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THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER

THOSE who write and those who teach have always behind them, lurking in the background, a haunting problem and responsibility which was identified long ago by Plato, and has been dealt with variously in modern times by such thinkers as Hannah Arendt, Ortega y Gasset, and Martin Buber. The problem is: How do you get students and readers to recognize that there are two ways to look at every question—as the world looks at it, at the time it is asked, and from the viewpoint of what are called Eternal Values?

Hannah Arendt, after repeating the Socratic proposition, "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong," says:

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

Ortega's version is somewhat different—perhaps not similar enough to be taken as an example of the Socratic idea—but there is at least an educational relationship. In the first chapter of *Some Lessons in Metaphysics* he attacks the conventional idea that education means the "transmission of the cultural heritage" to the young. Real education begins, he says, only when the student feels an authentic need from within to know, to know for himself, not at second hand. The ordinary student, who makes up the great majority, is content to take at the hands of his teachers what other men have found out. He does not question or criticize, but assumes that the knowledge "which already exists has a defined value, is pure truth."

> What he seeks is simply to assimilate it as it already is. On the other hand, the man who is needful of a science, he who feels the profound necessity of a truth, will approach this bit of ready-made knowledge with caution, full of suspicion and prejudice, submitting it to criticism, even assuming in advance that what the book says is not true. In short, for the very reason that he needs, with such deep anguish, to know he will think that this knowledge does not exist, and he will manage to unmake what is presented as already made. It is men like this who are constantly correcting, renewing, recreating science.

It seems obvious that this individual—the one who *has* to know—corresponds to the Socratic ideal, for Socrates was the continual questioner, the challenger, the doubter, and it was by this means that he acquired the convictions or certainties that the ordinary men of his time found so unacceptable—"not," as Hannah Arendt says, "true at all."

Ortega goes on, pointing out that the determined questioners are very rare, and that this makes the central problem of true education:

> But . . . the others? The immense and normal majority? It is they, and not those other more venturesome ones, who bring into being the true meaning—not the utopian meaning—of the word "student" and "to study." It is unjust not to recognize them as the real students, and unjust not to question with respect to them the problem of what studying as a form and type of human occupation, is.

Ortega concludes, therefore, that the task of the teacher is not to "teach," but to try, by whatever means he can devise, to awaken in his students the *desire* to know, to understand for themselves. This he terms "a deep reform of that human activity called studying and, hence, of the student's being."

Buber formulates the problem more or less in the terms of the Socratic proposition, showing how it emerges in modern times. In the section on

education in *Between Man and Man*, written in 1939, he said:

> At the time of the Arab terror in Palestine, when there were single Jewish acts of reprisal, there must have been many discussions between teacher and pupils on the question: can there be any suspension of the Ten Commandments, i.e., can murder become a good deed if committed in the interest of one's own group? One such discussion was once repeated to me. The teacher asked: "When the commandment tells you 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor,' are we to interpret with the condition, 'provided that it does not profit you'?" Thereupon one of the pupils said, "But it is not a question of my profit, but of the profit of my people." The teacher: "And how would you like it, then, if we put our condition in this way: 'Provided that it does not profit your family'?" The pupil: "But family—that is still something more or less like myself, but the people—that is something quite different, there all question of *I* disappears." The teacher: "Then if you are thinking, 'we want victory,' don't you feel at the same time, 'I want victory'?" The pupil: "But the people, that is something infinitely more than just the people of today. It includes all past and future generations."
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> At this point the teacher felt the moment had come to leave the narrow compass of the present and to invoke historical destiny. He said: "Yes; all past generations. But what was it that made those past generations of the Exile live? What made them outlive and overcome all their trials? Wasn't it that the cry 'Thou shalt not' never faded from their hearts and ears?" The pupil grew very pale. He was silent for a while, but it was the silence of one whose words threatened to stifle him. Then he burst out: "And what have we achieved that way? This!" And he banged his fist on the newspaper before him, which contained the report on the British White Paper. And again he burst out with "Live? Outlive? Do you call that life? We want to live!"

Here, too, the Socratic statement—"It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong"—is found unbelievable. For Buber, the response of the student illustrates the extreme difficulty of the teacher's task. The moralities of time and place have taken over in the student's mind. He can see no other issues. Buber's comment is a diagnosis of the ill of the present age—essentially the same in meaning as Nietzsche's verdict: "We have abolished the true world"—the world of timeless values from which lesser ideals and values are born to us. Buber says:

> But if we now ask, "How in this situation can there be any education of character?", something negative is immediately obvious: it is senseless to want to prove by any kind of argument that nevertheless the denied absoluteness of norms exists. That would be to assume that the denial is a result of reflection, and is open to argument, that is, to material for renewed reflection. But the denial is due to the disposition of a dominant human type of our age. We are justified in regarding this disposition as a sickness of the human race. But we must not deceive ourselves by believing that the disease can be cured by formulae which assert that nothing is really as the sick person imagines. It is an idle undertaking to call out, to a mankind that has grown blind to eternity: "Look! the eternal values !"

