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A STRAIN ABOVE MORTALITY

WERE it not for the urgencies of human longing, simple review of the fallibilities of opinion and the brief survival of even supposedly scientific certainties would put an end to the search for truth. One might argue—if one were an uninvolved observer, and only that—that the extremes of dogma and the extremes of skepticism cancel one another, going on to assert that the man who decides to deal only in vague probabilities, claiming no certainty and affirming no convictions, will suffer the least disappointments and betrayals in life. But we are *not* mere uninvolved observers. We have a great stake in the expectations of our lives, and the grounds of our hopes cry out for verification, no matter what gloomy historians tell us about the follies of either eager belief or arrogant denial. There are no "positionless" men, save in the artificiality of academic posture, and we have been noticing lately that the unengaged "wisdom" of people who are themselves going in no direction, and who have no intellectual interest save in abstract process, is not a wisdom men can use to any purpose in their lives.

Still, as someone has said, doubt is the beginning of real wisdom. Even as seekers for truth, then, we need to prepare ourselves for encounters with paradox.

The immortality of the soul is a question that is not often discussed these days, giving the impression that it hardly merits the attention of serious thinkers. As a doctrine, however, it is widely *believed in*—sometimes with so much ease and so few misgivings as to suggest there might be value in considering its likelihood as distinguished from its certainty. For what confers upon an idea or belief the status of a certainty? Is it the weight of democratic opinion? Does the mind-set of an epoch reveal truths that will be sustained by common acceptance in all subsequent centuries? We know that this does not happen. In fact, the comforting condescension with which we look back on the opinions of even the recent past bears witness to decisive changes in belief. Why, then, should any book, teaching, or idea which appeared long ago survive for present-day study, or even examination?

The question may have several answers. First, it can be said that man's intellectual history seems largely a matter of cyclic repetition; that epochs of belief and unbelief alternate, and that faiths are as vulnerable to the erosions of contradicting experience as the skepticism of scholars is to the will-to-believe. Look at what is happening today. Deeper currents than the shallow rationalism of the immediate past are shaping eager responses to the sudden longings of an astonishingly confident new generation.

But this sort of brashly reversing change takes only the popular level of opinion into account. In every age, along with the popularizers and spreaders of new orthodoxies, there are the questioners, the serious examiners, the men who are neither eager believers nor adamant deniers and who prefer to discuss likelihoods and possibilities, presenting evidence, weighing testimony, and explaining why they sometimes feel strongly concerning matters which seem beyond final decision. These men start no great religions, head no revolutionary movements, but rather instigate fresh ferments, establish reflective distances from the immediacies of life, and gain small but responsive audiences through the justice of their uncertainties and the relevance of their continued inquiry. Sometimes they move in the direction of belief, sometimes toward unbelief, but the intelligent on both sides of any significant controversy find it profitable to consult with them.

One such man, who lived in the seventeenth century, was Sir Thomas Browne, a learned physician who was admired by kings and loved by common folk. Browne continues to engage the mind of thoughtful readers by reason of the *quality* of his belief, which, for most critics, frees him from the charge of conventional orthodoxy. His best known book, *Religio Medici* (1642), has been termed "the confession of a mind keen and skeptical in some aspects, and credulous in others." His graceful prose sometimes seems to wear the trappings of Anglican orthodoxy, yet in areas where his imagination runs free the reasoning has very close to universal appeal. The mood of these reflections is well suggested by some passages pieced together from the second part of *Religio:*

> The world that I regard is myself; it is the microcosm of mine own frame that I cast my eye on . . . whilst I study to find how I am a microcosm, or little world, I find myself something more than the great. There is surely a piece of divinity in us, something that was before the elements, and owes no homage to the sun.
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> . . . surely it is not a melancholy conceit to think we are all asleep in this world, and that the conceits of this life are as mere dreams to those of the next; as the phantasms of the night, to the conceits of the day. There is an equal delusion in both, and the one cloth but seem to be the emblem or picture of the other: we are somewhat more than ourselves in our sleeps, and the slumber of the body seems to be but the waking of the soul. . . . Aristotle, who hath written a singular tract of sleep, hath not, methinks, thoroughly defined it; nor yet Galen, though he seems to have corrected it; for those noctambuloes and nightwalkers, though in their sleep, do yet enjoy the action of their senses: we must therefore say that there is something in us that is not in the jurisdiction of Morpheus; and that those abstracted and ecstatic souls do walk about in their own corps, as spirits with the bodies they assume, wherein they seem to hear, see, and feel, though indeed the organs are destitute of sense, and their natures of those faculties that should inform them. Thus it is observed, that men sometimes, upon the hour of their departure, do speak and reason above themselves. For then the soul, beginning to be freed from the ligaments of the body, begins to reason like herself, and to discourse in a strain above mortality.

