His water finished the night before, he had walked for five hours without finding a spring. Then, in the distance, he saw a motionless column he thought might be a tree. Approaching, he saw it was a man, and around the silent shepherd some thirty sheep crouched on the parched earth.

The shepherd gave him a drink, then took him to a well-built stone house not far away. The young man, Jean Giono, stayed the night, and in the morning asked to accompany the shepherd, who had aroused his curiosity. Before going to bed the shepherd had sorted out from a collection of acorns a hundred perfect specimens. The next day, after pasturing the sheep in the care of a dog, the two set out for a nearby ridge. There the shepherd stabbed his iron "walking stick"—a rod of a thumb's diameter, about four and a half feet long—into the earth, and dropped an acorn in the hole. (The acorns were now soaking in a pail of water he had brought along.) So went the day. This fifty-five-year-old French peasant, Elzéard Bouffier, whose wife and son had died, saw that the land was dying for lack of trees, and found his vocation. Giono relates:

> He was planting oak trees. I asked him if the land belonged to him. He answered no. Did he know whose it was? He did not. He supposed it was community property, or perhaps belonged to people who cared nothing about it. He was not interested in finding out whose it was. He planted his hundred acorns with the greatest care. After the midday meal he resumed his planting. I suppose I must have been fairly consistent in my questioning, for he answered me. For three years he had been planting trees in this wilderness. He had planted 100,000. Of these, 20,000 had sprouted. Of the 20,000 he still expected to lose about half to rodents, or to the unpredictable designs of Providence. There remained 10,000 oak trees to grow where nothing had grown before.

This is the beginning of an almost incredible story—practically a mystery story—by Jean Giono, which has been published several times (first by *Vogue* in 1954), and is now available in a pamphlet from Earthmind, Josel, Saugus, Calif. 91350, for seventy-five cents.

Knowing nothing of Provence save that in the thirteenth century this country was the scene of a "slaughter of innocents"—the ruthless genocidal crusade against the Albigensians launched by Pope Innocent III—and that the Mediterranean resort, Nice, is not many miles from the Durance River Valley—we turned for help to an old book, George P. Marsh's *The Earth as Modified by Human Action* (Scribner, 1874). Well, it is all there. In Roman times the Durance was a navigable river sailed by prosperous boatmen traders. But in the nineteenth century, Jerome Blanqui (brother of the revolutionist, Louis Blanqui), an economist devoted to study of the conditions of European working men, reported that the terrain had become bleaker than the wastes of Afghanistan. Alpine torrents were tearing the land to ruins. Grass would sprout in the spring in Afghanistan, but hardly any grew in this Provencal lunar horror. What had happened? Sheep had over-grazed the hillsides until vegetation could not live, while charcoal-burners had cut down nearly all the trees. Only dead, impotent soil remained, to be washed away by sudden floods pouring from the mountains. Marsh has many pages on this sort of man-made desolation, found in various parts of Europe. He quotes long passages from the agonized descriptions of Blanqui, written in 1843. One short paragraph tells how the processes of erosion are reversed when trees and grass are restored.

Giono makes an epic out of just such a reversal. Bouffier began his solitary crusade in 1910. Giono went off to war in 1914. Six years later he returned for another wandering tour of

Provence, to find that the aging shepherd had become a beekeeper. The sheep threatened his young trees. The acorns planted in 1910 now made a junior forest, seeming to Giono a gray mist on the mountaintops—a hazy greenish veil. And while Giono had been fighting at Verdun, Bouffier was adding beech and birch to his future forest canopy.

After the war Giono saw little brooks running where there had been only sand. With the waters had come "willows, rushes, meadows, gardens, flowers, and a certain purpose in being alive." Practically no one visited the remote area, and nature was working her magic undisturbed. Then, in 1933, Giono returned again. This time he brought with him a friend, a French forestry officer who understood what was happening and instructed his rangers to bar the charcoal burners from the region.

Giono saw Bouffier for the last time in 1945. He was then eighty-seven, living in Vergons, where only the town's familiar name made the writer realize he had come back to the same place.

> Everything was changed. Even the air. Instead of the harsh dry winds that used to attack me, a gentle breeze was blowing, laden with scents. A sound like water came from the mountains; it was the wind in the forest; most amazing of all, I heard the actual sound of water falling into a pool.

Now the village had cheerful inhabitants, young married couples living in new houses, with gardens filled with vegetables and flowers; and on the mountain slopes were fields of barley and rye.

> On the site of the ruins I had seen in 1913 now stand neat farms, cleanly plastered, testifying to a happy and comfortable life. The old streams, fed by the rains and snows that the forest conserves, are flowing again. Their waters have been channeled. On each farm, in groves of maples, fountain pools overflow on to carpets of fresh mint. Little by little the villages have been rebuilt. People from the plains, where land is costly, have settled here, bringing youth, motion, the spirit of adventure. Along the road you meet hearty men and women, boys and girls who understand laughter and have recovered a taste for picnics. Counting the former population, unrecognizeable now that they live in comfort, more than 10,000 people owe their happiness to Elzéard Bouffier.
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> When I reflect that one man, armed only with his own physical and moral resources, was able to cause this land of Canaan to spring from the wasteland, I am convinced that, in spite of everything, humanity is admirable.

Giono, who now lives on a mountainside overlooking the Durance Valley, wrote in one of his books: "Peasant civilization possesses as a gift human qualities which philosophical civilizations spend centuries first defining, then desiring, and finally losing." He titled his brief tale about Bouffier *The Man Who Planted Hope and Grew Happiness.*