And that is the nub of the question, defining the horns of the dilemma. What needs to be said, or rather realized, is precisely what cannot be understood. And how, indeed, does one restore a *sense* of eternity, so that the power of eternal values may once again be felt?

Buber will not take refuge in words:

> Today host upon host of men have everywhere sunk into the slavery of collectives, and each collective is the supreme authority for its own slaves; there is no longer, superior to the collectives, any universal sovereignty in idea, faith, or spirit. Against the values, decrees and decisions of the collective no appeal is possible. This is true, not only for the totalitarian countries, but also for the parties and party-like groups in the so-called democracies. Men who have so lost themselves to the collective Moloch cannot be rescued from it by any reference, however eloquent, to the absolute whose kingdom the Moloch has usurped.

What then?

> One has to begin by pointing to that sphere where man himself, in the hours of utter solitude, occasionally becomes aware of the disease through sudden pain: by pointing to the relation of the individual to his own self. . . . To keep the pain awake, to waken the desire—that is the first task of everyone who regrets the obscuring of eternity. It is also the first task of the genuine educator in our time.

> The man for whom absolute values in a universal sense do not exist cannot be made to adopt "an attitude which in action gives the preference over all others to absolute values." But what one can inculcate in him is the desire to attain once more to a real attitude, and that is, the desire to become a person following the only way that leads to this goal today.

Buber's line of reasoning to reach his conclusion—the conclusion that the need is to emphasize "the relation of the individual to his own self"—is of particular interest. Why does he say this? Because, as he explains, the indifference toward values—values as universal principles—that is so characteristic in the present is not a deliberated stance. It is an infection, not a rationally achieved position. Somewhere Bertrand Russell speaks of the "unearned atheism" of the multitude, which is only a habit, an outlook taken from others. Buber recognizes that such unexamined attitudes are virtually immune to argument *or* reason, because they did not come into being by any reasoned process. They are rather, as he says, "a sickness of the human race," and the first step of recovery from a sickness usually results from the experience of pain. Other, more important steps may follow.

In this case the provocative is the pain of conscience, of feeling oneself somehow in the wrong, of knowing better but not knowing, from the pain alone, *what* is better. Most people will agree that there is a great deal of this sort of pain felt, these days, and much confused expression of it.

Buber speaks of this pain. The effect is unpredictable:

> Even the most universal norm will at times be recognized only in a very special situation. I know of a man whose heart was struck by the lightning flash of "Thou shalt not steal" in the very moment when he was moved by a very different desire from that of stealing, and whose heart was so struck by it that he not only abandoned doing what he wanted to do, but with the whole force of his passion did the very opposite. Good and evil are not each other's opposites like right and left. The evil approaches us as a whirlwind, the good as a direction. There is a direction, a "yes," a command, hidden even in a prohibition, which is revealed to us in moments like these.

Buber no doubt had some sort of theological position, but his awareness of inner experience is the impressive thing about such passages. He has his language of the inner life; others will have other ways of speaking of it, but the reality of what he describes is the matter of importance. It seems of special interest that this material was first published in 1939:

> A section of the young is beginning to feel today that because of their absorption in the collective, something important and irreplaceable is lost to them—personal responsibility for life and the world. These young people, it is true, do not yet realize that their blind devotion to the collective, e.g. to a party, was not a genuine act of their personal life; they do not realize that it sprang, rather, from the fear of being left, in this age of confusion, to rely on themselves on a self which no longer receives its direction from eternal values. Thus they do not yet realize that their devotion was fed on the unconscious desire to have responsibility removed from them by an authority in which they believe or want to believe. They do not yet realize that this devotion was an escape. I repeat, the young people I am speaking of do not yet realize this. But they are beginning to notice that he who no longer, with his whole being, decides what he does or does not, and assumes responsibility for it, becomes sterile in soul. And a sterile soul soon ceases to be a soul.

No one who has followed the literature of the generational revolt which came after that time can fail to recognize in what Buber says an early stage of the inner experience of a vast multitude of the young. Out of the ordeal of pain which this experience brought have come many changes, and new ways of seeing the world and relating to it.