Browne is not seeking to convert us, but to share his wonderings about the meaning of life and the possibility of its continuance after death. He takes certain things for granted, it sometimes seeming that the hold of orthodoxy upon him is no more than by a certain essence which corresponds to some inner conviction he feels, rather than the persuasions of common belief. His conceptions of heaven and hell are essentially psychological. Objecting to the inadequacy of St. John's account (in Revelations) of heaven, he says:

> Briefly, therefore, where the soul hath the full measure and complement of happiness; where the boundless appetite of that spirit remains completely satisfied, that it can neither desire addition nor alteration; that, I think, is truly Heaven. . . . Thus the soul of man may be in heaven anywhere, even within the limits of his own proper body, and when it ceaseth to live in the body, it may remain in its own soul, that is, its Creator. And thus we may say that St. Paul, whether in the body or out of the body, was yet in heaven. To place it in the empyreal, or beyond the tenth sphere, is to forget the world's destruction; for when this sensible world shall be destroyed, all shall then be here as it is now there, an empyreal heaven, a *quasi* vacuity; when to ask where heaven is, is to demand where the presence of God is. . . .

On the subject of Hell, he wrote:

> I cannot tell how to say that fire is the essence of hell: I know not what to make of purgatory, or conceive a flame that can either prey upon, or purify the substance of a soul. . . . Men commonly set forth the torments of hell by fire, and the extremity of corporal afflictions, and describe hell in the same method that Mohamet cloth heaven. This indeed makes a noise, and drums in popular ears: but if this be the terrible place thereof, it is not worthy to stand in diameter with heaven, whose happiness consists in that part that is best able to comprehend it, that immortal essence, that translated divinity and colony of God, the soul. . . . The heart of man is the place the devil dwells in: I feel sometimes a hell within myself: Lucifer keeps court in my breast, Legion is revived in me. There are as many hells, as Anaxarchus conceited worlds. . . . I can hardly think there was ever any scared into heaven; they go the fairest way to heaven that would serve God without a hell; other

> mercenaries, that crouch unto him in fear of hell, though they term themselves the servants, are indeed but the slaves of the Almighty.

We are not of a mind to be much impressed by Sir Thomas Browne's lightly worn orthodoxy. The currency of his time is not ours; the assumptions of this age do not give even remote touch with many of the matters which concern him. But we may feel invited, and somewhat warmly, to ponder the depths of his conviction and savor nuances of his prose, wondering, meanwhile, not at how much but how little these qualities are related to his conventionally received beliefs.

Yet what may happen, from reading the thoughts about immortality of so civilized and urbane a writer, is that, imperceptibly, without noticing how our doubts have been quieted, we begin to wonder about the possibilities of immortal life. It does not matter that the thought of our time is concentrated on the body and its welfare or misfortunes; or that today's religion, except for recent transfusions of Eastern mysticism, is largely silent on the question of what happens after death. There is something in every human being which may suddenly feel constrained to ask, "But suppose I *should* survive . . . suppose this feeling of being myself, a certain and undeniable identity, is somehow threaded with skeins of timelessness . . . what would it be like . . . where would I go?"

Emerson might have felt something like this when he came to the end of his essay on Montaigne, in which he finds that the skepticism so uniformly practiced by the tough-minded Gallic sage grew from a deeper faith than that of the mass of believers:

> He denies out of honesty. He had rather stand charged with the imbecility of skepticism, than with untruth. I believe, he says, in the moral design of the universe; it exists hospitably for the weal of souls; but your dogmas seem to me caricatures: why should I make believe them? Will any say this is cold and infidel?

Here Emerson does not of course speak to the condition of contemporary skeptics, for whom the idea of "moral design" is as unacceptable as any conception of transcendence, but what should be understood is that there are plenty of modern men and women who find nothing in the scientific view of the universe which bears decisively against the idea of immortality. On the contrary, an eminent medical researcher, discussing the phenomenon of dying, declared recently that while we may understand much about the processes of death, "there is still that permanent vanishing of consciousness to be accounted for." This modern physician, Lewis Thomas, is not persuaded that consciousness can simply go our of existence:

> Are we to be stuck forever with this problem? Where on earth does it go? Is it simply stopped dead in its tracks, lost in humus, wasted? Considering the tendency of nature to find uses for complex and intricate mechanisms, this seems to me unnatural.

Dr. Thomas is led to these reflections by the analogy of nature. Nature wastes nothing, certainly nothing truly valuable, and the human intelligence that acts in the body, which then quite obviously leaves it, has undoubted value, even though, in recent decades, its behavior has been something less than admirable.