Ortega's analysis of the plight of the great majority of students—those who "accept" what is given to them by their teachers instead of questioning and wondering—makes a significant parallel to Buber's observations. The following, from *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*, was set down in 1932:

> Meanwhile, generation after generation, the frightening mass of human knowledge which the student must assimilate piles up. And in proportion, as knowledge grows, is enriched, and becomes specialized, the student will move farther and farther away from feeling any immediate and genuine need for it. Each time, there will be less congruence between the sad human activity which is studying, and the admirable human occupation which is true knowing. And so the terrible gap which began at least a century ago continues to grow, the gap between living culture, genuine knowledge, and the ordinary man. Since culture or knowledge has no other reality than to respond to needs that are truly felt and to satisfy them in one way or another, while the way of transmitting knowledge is to study, which is not to feel those needs, what we have is that culture or knowledge hangs in mid-air and has no roots of sincerity in the average man who finds himself forced to swallow it whole. That is to say, there is introduced into the human mind a foreign body, a set of dead ideas that could not be assimilated.
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> This culture, which does not have any root structure in man, a culture which does not spring from him spontaneously, lacks any native and indigenous values; this is something imposed, extrinsic, foreign, and unintelligible; in short, it is unreal. Underneath this culture—received but not truly assimilated—man will remain intact as he was, that is to say he will remain uncultured, a barbarian.

So it is not, again, basically a matter of "arguing" about this or that, of pointing to particular evils or wrongs—even though it may be necessary to call attention to them—but of trying, as best we may, to reorder our relations with ourselves. Everything else we do, even though we have to do it, may be no more than marking time. This is probably why A. S. Neill exploded to Mario Montessori:

> . . . you're talking about education, the three R's and science, and I'm thinking about the dynamics of life, the dynamic in a child, how we're going to prevent the child from becoming a Gestapo, or a color hater and all these things. The sickness of the world. I'm interested in what we're going to do for children to stop them from becoming haters, to stop them from becoming anti-life.

Others look for the leverage that is needed in other ways, hoping something good will happen, but hardly knowing whether it will, or why. Bayard Rustin, while he was colleague and adviser of Martin Luther King, told an audience:

> . . . in times of confusion we have got to face the fact that that which is practical—real politik—has never worked and that it is in these periods where the historical concomitants are building so rapidly that that which appears to be utopian is in fact *the* way out . . . every project we have ever set up we have set up to reveal truth, not to win minor victories. . . . I am not fooled—I know that most of them are in nonviolence for reasons far removed from why King and I are in it—they are in it because they see this as the only practicable way. . . .

Buber suggests that the teacher may do well to choose a great character in history as an example. Then he says:

> Of course, it may be asked whether the educator should really start "from above," whether, in fixing his goal, the hope of finding a great character, who is bound to be the exception, should be his starting point; for in his methods of educating character he will always have to take into consideration the others, the many. To this I reply that the educator would not have the right to do so if a method inapplicable to these others were to result. In fact, however, his very insight into the structure of a great character helps him to find the way by which alone he can begin to influence also the victims of the collective Moloch, pointing out to them the sphere in which they themselves suffer—namely, their relation to their own selves.

Then there is this rather magnificent passage:

> He can bring before his pupils the image of a great character who denies no answer to life and the world, but accepts responsibility for everything essential that he meets. He can show his pupils this image without the fear that those among them who most of all need discipline and order will drift into a craving for aimless freedom: on the contrary, he can teach them in this way to recognize that discipline and order too are starting-points on the way toward self-responsibility. He can show that even the great character is not born perfect, that the unity of his being has first to mature before expressing itself in the sequence of his actions and attitudes. . . .
>
> Today the great characters are still "enemies of the people," they who love their society, yet wish not only to preserve it but to raise it to a higher level.

> Tomorrow they will be the architects of a new unity of mankind. It is the longing for personal unity, from which must be born a unity of mankind, which the educator should lay hold of and strengthen in his pupils. Faith in this unity and the will to achieve it is not a "return" to individualism, but a step beyond all the dividedness of individualism and collectivism. A great and full relation between man and man can only exist between unified and responsible persons. That is why it is much more rarely found in the totalitarian collective than in any historically earlier form of society; much more rarely also in the authoritarian party than in any earlier form of free association. Genuine education of character is genuine education for community.

All that has been said here, by some of the wisest individuals of our time, applies, with some small qualification, to writing as well as to teaching. It embodies a conception of general education which starts at the root—in human character—and rests all its hopes on that beginning. But human character is largely a mystery, which is one explanation of why modern educators have given virtually all their attention to other matters.

REVIEW
REBIRTH OF PHILOSOPHY

IT is difficult to characterize Jacob Needleman's new book—*A Sense of the Cosmos* (Doubleday, 1975, $6.95). It deals with science and religion, but is also a discussion of cosmology, a treatment of psychology, and at the same time a kind of autobiography—the fragmentary accounts of personal experience being exceedingly useful to what the author endeavors to do. What is this? To put it simply, the book is an effort to open doors for new thinking about the world and ourselves. The effort is deliberate and self-conscious, becoming evidently so for the reader through the author's illustrations of the kind of thinking and writing which closes doors.

The subtitle is "The Encounter of Modern Science and Ancient Truth." Nowhere does Mr. Needleman set out "ancient truth" as something he has discovered and now restores to currency. The idea of ancient truth comes in as an intuition of its validity, without a didactic listing of the verities it may include. It is represented by certain attitudes toward the world and man, and the author brings these attitudes into the foreground as haunting possibilities that can no longer be ignored. They are suggestions that present themselves again and again to the human mind and which, in the present, seem to declare their relevance in compelling terms. Borrowing a phrase from Joyce Carol Oates, we might say that the book is "a form of inquiry, a testing of certain propositions by the author." Not remarkably, this mode of presentation of ideas makes them all the more persuasive. The reader decides; there is no assertion from the author to guard against or resist.

Essentially, Mr. Needleman is examining the question of how truth comes into the world, and into ourselves. That it *does* come into the world is an assumption of the author, which means simply that great religious and philosophical teachers have had a work to do and knew what they were about. At issue is our understanding of them—how the world succeeds somewhat in understanding, then fails. The following is from the Introduction:

> I do not claim to know where new, awakening ideas come from or how they need to be transmitted to us so as to serve as a positive influence on the life of a civilization. I do say however, that this is a crucial question. And that it is not being spoken about very much at the present moment when so many people are turning to teachings that challenge the world view of science. We are so accustomed to believe that great truths need only to be put before us and they will have a beneficent effect. But I wonder if there is not something exceedingly naive in this assumption, some naive estimation of our unaided ability to *be* what we know, some failure to realize how swift and subtle is the passage from seeing the darkness to dreaming of light.
>
> In any event, the great traditions make no such easy assumption about man's ability to digest the truth. From one point of view, in fact, sacred tradition can even be defined as the science of transmitting truth by degrees so that it can enter correctly and harmoniously into the human psyche. To this end, a tradition both withholds and reveals at the same time. Transmission of the truth is always understood in this way. There is always a "secret." Because there is always that in man, in ourselves, which seeks only to believe and explain and to manipulate, rather than understand.

For Mr. Needleman, religious and cultural history become one—justifiably so in his hands. Epochs are marked off by periods of common assumption that *the* truth has been found, with the events of a time made by putting it to work. But it was not *the* truth, but only a degree, and therefore was eventually turned practically upside down through exploitation and misuse. This is the way the author reads intellectual and moral history, as made up of cycles of changing conceptions of self and the world. The mind, in short, is twofold, and therefore the sort of attention we give to experience is twofold. There is in man a deep, endlessly recurring hunger to know, which informs our highest striving, yet this hunger is all too easily translated into the pursuit of finite ends, mundane realizations, material

satisfactions. Because the higher longing cannot ever be defined in terms of a particular goal, minds wrapped up in goal-seeking sometimes declare that the higher longing is only a will-o-the-wisp, the invention of priests, the fancy of poets, the high-toned pretense of metaphysicians. The practical man says he will devote himself to *workable* truth, and unless their intuition of a higher knowledge is strong, others tend to agree with him. Then the idea of the "higher" has only ritual reference, or poetic allusion comparable to Sunday religion, and by common consent men of the world proceed with its conquest.

This is a way of organizing our understanding of cultural history, of the rise and fall of great religions, and of the birth, reign, and decline of new gospels of every sort. Why does the cycle of finite end-seeking come to an end? Because there is that in human beings which somehow knows better—which is left without nourishment and which, in desperation or rebellion, produces those symptoms which are recognized in society as disorders of the psyche, excesses of every sort, and a loss of stability in both individuals and culture.