Emerson finds a reply to skepticism in another human quality, by no means alien to Dr. Thomas' reasoning:

> The final solution in which skepticism is lost, is, in the moral sentiment, which never forfeits its supremacy. All moods may be safely tried, and their weight allowed to all objections: the moral sentiment as easily outweighs them all, as any one. This is the drop that balances the sea. I play with the miscellany of facts, and take those superficial views which we call skepticism; but I know that they will presently appear to me in that order which makes skepticism impossible.

Here Emerson seems to be talking about that sudden melting of doubt which, in one relation or another, may overtake any of us, even as it is now overtaking our age. A rush of feeling may open up a sense of reality for another world. But

Emerson means more than this. He is talking about an inner sense that the world has meaning, that there is somehow order behind disorder, that the very aspiration which seems frustrated at every turn—that this longing, whatever its origin, senses a persisting meaning in human life:

> Things seem to tend downward, to justify despondency, to promote rogues, to defeat the just; and, by knaves, as by martyrs, the just cause is carried forward. Although knaves win in every political struggle, although society seems to be delivered over from the hands of one set of criminals into the hands of another set of criminals, as fast as the government is changed, and the march of civilization is a train of felonies, yet, general ends are somehow answered. We see, now, events forced on, which seem to retard or retrograde the civility of ages. But the world-spirit is a good swimmer, and storms and waves cannot drown him. He snaps his finger at laws: and so, throughout history, heaven seems to affect low and poor means. Through the years and the centuries, through evil agents, through toys and atoms, a great and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams.
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> Let a man learn to look for the permanent in the mutable and fleeting; let him learn to bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence, without losing his reverence; let him learn that he is here, not to work but to be worked upon; and that, though abyss open under abyss, and opinion displace opinion, all are at last contained in the Eternal Cause.—
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> "If my bark sink, 'tis to another sea."

The optimism of such dreaming may be too much for us Is Emerson whistling to keep up his courage? Would daily converse with an Emerson alter our feelings in such matters? What sort of intimations of immortality would convince?

Opinions on the question have been extraordinarily various. Whitman once told John Burroughs that "he would as soon hope to argue a man into good health as to argue him into a belief in immortality." The poet declared he *knew* it to be true, requiring no proof, but Burroughs said, "I never could light my candle at his great torch."

Curiously, there are classic scriptures which affirm the truth of immortality with the full assurance of unequivocal revelation, yet also speak plainly of the uncertainties which beset ordinary men. "Death," Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita,* "is certain to all things which are born, and rebirth to all mortals; wherefore it doth not behoove thee to grieve about the inevitable."

> The antenatal state of beings is unknown; the middle state is evident; and their state after death is not to be discovered. What in this is there to lament?

The round of rebirth, Krishna seems to be saying, is a winnowing process from which souls are released when they can no longer be enthralled by mortal bonds. This counsel seems framed with a purpose different from the intentions of Seneca, who told the Romans of his day:

> As the mother's womb holds us for ten months, making us ready, not for the tomb, but for our life, just so, through our lives, we are making ourselves ready for another birth. . . . Therefore look forward without fear to that appointed hour—the last hour of the body, but not of the soul. . . . That day, which you fear as being the end of all things, is the birthday of your eternity.

With what enormous assurance these sages speak of the peregrinations and continuity of the consciousness in man! Yet they *were* sages, and they sound as though they knew what they were talking about. Less confident, perhaps, though in a way equally persuasive, was H. T. Buckle's view. "If immortality be untrue," he said, "it matters little whether anything else be true or not." A more reasoned expression of faith, seeming sounder than most dogmatic claims, was that of Horace James Bridges:

> As to mortality, my conviction stands thus: If there be anything in me that is of permanent worth and service to the universe, the universe will know how to preserve it. Whatsoever in me is not of permanent worth and service, neither can nor should be preserved.

Should, indeed, a man argue at all about such matters, or do anything more, when asked, than state his view, agreeing with Whitman that the life of the soul is too important a matter to be chopped up in debate. Can, then, a declaration of conviction avoid the appearance of debate? And

isn't it desirable to be "rational" about even such great questions? Actually, we have a diminished understanding, these days, concerning the grounds of rationality. In the closing pages of *The Human Situation*, perhaps the most eloquent defense of immortality published in the twentieth century, W. Macneile Dixon made this reply to its demands:

> Rational? What could be less rational than that the pen and paper should be more enduring than the saint, that we should have Shakespeare's handwriting but not himself? Raphael's pictures but not the mind that conceived them? . . . Beyond all peradventure it is the thought that death appears to proclaim, the thought of frustration and final unreason at the heart of things, that is itself the root of the pessimists despair. . . . A future life is, you think, unbelievable? How clear it is that death is death for men as for all living things.
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> Well, I should myself put the matter rather differently. The present life is incredible, a future credible. "Not to be twice-born, but once-born is wonderful." . . . How many modes of existence are there? I cannot tell you, but I should imagine them to be very numerous. . . .

REVIEW
AFRICAN EPIC

THERE are not many novelists left who are able to write larger-than-life stories with ardor and sincerity. It is something of a treat, therefore, to encounter what seem mythic presences rather than ordinary human beings in Laurens van der Post's *A Far-Off Place* (Morrow, 1974). This book is a sequel to *A Story Like the Wind* (quoted in "Children" for Oct. 30, 1974), and an outline of what has already happened brings the reader to the beginning of the action. And action it is, for the whole book is about the long, tortuous escape of a boy and his companions from ruthless invaders of his home and countryside.

So there is plenty of adventure. But the people who have the adventures may get the reader to wondering whether there were ever such human beings on earth, or if, perhaps, they might better have belonged to some distant long-ago. They seem too wonderful to be true. Yet their unbelievable heroism and goodness do not spoil the book, and this, too, makes you wonder whether the African setting justifies an idealizing *tour de force.* Col. van der Post grew up in South Africa and it seems possible that the larger-than-life scale of experience on the veldt and in the bush makes heroic themes natural for him. Well, no one minds the superhuman exploits of the Knights of the Round Table, or the knightly standards demanded by Arthur and lived up to by Galahad; and you could say that the characters in *A Far-Off Place* are van der Post's Knights of Interior Africa—some white, some black, some brown. It may even be comforting to find that such people can still be imagined, if not met with in the flesh.

By setting his story in a far-off place, where the intrusions of European civilization are few and of small effect, van der Post seems to move us back in time. Even though the wicked enemy in this case are today's Chinese communists, you can't quite believe it. Their gigantic plot to take over a large portion of southern Africa seems a dreadful anachronism, since the atmosphere created by the story doesn't fit the twentieth century at all. Well, you put up with these anomalies because of the splendor of what the author does with the resulting desperate situations.

The central figure of the story is François Joubert, descendant of French Huguenots who fled to Africa after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. His father, Pierre-Paul Joubert, had settled in a remote region largely inaccessible to civilization, establishing there a vast farming enterprise with the full cooperation of a sage Matabele (Zulu) chief and his people. Pierre-Paul, a teacher and educator who found himself totally rejected by the European community because of his emancipated attitude toward his black and coloured countrymen, hoped to turn his holdings into "a model of a larger world to come, without discrimination on grounds of race, creed or colours."

Growing up in this primitive environment, François has the best of two worlds. He need not attend school for both his mother and father are accredited and skillful teachers. The old Bushman woman who is his nurse teaches him the Bushman language, and transmits to him the lore of her almost vanished people. François has a relationship of trust and love with 'Bamuthi, the head of the Matabele clan. "There is no corner of the spirit of the emerging man in François where 'Bamuthi's presence, voice and being is not present, and no shadow in his spirit which is not illuminated by 'Bamuthi's tender concern for what is unafraid and self-reliant in men." At the time of this story, François' remarkable father has died of a wasting disease, but the boy has a second "father" in an old family friend—"an almost legendary white hunter turned conservationist, officially styled Colonel H. H. Theron but known far and wide by his African name, Mopani." The hunter had sickened of all killing from taking part in a war, and now, as a guardian of the wilds, "he takes François on long and dangerous patrols against the armed poachers who are always raiding his immense game preserve."

François also has a secret friendship with a young Bushman he rescued from the jaws of a huge lion trap, and whom he must conceal from his hereditary enemies, the Matabele, who drove the Bushmen from this country into the desert. One other "character" figures largely in the tale of

François' growing up—his hunting dog, Hintza, given him as a puppy by Mopani.

The story begins at the time of François' lucky escape from a sudden attack by the Communists which wipes out the people living on the farm—his mother, the Matabele leaders, and neighboring European settlers. All are killed except the daughter of an eminent Portuguese family to whom François is strongly attracted. The book is an account of the journey of four fugitives from the Communists—François, the Portuguese girl, and the young Bush man and his wife, the hunting dog making a fifth—to the sea and the welcome refuge of the British Navy.

Well, the book makes exciting reading, and would be especially good for young people, by reason of the quality of the idealism so spontaneously embodied in the principal characters.