A great deal of the importance of Mr. Needleman's book depends upon admission or recognition that human beings, as presently constituted, are unfinished in their development. Such beings, he suggests, would be prone to imagine that a formula for knowledge which fits—or seems to fit—their present needs is all they need to know. This assumption—common enough in the modern world since the Enlightenment—has the effect of slamming doors on anything but "practical" thinking. It stops the asking of crucial questions and makes for a complacency that in a later time will be regarded with embarrassment and shame. From a moral or spiritual point of view, this self-satisfaction amounts to the suppression of aspiration. Mere ambition or acquisitiveness, at various levels, takes its place. This, too, shuts out awareness that a higher knowledge exists, needing to be sought. Meanwhile, learned definitions of the world are made in terms of a grossly limited outlook:

> The fact that we are bedazzled by the pragmatic successes of science shows us that when we pursue science our real intentions do not match what we sometimes claim to be searching for. We say we want knowledge about the universe, but we test our knowledge only by its logical consistency, its power to predict and its production of marvelous feats. Our real intention, therefore, is to satisfy our desires or allay our fears—desire for explanations, a sense of security, or material gain; fear of the unknown, death, pain, and loneliness.
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> We must therefore recognize that there is a great difference between the wish for knowledge and the wish to satisfy desire, *which is the basis of pragmatism.* And that knowledge in the service of our ordinary desires may produce a very different picture of the universe than knowledge which is connected to other motives.

The approach and appeal of this book is to man as a knowing being—his capacity to know is the heart of the matter. There is no moralizing, but an effort to show high human possibility, to suggest a stance where the individual will choose for himself to do right, because doing right is consistent with his true being. The stance is in a sense above the polarities of good and bad, yet there is no suggestion of cold intellectual analysis—*eros* is at the root of knowing, which is also becoming, in a holistic sense.

This book is published at an appropriate time. The criticism of science during recent years has created a plateau of new thought and speculation. It has raised the sights of human beings, but the light has been poor, the compass points almost unknown. Mr. Needleman's offering in fresh terms of the idea of man as the microcosm of the macrocosm—as a being linked through consciousness as well as by material organization with the whole wide world—seems to provide orientation for the individual thinker who has reached the plateau but wonders what to do next. For one thing, by showing the origins of scientific thinking—indeed of the scientific ideal—in ancient

religious philosophy, the author restores a sense of competence to individuals to *be themselves* scientific, without either laboratory or degree. This is accomplished by the suggestion that, for the ancients, knowledge of nature and the world was a part of self-knowledge. Science was once an avenue which also leads to philosophic truth for the reason that ancient science did not exclude the idea of man as knower, but depended upon it. We look at the universe with physical eyes, and we *see* only in terms of our level of psychic development. Recognizing this, we should make only tentative or working definitions which always include the qualification—tomorrow I will see more. And this is no formal rhetoric, but a reservation which is integral to symmetrical knowing at any moment.

Mr. Needleman's historical analysis becomes a study of how profound insights—sometimes instruction concerning an inner path to knowledge—are turned by man's immaturity and eagerness for "results" into pragmatic techniques. There follows a degradation of language by retaining spiritual language for earthly ends. And then, in consequence, there comes a wrathful rejection of spiritual ends in reaction against the perversion of language. In this view, the profane becomes first a misunderstanding, then a misuse, of the sacred. But the polarity is in us—not "out there." To see all this in ourselves is the means to clarification and reorientation. Self-knowledge is also the key to history.

In a brief review, it is not possible to suggest how well Mr. Needleman's application of this tool of understanding fits modern man's experience and retrospect on history. For us, it may not be our own understanding, but it is certainly an *example* of understanding.

No important area of life is neglected. There is a discussion of death which brings the author very dose to the spirit of Socrates in the *Phaedo.* The art of the philosopher lies in learning how to die, which means that dying is a way of separating oneself from all those preoccupations which blind us to the meaning behind the furious busyness of daily life. One comes to realize this, Mr. Needleman suggests, by experiencing death without actually dying. Just, eloquent, and mighty death! What does it mean? He says:

> In my professional career I have participated in many conferences with doctors, therapists and clergymen on the subject of death. Not once have any of us mentioned the awesomeness of death. We have all been eager to confess that death frightens us and leads us into self-deceptive denials of mortality. But never a hint of the fact of two consciousnesses in man totally unrelated to each other, only one of which can perceive reality on the same scale upon which death exists.

This is not a book about ancient teachings and saving doctrines, though these are essential and appear. It is a record of the reflections of an impartial, independent, and therefore learning, mind concerning the great questions, using such materials as this subject-matter naturally requires. It joins issues at a level pertinent to all readers of the present time. As an invitation to philosophy, it is exemplary. And it is restorative of the original meaning of philosophy, through its practice.