Most memorable, however, are the passages of practical philosophy which develop naturally with the events that make François search his own heart. Brooding over the cruelty of the invasion of his home, and what he should do, he recalls his father's counsels:

> Then again there came the measured, slightly pedantic voice of Ouwa urging that the real art of living was to keep alive the longing in human beings to become a greater version of themselves, to enlarge this awareness of life and then to be utterly obedient to the awareness. Obedience to one's greater awareness, and living it out accordingly to the rhythm of the law of time implicit in it, was the only way. Unlived awareness was another characteristic evil of our time, so full of thinkers who did not do and doers who did not think. Lack of awareness and disobedience to such awareness as there was meant that modern man was increasingly a partial. provisional version instead of a whole, committed version of himself. That was where tyranny, oppression, prejudice and intolerance began. Tyranny was partial being; a part of the whole man masquerading as his full self and suppressing the rest. . . .
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> All this, Ouwa would add, meant living in terms not of having but of being, a difference which in his own inimitable ironic way he always stressed was something our civilised superiors could learn from their primitive inferiors. For what he often asked, was the difference between the 'Bamuthis of this world and the Europeans of Africa, if not that the Europeans specialised in having and the 'Bamuthis in being.
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> And he remembered Ouwa saying with usual tenderness that the life of any human being or any animal, even the smallest of insects, could be taken only in defence of life conceived in some terms such as those [their ever-growing potential] and never for any other reason.
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> Watch your dislikes as much as your likes, he would add, and remember all men tend to become the thing they oppose. The greatest and most urgent problem of our time was to find a way of opposing evil without becoming another form of evil in the process. Hence the New Testament's "Resist not evil." One had just to pray, or as 'Bamuthi would put it? to ask with one's heart, to be delivered from evil and try to be something that was not evil and more than good; something he called whole. . . .
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> The time had come, Ouwa had suggested to change the group approach, to make the collective individual and the universal specific, and to avoid mass solutions and the abstractions of numbers like the plague. Men and their meaning were in danger of drowning in a flood of the collectivism of numbers greater than the world had ever experienced, and all creation depended now on the speed with which men could be detached from it, breaking it up by being their own unique selves. . . . He, Ouwa, had been told that all this was no use and too late, for the final disaster was already upon us. Ouwa disagreed. One must live life, he thought, as if disaster would never come. It should be one's own finest hour never to accept disaster, if for no other reason than making certain that when disaster did come it was the right kind of disaster life needed. It could be that for the moment the greatest victories were only to be won by losing in such a way that losing became a form of winning. Here, unsolicited in François' memory, came a kind of pagan amen in an echo of 'Bamuthi's deep base voice: "Little Feather, the warrior who returns to his kraal from battle without purifying himself first of the spirit of killing that took him away brings the vanquished back with him and the vanquished will conquer him in their turn.

There are many such passages in this story.

COMMENTARY
THE TOLSTOYAN DILEMMA

IN *My Confession,* Tolstoy wrote of his inability to adopt and live by the simplicities of the faith of the Russian peasants whom he loved and admired. How to devise practice of the ideals his mature mind was able to formulate was his problem; he didn't solve it, but his attempt reached heroic dimensions.

Something like Tolstoy's dilemma is created by the ideal program suggested by Peter Schwartz in a *Christian Science Monitor* article for July 1, 1974, sent in by a reader. Writing on the necessities of the future, Mr. Schwartz said:

> Our very concept on of "reality" itself must be altered. Our ideas of what is "rational" must be reordered and extended to accommodate what we now regard as "transrational." The intuitive, the perceptual, and the transcendent must be rediscovered and celebrated. Our decisions and our behavior must come to be based on an expanded and improved awareness of the social order and its incredibly complex processes. Our puny, inadequate analytic models of social behavior must be enriched by an actively developed ability to perceive reality holistically and intuitively. We must learn to accept, embrace, and use to our collective advantage the uncertainty, change, and error which is inherent in any society which looks experimentally towards the aspirative future.

The language is superlative, its meaning for practice profoundly obscure! What does one do to start currents moving in these high-flying directions?

For example, the counsels of "Ouwa"—appearing by happy coincidence in the next column—probably include essentials of the process of self-transformation Mr. Schwartz requires. And how, short of migrating to the African interior and finding a 'Bamuthi to guide us, shall we acquire such attitudes?

A good ninety-nine per cent of the serious writing of today is concerned with how to avoid disaster. How, then, can we learn to identify and welcome the "right kind of disaster"—one that "life needs"? What can prepare us for thinking in ways that will reorder our conceptions of what is "rational"?

To what extent are the ideas of Thomas Browne and W. Macneile Dixon tools for such reordering? How about the Spartan proposals of Solzhenitsyn?

And what, finally, are the defining characteristics of a good life lived in a grossly imperfect world? The continuing balances between changing the world and changing ourselves need recognition. What sort of framing assumptions are necessary in order *to begin* to answer such questions?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
DESEGREGATING THE HANDICAPPED

THE classroom had a pleasant atmosphere, with sunlight coming through tall windows. At one end sat the attractive young teacher; beside her at a low table was a small boy, apparently of kindergarten age. The teacher was helping him to recognize small numbers by means of groups of wooden blocks. "Here are *two* blocks. See, Sandy. Now you say, *'two* blocks'." Sandy tried it—"*Two* blocks."

Across the room on a large rug were various play-house toys, including dolls. A counter along the wall beneath the windows displayed puzzles, plants growing in glass jars, a record player, and some simple table games. Low kindergarten tables and chairs occupied much of the room. At a piano in a corner a child gently pressed the keys, one at a time. Some children were playing on the rug. One small fellow pushed a toy truck across the room. Several children were working at the tables with clay, which was hard and cold, very difficult for small hands and weak muscles to shape. The children pushed and poked without much success.

While the teacher was working with Sandy, another adult circulated about the room—the teacher s assistant, giving help where it was needed and generally maintaining order. At the clay table a larger child, a ten-year-old worked her clay vigorously, calling out encouragement to the others. "See, pick up the clay, and throw it down, *hard.* That makes it flat. Bring your arm way up, like this, high in the air, then down." Bang! The smaller children followed her example. Bang! The clay began to change shape.

The smaller children were actually the same age as the larger girl teaching them, but very immature. These little ones were all identified by the school system as "trainable mentally retarded." Most of them had minor physical impairments. (Mental retardation is almost always accompanied by physical limitations.)

This classroom is typical of many maintained in public schools for mentally retarded youngsters, but with one important difference: the child-teacher who was demonstrating how to work up the clay had come from the regular elementary school as a volunteer, to spend an hour every day assisting in whatever way the teacher suggested. She and several other girls and boys had offered to help on a regular schedule in different Special Education classrooms. And indeed they were of help, for the retarded children admired and imitated the mature children, attempting whatever was suggested or shown. This also freed the teacher and her assistant to give individual attention to other pupils.

What did such an experience mean for the fifth-grade pupils who gave their help? The primary value was the development in them of a sense of service toward fellow human beings. The normal child seldom has contact with retarded children unless there is a retarded brother or sister at home. The average child has no occasion for interest in handicapped children, or handicapped persons of any age. He is preoccupied with his own friends, interests, and activities.

If normal, intelligent children can be of such great help to handicapped children (physically or mentally), why are they commonly separated? The answer lies in the origins of "Special Education." All through history human beings have shown uneasiness, fear, and sometimes disgust and contempt, for those who suffer serious afflictions. Superstitions grew up to justify isolation and rejection of such individuals, who were sometimes treated as animals or evil beings, and sometimes as peculiarly endowed—"touched by God." Only the rare culture or community has included such unfortunates in the affairs of everyday life. The handicapped have also been kept hidden by their ashamed families, not allowed to mix socially with friends. and certainly not placed in school.

In America the general trend of compulsory education gradually brought into the regular classroom certain children having limitations. Teachers were seldom pleased, since it meant adapting teaching methods, plans, and materials to the unique needs of a few, or even just one child who

was "different." Soon there arose the cry, "Take this child out of my classroom. He doesn't belong." So special classes were set up for the mildly retarded children, often classes with teachers who themselves had limitations, resulting in lack of success in the regular classroom, and sometimes a too sentimental, "motherly" attitude toward the children.

Groups of parents united to push for legislation providing education for many types of children—blind, deaf. severely retarded, cerebral palsied, and the educationally handicapped such as the emotionally disturbed and children with motor-sensory disorders. Funds were appropriated, classrooms established and special education programs and departments were worked out.

At first the teachers selected to work with retarded children were those who had been unable to deal with a regular classroom. Today, in contrast, specially trained teachers from "Special Education" programs in the colleges are working in this field. While their training may be inadequate, there is at least the likelihood that the motive of those who undertake this work is a real desire to help handicapped children.

We must still ask—why the segregation of the handicapped? Is the separation of these children from others anything more than an inheritance from the days when isolation was regarded as the appropriate remedy for any intrusion of the unpleasant or unfamiliar in everyday life? Conceivably, the Special Education classroom is just another ghetto where we hide persons the public prefers to ignore.

But if we turn to the experience of the parents and relatives of deficient children—those who have been unable to avoid such problems—we find that they have learned that it is best for the deficient child, and best, too, for those who love and are responsible for him, to include this child in the family group, to let him associate with the family in public places—in short, to let him be a human being.