COMMENTARY
THE COMMON NAIVETE

THERE is a close correspondence between something said by Jacob Needleman (see "Review") and Martin Buber's observations on the formation of character. Mr. Needleman speaks of a common human tendency—sharpened into tragic paradox by those called "intellectuals":

> We are so accustomed to believe that great truths need only to be put before us and they will have a beneficent effect. But I wonder if there is not something exceedingly naive in this assumption, some naive estimation of our unaided ability to *be* what we know, some failure to realize how swift and subtle is the passage from seeing the darkness to dreaming of light.

Musing on a related aspect of human behavior, Buber suggests that the darkness is unrationalized bad habit, inherently resistant to the light of reason or the appeal of "truth":

> We are justified in regarding this disposition as a sickness of the human race. But we must not deceive ourselves by believing that the disease can be cured by formulae which assert that nothing is really as the sick person imagines. It is an idle undertaking to call out, to a mankind that has grown blind to eternity: "Look! the eternal values!"

Again, as a writer in the *Saturday Review* (May 31, 1975) put it:

> Our journalists, both on TV and in print, pledge fealty to the proposition that society thrives by communication of great gobs of unvarnished truth. Our law courts make us swear to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Yet we only dimly understand how, in an all-enveloping environment, man chisels his little statues of perceived reality.

Socrates, it will be remembered, reached this conclusion about "truth" a long time ago. He spent all his life asking those willing to converse with him what tools they used to chisel their "little statues of perceived reality." What are your first principles? he wanted to know. Are they good enough?

The Platonic program (see "Children") of dancing and singing may be right for the young, but how shall we know what ought to be loved and what hated during the years of mature decision? Buber saw the beginnings of an answer in the voice of Conscience.

So far, then, we have Conscience and the Dialectic as our means. But they may gain little use until the full impact of the problem, as stated by Martin Buber and Jacob Needleman, is widely felt.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
LESSONS IN HARMONY

READING recently in a doctoral thesis on Herbert Read's conception of aesthetic education, we found this quotation from Plato's *Laws:*

> By education I mean that training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children—where pleasure and pain are rightly implanted in non-rational souls. The particular training in respect of pleasure and pain, which leads you to hate and love what you ought to hate and love is called "education." The discipline of the pleasure-pain sense takes place via dancing and music. Young creatures are always wanting to move and cry out—leaping, skipping, overflowing with sportiveness and uttering expressive cries human beings are gifted with the pleasurable sense of harmony and rhythm; so that in choric dances rhythm and harmony train human motility. This is a form of education, and the well-educated are those who are able to sing and dance well.

Interestingly, John Dewey wrote in 1897:

> Modern theory and practice in education have laid relatively too much stress upon the volitional training in practical control and intellectual training in the acquisition of information, and too little upon the training of responsiveness. We need to return more to the Greek conception, which defined education as the attaching of pleasure and pain to the right objects and ideals in the right way. This ideal emphasized the emotional element, but we have now gone to the opposite extreme.

Someone may object to such a program, arguing that "free souls" ought not to be influenced to like some things better than others, but there is a limit to this grand impartiality. When babies reach for hot stoves, show an inclination to stick their fingers into electrical outlets, or lick the ant-poison dispenser, we immediately do what we can to direct their playfulness in better directions. Then there is the delighting argument, put together more than a hundred years ago, by Coleridge. A householder became involved in a dispute with a friend who maintained that it is wrong to teach a child anything involving "value-judgments" until the age of discretion is reached. So, as the householder relates—

> I showed him my garden, and told him it was my botanical garden. "How so?" said he, "it is covered with weeds." "Oh," I replied, "that is only because it has not yet come to the age of discretion and choice. The weeds, you see, have taken the liberty to grow, and I thought it unfair in me to prejudice the soil towards roses and strawberries."

Happily, common sense intervenes in such matters. In the areas where there is not much doubt about what ought to be regarded as good, and what bad, the educator's responsibility it clear.

Yet Plato, in effect, offers a qualification. He doesn't say, *"Tell* the children what they ought to like," but proposes that they be taught "to sing and dance well." This, he implies, will develop in them the basis of discrimination, and the choice of what to love and what to hate will be their own. It seems reasonable to say that this amounts to trusting to nature, although the job of the teacher is to help nature along.

Read believed that, for Pythagoras and Plato, aesthetic training made a foundation for moral training, since both beauty and goodness grow out of harmony. Pythagoras was the first to teach the idea of harmony to the Greeks, through the disciplines of mathematics and music. Read quotes Werner Jaeger in *Paideia* on "the doctrine of universal harmony":

> This harmony was expressed in the relation of the parts to the whole. But behind that harmony lay the mathematical conception of proportion, which, the Greeks believed, could be visually presented with geometrical figures. The harmony of the world is a complex idea: it means both musical harmony, in the sense of a beautiful concord between different sounds, and harmonious mathematical structure on rigid geometrical rules. The subsequent influence of harmony on all aspects of Greek life was immeasurably great. It affected not only sculpture and architecture, but poetry and rhetoric, religion and morality; all Greece came to realize that whatever a man made or did was governed by a severe rule, which like the rule of justice could not be transgressed with impunity—the rule of fitness or propriety. Unless we trace the boundless working of this law in all spheres of Greek thought throughout classical and post-classical times, we cannot realize the powerful educative influence of the discovery of harmony. The conception of rhythm, relation, and of the mean are closely akin to it, or derive from it a more definite content. It is true not only of the idea of the cosmos, but also of harmony and rhythm, that it was necessary for

> Greece to discover their existence in "the nature of being" before she could employ them in the spiritual world, to find order and method in human life.

The foregoing somewhat elevated discussion of Greek ideas about education came from a line of thought provoked by reading an article about Scott and Helen Nearing in the *Washington Post* for Aug. 10. Scott is now ninety-two and looks something like an amiable tree drawn by Arthur Rackham, and Helen, seventy-one, moves like a dancer and was once a concert violinist. They live on their farm at Harborside, Maine, where they are "85 per cent self-sufficient on food, 100 per cent on fuel and rent, buy a few clothes, hardwares, and our gasoline." Through the years Scott Nearing has written a lot of books, some on radical politics and some on a way of living on the land that they have found good.

What is the connection between Scott Nearing and the Platonic definition of education? Well, the example of their lives has been the means, for a great many young people, of learning "to hate and love what you ought to hate and love." The whole idea of harmony is now conceived at another level. While the world of nature is still there to be observed, and geometrical harmonies have not disappeared, these natural elements of experience have been largely overshadowed by man-made intrusions and distractions. It is the lost harmony of man's relationships with the earth and his fellows that a great many people hunger for, and the life Scott and Helen Nearing have lived for the past forty odd years—since 1932—has become an educational force through example. They have about twenty-five hundred visitors a year, most of them under thirty. "They've been fed a diet of the American Way of Life, and they know there's something wrong," Scott told the *Washington Post* interviewer. "They're searching for something else. They're on the move."

Why do they seek out the Nearings? Probably because they read a book. Books are the start of a lot of things. We first heard of Scott Nearing about forty years ago by reading *Dollar Diplomacy*, a historical study of United States intrusions on the affairs of Latin American republics to the South. Once you read a man like Scott Nearing, you try to keep track of what he does and has to say.

But people *learn* from him not so much through his books as from how he and Mrs. Nearing spend—use—their lives. They have achieved an impressive level of both harmony and independence. The *Post* writer summarizes:

> In 1932, when he was 50, unable to survive in a hostile urban environment, the Nearings took to the hills of Vermont, where they invented a farm and a way of life that made native Vermonters look like hedonists.
>
> Twenty years later, dismayed by the ski-resort mentality infecting the area, they moved to the Maine coast, where they started all over again on 140 acres of rocky meadows long since recaptured by forest.

Through the years, people wondering if they ought to change their loves and hates beat a path to their door—wherever it was. Their books on living on the land—once not very popular—are now being republished: they speak to the hungers of a disenchanted generation. Scott Nearing is a radical political theorist who practices what he preaches, and it is the practice that attracts would-be learners.

His books? In print and available from Social Science Institute (Harborside, Maine 04642) are farm-life books such as *Living the Good Life* ($2.25) and *The Maple Sugar Book* ($2.75). *The Making of a Radical* ($2.45) is both autobiographical and a history of the past seventy-five or a hundred years from the Nearing point of view. These and nearly a dozen other books (a new one, Civ*ilization and Beyond: Learning from History,* has just come out) are all available (paperbound, and in cloth for a little more money) from the publisher at Harborside.

The *Washington Post* interview concludes with a quotation from *The Making of a Radical:*

> Our life in the country is not an ivory tower retreat. It is an instance and an example of sane living in an insane world. It is a means of contacting nature, in many ways as important as contacting society. It enables us to live harmlessly in a violent world. It is a desirable, limited alternative to one segment of the existing social order.

Warning: Emulating the Nearings is tough on every familiar form of self-indulgence.

FRONTIERS

Sharp Diagnosis, Indifferent Cure

A FALL 1975 special report of the *Washington Spectator,* a newsletter edited by Tristram Coffin, begins with this statement:

> The next ten years will see major changes in the American economy and a return by the Middle Class to a bare-bones standard of living. Democracy and free enterprise can survive, if military and foreign aid is cut drastically, the social structure repaired after almost a half century of neglect, and imaginative leadership rises in the political arena.