Family adaptations show the way for the schools. Informal relations between children of various ages are now known to be valuable in the classroom, and interaction between normal and handicapped children—of the sort illustrated by the ten-year-old who taught the retarded youngsters how to pound clay—is much the same as the natural relations between members of a family group. This everyday interaction between normal and less endowed individuals provides opportunity for general human development—a help to *everybody*—that is not possible under other circumstances. Unfortunately, the rigidity of custom and of legislated school routines may make institutional change in this direction difficult, yet the value of this sort of desegregation is evident enough. More and more persons have become aware that full human development comes from seeing and using every sort of human interdependence. Actually, we owe part of this recognition to the pupil-teachers who are so effective in stimulating retarded children to special effort, and broadening their own sympathy and understanding at the same time.

We might put this realization into a simple formula: Heterogeneity plus enthusiasm for learning, plus a warm regard for others (altruism) produces true human growth. A wise teacher is able to get the most from such situations, but the necessary agent is proximity. Daily contact reduces fear and makes stereotypic attitudes unlikely.

Maybe a school somewhere will go in this direction. One can imagine a class which has among its pupils a blind teenager, some deaf children, perhaps a paraplegic adult, some healthy children and adults, and some typical adolescents. If the dual desire to help and to learn can be born in the members of such a group, wonderful things might happen. Actually, for a century or so, a town in Belgium has carried on work of this sort. It is a tradition among the people of Geel to take mentally deficient people into their families, and it has been found that the natural environment of family and community life is extraordinarily helpful to them, bringing both happiness and development toward what may be their maximum possibility. But why only one community for this kindly service? Why not many such communities, many such schools?

TEACHER

FRONTIERS

Not To Live By Falsehood

[This agonized appeal by Solzhenitsyn to his Russian countrymen was first published about a year ago in a Russian language journal issued in Paris. It was put into English by a Doukhobor writer and editor residing in British Columbia. Readers may recognize that Solzhenitsyn here presents the same argument that was so compellingly made by Tolstoy in *Christianity and Patriotism.*]

THERE was a time when we didn't even dare to whisper. Now we write and read Samizdat, and at gatherings complain to each other: What tricks they resort to . . . where are they leading us? All this boasting and bragging about cosmic flights, when homes are destitute and impoverished; the support of boisterous regimes in far away places; provoking civil wars, and senselessly bringing up Mao-Tse-tung, preparing us to be sent against him. And the people would doubtless go—how could one escape? Meanwhile they bring to trial whomever they wish, and the sane are forced into mental hospitals. All this is done by them . . . and we . . . we are powerless. . . .

Affairs have almost reached the bottom. Threat of spiritual perdition (ruin) hangs over our heads, while the physical consequences could flare up and burn us and our children. But we, as before, cravenly smile, mumble and lisp: How can we prevent it? We have no power.

We are so hopelessly dehumanized that to keep our place at today's modest trough we are willing to give up all principles, even our soul, wasting all the travails of our forefathers, ignoring the possibilities for our posterity. Gone is firmness, pride, and warmth of heart. We are hardly frightened by all-encompassing atomic death, supposing, if a third world war comes, that we can hide in some crevice. All that we fear is to act courageously! The fate we dread most is to be separated from the herd, to have to make a step *alone,* suddenly to be ostracized . . . isolated.

We are indoctrinated by political propaganda, dinning into us that this way it is easier to live. No one, they say, can escape social conditions: existence determines consciousness, so what can you do? Nothing.

Yet we could do everything! We lie to ourselves to calm our conscience. No one else is to be blamed. Only ourselves. Only we!

It might be objected: What alternatives are there? Our mouths are riveted shut; no one hears us, no one asks anything. How can we make people hear? Change their minds? It is impossible.

Why didn't we elect other leaders? There are no elections in our country. In the West people know about strikes, protests, demonstrations—but we are so intimidated that such action horrifies us: Who, all of a sudden, could refuse to work, or dare to make open protest on the street? These and other fatal methods were tried in the last century—look at the bitter history of Russia!

Indeed, these things are not for us; in truth, we must not attempt them. Now, when we have hewn our way to the end, when all the seed that was sown has sprouted, we see how lost, how dazed and presumptuous were those who thought that by terror, bloody uprisings and civil war they could make our country just and happy. No, we turn away from those fathers of "enlightenment"! We know, now, that heinous means breed heinous results. Our hands must be clean!

The circle is closed! There is no escape. Left for us is passive waiting, as if, suddenly, something might happen by itself!