Mr. Coffin quotes the view expressed by three Nobel prize-winning economists who join in saying:

> The wastefulness of the Western economies—in energy, in food, and in the despoiling of the environment—is not an oversight, but an inherent trend in a system which produces primarily for corporate profit. The economic crisis in industrial democracies raises serious questions about the very nature of the economic system in these societies.

The impact of this change—quite evidently now on the way—is briefly described: "High prices for food, fuel and manufactured goods, steep rates of unemployment, and, possibly, a collapse of Government credit." Why are these things happening or likely to happen? The reasons are gradually becoming well known. We have been squandering our natural resources, using our surplus wealth in military ventures, increasing production by a technology that eliminates jobs. These policies, taken together, bring ruin.

Mr. Coftin proposes common-sense measures such as drastic reduction in military expenditures, the savings to be invested in schools, libraries, parks, water, soil, and housing. Regional TVA's, he says, would help to supply both energy and jobs. There are other intelligent recommendations (see the *Washington Spectator* for Sept. 1, P.O. Box 1750, Annapolis, Md. 21404).

Actually, it is not difficult to list what needs to be done. *Getting* it done is the problem. Called for is a radical change in the motivation, habits, conception of goals and of human good by the millions of people engaged in the vast economic enterprises of industrial society. Making the prescription is easy enough, but generating momentum for the change is not easy at all.

Take for example a letter in the September *Not Man Apart.* A reader approves Dr. George Wald's account (noticed last week) of the part played by multinational corporations in bringing the world closer to crisis, then says:

> Unfortunately, Dr. Wald's rhetorical conclusion, which rightfully suggests that we turn our backs on the power elite and "serve the people," was a disappointment. . . . Dr. Wald already recognizes that established political processes offer no solutions. He says "That is no accident. We now sell and buy political candidates in exactly the same way we sell toothpaste and soap. The same advertising methods are used, and the same people are paying for it."
>
> Consequently, some important questions arise concerning the strategies on which we base many of our hopes for a better environment. At present, two of the movement's most widely-used tools, letter writing and lobbying, are directed to the very forces (our elected officials) that are orchestrating the earth's impending doom. Though we do make gains, our gains are reformist in nature, instead of a river dying in ten years, pollution controls are instituted that slow the rivers death to twenty-five years. It still dies. . . . I don't believe this means we should stop writing letters or discontinue the pressure directed against the ruling elite, because these efforts do buy us time and will leave us with a somewhat better quality of life for building society anew should a change in order ever come about. . .
>
> Dr. Wald says human life may not last much beyond the year 2000. Twenty-five, 30 years, maybe. Either we continue our present letter writing and die, or we begin to educate ourselves individually and collectively.

This writer now turns to specific proposals, and here, however much we may approve his suggestions, we can't help thinking about all the other things that will have to get done first, or be made to happen at the same time. How, after all, do you write up an action program that fits the objectives so well described by George Cabot

Lodge: "The great individualistic, proprietary competitive thrust with its enormous technological and economic achievements is faltering. . . . We are seeking new social constructions which will clearly embrace economic and technical activity and allow for the development of a new sense of community; the atomistic is giving way to the organic, the parts to the whole, the linear to the circular, the sensate to the ideational."

The *Not Man Apart* correspondent says:

> We must align ourselves with the farmworkers who seek a decent working and living environment while cutting our lettuce and picking our grapes. We must scream loudly when an American president invades a tiny Asian country because it seeks independence from colonial powers; what worse human environment is there than war? We must agonize through the painful personal changes that occur as women and men begin to learn a new and equal respect for each other as viable, intelligent beings, thus improving our personal environments.

Well, these suggestions may sound inadequate, but this is not the writer's fault. It is no one's fault. He is talking about the future—what human beings need to grow toward and into—and the only way to do this is to generalize as he has done. To give what he says impact, it i' necessary to devise and to live individual applications of such ideas. Quite naturally, left in the abstract, such proposals lack substance and definition.

In the same issue of *Not Man Apart*, replying to a reader, a staff writer, Hugh Nash, does about the same thing in another way, or at a different level:

> We have painted ourselves into a corner of dependency on the auto, and I don't think we can escape that dependency without changing the whole pattern of human settlement. Public transit will help in the meantime. But until we reshuffie ourselves into communities scaled and designed to place essential services within the reach of pedestrians, and bicyclists, some form of motorized personal transportation cannot be dispensed with entirely.
>
> Like it or not, we must evolve into a post-industrial society.

There are reasons for liking it, and giving these reasons substance and popularity may be the most important thing to do.