Never will these bonds loosen by themselves. Never, while all of us continue every day to affirm them, praise and strengthen them. The knot which ties them remains secure unless we attack its most sensitive point, which is *Falsehood.*

When violence invades the peaceful life of the people, it proclaims: "I am Violence! Disperse, give way—or I'll crush you!" But violence soon succumbs to time. After a few years it's not so sure of itself, and to gain respectability, to be

thought decent, violence always calls on falsehood for an ally. Violence cannot hide its ugliness except in falsehood, and falsehood can be upheld only by violence. Moreover, in order to survive, violence must be selective. Not every day, and not on every shoulder, does violence put its heavy paw. It works best by threat, demanding that we be obedient to falsehood, participate daily in falsehood—this is the allegiance it demands. Yet here, though neglected by us, is the simplest, most available key to our freedom: *personal nonparticipation in falsehood!* While falsehood may cover everything and own everything, the single individual still can stand alone. He can say: Falsehood may rule, but not through me!

And this is a break in the circle of our inactivity. Because, when people turn away from falsehood it simply ceases to be. As an infection, falsehood can exist only in people.

We are not called—indeed, we may lack the strength—to go out in public squares and proclaim the truth, express openly our thoughts. But a way is still open to us, even in our ingrown condition of cowardice—a way easier than Gandhi's civil disobedience.

It is not to uphold falsehood consciously in anything. Where one sees the beginning of falsehood—each in his own way—he will not cross the line into its gangrenous territory. Having made this resolve, we would perhaps be astounded to see how suddenly falsehood dies, so that what lies behind stands naked before the world.

Let each one choose: Will he continue to be a servant of falsehood (not from any inclination to falsehood, but only for feeding his family, for bringing up his children, in the spirit of falsehood), or has the time come for him to change, to become worthy of the respect of his children and his contemporaries? If the time has come, from that day on:

—he will not write, sign, or publish any phrase, which, as he understands it, distorts truth. He will not express such a phrase either in private conversation, or publicly, or by order, or in the role of agitator, teacher, tutor, or in a theatrical role.

—he will not, either in painting, sculpture, photography, technically, or musically, portray or express one false thought, one distortion of truth as he understands it.

—he will not cite, either orally or in writing, one "leading" idea so as to curry favor, so as to be safe, so as to be successful in his field of work, unless he completely agrees with the thought he cites, and it exactly fits the case.

—he will not be coerced to attend a demonstration or a meeting if this is against his desire and will. He will not carry in his hands a banner with a slogan the meaning of which he doesn't completely share; he will not lift his voter's hand to endorse a motion with which in all honesty he is not in accord; he will not cast his ballot, either publicly or secretly, for a person he deems to be unworthy of trust.

—he will not let himself be forced to attend a meeting which will permit only a deliberately biased discussion of a question; he will immediately leave a session, meeting, lecture, play or a film showing, as soon as he hears the speaker repeat falsehood, ideological nonsense, or brazen propaganda.

—he will not subscribe, buy, or accept newspapers or journals carrying distorted information, in which meaningful facts are withheld.

We have enumerated only a few of the possible and necessary ways of avoiding falsehood. He who begins to purify himself will soon be able to identify other means.

At first, to be sure, the changed practice will be uneven. One may lose his job. The young person who wants to be honest will find his life complicated at the beginning. Even lessons in school are crammed with falsehood, and he will

have to choose. Indeed, for young or old, there is no escape from decision—there is not a day for any one of us, even in the most safely remote technical sciences, when we can avoid the choice of either truth or falsehood; of either spiritual autonomy or spiritual servitude. The one who lacks courage even to defend his soul—let him not be proud of his enlightened views, or that he is an "academician," a people's artist, a much admired "activist," or a dauntless general. Let him say to himself, instead: I am a nonentity, a coward, who puts personal security before truth.

Even this path of personal integrity—the most moderate means of resistance—will be for us, who are so timorous, so conditioned, not easy. Yet it is far easier than self-immolation or hunger strikes: the flames will not encompass the body, the eyes will not burst from the heat, and black bread with clean water may still be found for one's family.

A great people of Europe—the people of Czechoslovakia—deceived and betrayed by us: Have they not shown how the uncovered breast may stand up even against tanks, when in the breast beats a deserving heart! It may not be an easy choice for the body—but it is the only one for the soul. Not an easy path—yet there are people amongst us, even tens of them, who have through many years endured while following this path—while living by truth.

One may not be the first to step on this path, but one can *join*! Each one who joins makes the path easier, and much shorter for all the rest. When there are thousands who take this way, it will be impossible to overcome each one. And were there tens of thousands—then, we would not recognize our country, so great would be the change!

But if we lack courage, then let us at least stop complaining that we cannot breathe. For it is we, ourselves, who refuse to breathe! So in that case we may kneel even lower and wait until our brothers in the department of biology arrange to bring closer the day when all our thoughts are read and inspected, and our genes have proper supervision.

It was to such that Pushkin cried—

> What need have herds for the gift of freedom? . . .
> Their heritage—passed on from generation to generation—
> Is the yoke with rattles and the whip.

February 18, 1974 ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN