

## LEARNING FROM NATURE

THESE are days of deepening longing for authoritative ideas concerning what human beings should do to manage their affairs in harmony with nature and with each other. It seems that every reliable authority, once it gains popularity, becomes shallow in effect or is made to turn against us. We find our own faltering judgments inadequate—especially in a world left far too long to the management of experts, in whom, today, we are rapidly losing faith. The directions given by oracles—whether of Delphi or the I Ching—are ambiguous and hardly acceptable in public affairs. No one has been able to embody the instruction of Divine Revelation in a constitution or body of law, and while hope persists that there *is* an ideal way to conduct human affairs, those who claim to know it are regarded with justifiable suspicion.

Historically speaking, the most familiar long-term experience we have had with this sort of certainty was the Enlightenment attempt to apply the doctrine of Natural Law. This conception of a natural order on which human affairs ought to be based is commonly traced to the ancient Roman lawyers, but its roots are almost certainly Greek. Sophocles has Antigone say to Creon, the ruler of Thebes, challenging his decree that no one should bury her slain brother:

"I did not think your proclamation of such force that you, a man destined to die, should override the laws of the gods, unwritten and unvarying. For those are not of yesterday nor of today, but everlasting. No one knows when they began."

Her appeal is unavailing and Antigone goes to her death, although the king repents, made to see the application of a higher principle by a sage who counsels him too late.

But why can't human law embody the higher law, whether of the gods or Nature? The simple answer to this question seems to be that while

man-made laws, following some ideal pattern, can be the instruments of justice, they cannot of themselves *give* justice. The capacity and will to do justice is in human beings, and are not transferable to statutes or states.

The Romans, whatever they believed to be the origins of Natural Law, regarded it as a sort of higher counsel, to which law-makers and lawyers should have reference. As Margaret Macdonald says in an essay on "Natural Rights" (in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956):

Thus natural *law* is only imperfectly realized in positive *laws*. And it is significant that the lawyers and later political theorists who adopted this distinction talked only of natural *law* and *the* Law of Nature, never of natural laws and laws of nature. . . . Natural law was not formulated in natural *laws*. It was neither written nor customary and might even be unknown. . . . But how is it discovered?

Natural law, it seems, is discovered by a process of becoming. At the same time, it tells us what we ought to become. Miss Macdonald says:

The answer lies in the peculiar status given to reason in the theory. Propositions about natural law and natural rights are not generalizations from experience nor deductions from observed facts subsequently confirmed by experience. Yet they are not totally disconnected from natural fact. For they are known as entailed by the intrinsic or essential nature of man. Thus they are known by reason. But they are entailed by the proposition that an essential property of men is that they have reason. The standard of natural law is set by reason and is known because men have reason. . . . "There is, in fact," said Cicero, "a true law—namely right reason—which is in accord with nature, applies to all men and is unchangeable and eternal." And for Grotius, too, "The law of nature is a dictate of right reason."

The initial glory—which became the disaster—of the Enlightenment was the translation of "right reason" into observable, objective fact.

Among the principal translators or converters were Galileo, Hume, Locke, and, in effect, Newton. As Carl Becker remarks in *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*: "When philosophy became a matter of handling test tubes instead of dialectics everyone could be, in the measure of his intelligence and interest, a philosopher." After the discoveries of Isaac Newton it became the common opinion of learned men and teachers that at last Natural Law was being brought down to a comprehensible, manageable level. Hence the extraordinary optimism and emotional exaltation of the Enlightenment. To the tough-minded men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this achievement was far better than a Second Coming. Commenting on Hume's ecstatic praise of the Newtonian World Machine in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Becker says:

The passage is significant in two respects. We note at once that the logical process has been reversed. Cleanthes does not conclude that nature *must* be rational because God *is* eternal reason; he concludes that God *must* be an engineer because nature *is* a machine. From this reversal of the logical process it follows that natural law is identified with the actual behavior of nature . . . natural law, instead of being a construction of deductive logic, is the observed harmonious behavior of material objects. . . .

Obviously the disciples of the Newtonian philosophy had not ceased to worship. They had only given another form and a new name to the object of worship: having denatured God, they deified nature.

What they overlooked, in this exhilarating transaction, was the fact that the resulting Nature had no place in it for the uniquely human qualities of human beings. This Nature could be reasoned about, by those who would take the trouble to learn a little mathematics, but *It* could not reason. This Nature was mostly pushed around by blind forces given—without explanation—in experience. Becker states precisely the problem inherited by the modern world from the Enlightenment:

There it was then—the ugly dilemma, emerging from the beautiful premises of the new philosophy: if nature is good then there is no evil in the world, if

there is evil in the world then nature is not so far good. How will they meet it, the enlightened ones who with so much assurance and complacent wit have set out with the rule of reason to rebuild an unlovely universe according to nature's design? Will they, closing their eyes to the brute facts, maintain that there is no evil in the world? In that case there is nothing for them to set right. Or will they, keeping their eyes open, admit that there is evil in the world? In that case nature fails to provide them with any standard for setting things right.

Well, we know what they did. They explained that science and technology would erase disease, pain, and poverty from the modern world. There would be plenty for everyone and hence no more crime. They promised endless growth that would make famine impossible and bring adequate food, shelter, clothing, education, and whatever else is considered basic decency within the reach of everyone on earth. What other evil is there to get rid of? Needed was only a little time.

We find today—or are finding—that Nature has a voice of her own. The Enlightenment program won't work, she keeps telling us. She has a new set of interpreters—the ecologists and the humanistic economists. Their readings of the Book of Nature are not entirely uniform but they all agree in declaring that the endless exploitation of nature in behalf of middle-class prosperity for everyone in the world will bring hasty ruin, if not planetary death, early in the twenty-first century if not sooner. They don't talk much about Natural Law in the old way, but they say a great deal about the finiteness of the earth, the requirements of health for man and other living things, and about the balances that are required for continuity and survival of the species.

Yet under all this, pervading it somewhat, sometimes in shy or covert fashion, is a reviving earth mysticism, almost a pantheistic credo, occasionally growing explicit in the new religions, and plainly implicit in some of the writers who are capturing the imagination of the young. There is a sense in which a reformed generation is trying to consult Nature once again.

But what do we mean by "Nature"? There is probably no more ambiguous term in the English or any other language. Is Nature everything objective, or does it include hidden subjective realities? Is Nature the unimproved aspect of the world—the way things are now, or is it the way things ought to be? In *Studies in Words* (Cambridge University Press), C. S. Lewis has fifty pages on the various meanings of Nature, and he by no means exhausts the subject. If Nature can tell us the way things ought to be, why is her instruction so confusingly contradictory? Lewis puts it briefly:

It is "she" who does nothing by leaps, abhors a vacuum, is *die gute Mutter*, is red in tooth and claw, "never did betray the heart that loved her," eliminates the unfit, surges to ever higher and higher forms of life, decrees, purposes, warns, punishes and consoles.

Nature is a very large book—bigger than any other—and one must always ask himself: Which page are you reading now? Are you reading about unities or diversities, collaborations or hostilities? Is man a part of nature or some kind of outsider? Of one thing we may be sure: He makes all the definitions of nature, and had better be included as a matter of common sense. Definition of nature includes self-definition.

One way of speaking of the "natural" world makes it mean the world before we got here or did anything to it—"interfered" with it. The man-made, we suppose, is not natural. Mr. Lewis does not think much of this definition:

For of course in the real world everything is continuously "interfered with" by everything else; total mutual interference . . . is of the essence of nature (as a totality). What keeps the contrast alive, however, is the experience of men as practical, not speculative, beings. The antithesis between unreclaimed land and cleared, drained, fenced, ploughed, sown, and weeded field—between the unbroken and the broken horse—between the fish as caught and the fish opened cleaned and fried—is forced on us every day. That is why *nature* as "the given," the thing we start from, the thing we have not yet "done anything about," is such a persistent sense. *We* here, of course, means man. If ants had a language they would, no doubt, call their anthill an

artifact and describe the brick wall in its neighborhood as a *natural* object. *Nature* in fact would be for them all that was not "ant-made." Just so, for us, *nature* is all that is not man-made; the *natural* state of anything is its state when not modified by man. This is one source of the antithesis (philosophically so scandalous) between *nature* and Man. We as agents, as interferers, inevitably stand over against all other things they are all raw material to be exploited or difficulties to be overcome. This is also a fruitful source of favorable and unfavorable overtones. When we deplore the human interferences, then the *nature* which they have altered is of course the unspoiled, the uncorrupted; when we approve them, it is the raw, the unimproved, the savage.

To be in it and of it, yet out of it in the sense of aware of it—that seems to be our condition. So, depending upon how we feel, or relate to the world around us, we make our definitions or rules.

Hobbes said that in a state of nature man's life is nasty, brutish, and short. Did he know? Lao tse said that the "uncarved block" of man's nature before he succumbed to civilized ways was gentle, kind, and good. Did he know?

Is there a "hierarchy" of natural qualities, just as there is a hierarchy of needs in human beings, as Maslow showed? There are certainly differences among the creatures of the natural world—hyenas and dogs, for instance. Horses and cows. Whales and piranhas. Tape worms and butterflies. Wisdom and folly, too, are found in profusion in Nature, as R. W. G. Hingston shows in *Instinct and Intelligence* (Book League of America, 1929). Are these all samples to choose from for our instruction? Do we dare say they have a "purpose," either in themselves or for us?

Pascal wondered about such matters in connection with human custom. Isn't custom a "natural" way of behaving? How do we tell what is natural for *us*? Are we to imitate tigers or lambs? Or should we say that a sample part of nature is not a model to be followed, but, somehow or other, learned from?

Then there is Alexander Pope's beguiling excuse for all that happens, including the worst evils we know:

All discord, harmony not understood;  
All partial evil, universal good:  
And, spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, *Whatever is, is right.*

Who, then, can say that satellites and moon landings are not natural, or not meant to be; that war is not Nature's own way of evening up things we don't know about? There may be some kind of sense in Pope's lines, but they also give full justification for Becker's comment:

But this, addressed to the intelligence, was not an answer it was merely an avoidance, a dishonest begging of the question. To assert that all that is, is right, was to beat all meaning out of the word "right," unless indeed one were willing to hood one's eyes once more in the cloak of Christian faith. For Pope was merely repeating St. Thomas, who had written twenty volumes to reassure a world on the verge of doubt—twenty volumes to say that it was really right that things should go wrong, God only knows why.

God's law, Natural Law—if they don't work or can't be followed, what then can we learn from?

Interestingly, if we go back to the Greeks on this question, we find Aristotle saying that the nature (*phusis*) of anything is what it is like when its process of becoming is complete, and that we should study the best or undamaged specimens. Going further in a Platonic spirit, Plotinus suggests that the artist should not imitate or copy sensible objects, but the principles (*logoi*) from which the objects obtain their manifest nature. Seek, in other words, the ideal form of which the material image is only an imperfect example.

But these counsels have to do with objects in nature, where excellence is in form and well-established relationships are always the same. Among living creatures they are *species* relationships, and their ends, if they can be said to have ends, are realized or exhausted in the perpetuation of the species. It is difficult to think that such examples in nature are instructive to man, except in very limited ways and only by

analogy. Human problems are ethical or moral problems, and the rules leading to human good transcend the question of survival.

Curiously, the difficulty we experience in learning from "nature" is duplicated when we look for examples of excellence among the technical experts in various human undertakings. The expert, it seems, represents "nature" raised to a higher power, but still subject to the same limitations. As another writer in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, Renford Bambrough, remarks in a discussion of "Plato's Political Analogies":

Besides navigation and medicine, Plato illustrates his conception of ethics and politics by reference to mathematics and music, to the arts of manufacture, such as shoemaking, shipbuilding and weaving, and to the tendance of animals. . . . The importance of mathematics and music for Plato's purpose is that they are disciplines in which, *par excellence* we find questions to which there are precisely correct answers and experts who can find and give those answers as men speaking with authority. For Plato, as for Locke, mathematics was the paradigm of certainty and accuracy to which morals and politics were required to conform. But the ambition is a hopeless one precisely because of those features of ethical discourse of which Plato complained, and without which ethical discourse would not be ethical discourse. We accept the expert's solution of a mathematical problem because we know from experience that he agrees with other experts, and he agrees with other experts because the problem can be precisely stated and there are approved methods of solving it. These conditions do not hold in ethics and politics. There are not even any adequate neutral criteria for determining who are the experts. . . . In such a case it becomes misleading to speak of experts at all. . . .

It comes to this—

Wherever Plato turns among the *technai*, although the word covers a wide variety of skills, studies and pursuits which no modern language would call by a single name, he cannot find what he is seeking, a skill at determining which ends ought and ought not to be pursued. He is conscious of this difficulty, and he attempts to overcome it by distinguishing between the standard, instrumental arts, and a higher, prescriptive art, the kingly art of

politics. All the lower arts are means to ends; the royal art, as practiced by the true philosopher, prescribes to the lower arts the ends they are to serve.

However—

There is no such prescriptive *techne*, not because civilization is in its infancy, but for the inescapable logical reason that anything which can properly be called a *techne* will be by its very nature instrumental, and the decision about the purpose for which it is to be used will lie outside its own scope.

Mr. Bambrough seems to think that Plato was not sufficiently aware of this limitation, even though he was careful not to let Socrates win all the arguments about justice and right action. (There are those, like Dionysius II, who resist the persuasive force of the Dialectic, and who will not practice the personal discipline required for the awakening of knowledge.) The disciplines of the expert in mundane undertakings may order the mind; the abstractions of mathematics may school a person in philosophic reflection, but the awakening to truth involves some sort of *leap* of the mind, beyond the reach of every sort of *techne*. So, for Plato, the analogies of the experts have only a limited value. It is as Mr. Bambrough says:

To accept the Platonic analogies unconditionally is to suppose that the concepts of knowledge, truth, right answer, speaking with authority, expert have the same logical roles in ethics and politics as they have in science and mathematics. To reject the Platonic analogies unconditionally is to suppose that none of these concepts has any place in the logic of ethics and politics.

The parallels, in short, may help to induce a state of mind receptive to understanding of what is right, but they cannot produce the conclusions sought. The learner must do this for himself. And this, indeed, is the burden of Socrates' contention in the *Gorgias*, when he tells Callicles that he is interested only in the testimony of Callicles himself—no other witness is important for a decision by Callicles. He is the *only* "expert."

And this, if we are inclined to listen to Plato, is the reason why we cannot learn all from Nature,

which is a dissimulating mask of Natural Law, so far as human right and good are concerned. Yet nature is filled with wonderful preparations—analogy—for self-discovery. To learn from them without mistaking them for truth seems necessary as well as difficult.

## *REVIEW*

### NOT ONE, BUT TWO

THE transition from science to philosophy—now going on again, in numerous ways—has its first clear description in the brief autobiography given by Socrates in the *Phaedo*. There he tells Cebes how, in his youth, he had a passion for natural science, which, he expected, would instruct him in the causes of everything that is. However, Socrates eventually became convinced that the causes of what *he* did were not external to himself, but grew from the decisions he made. He sat there calmly in the Athenian prison, he told his young friend, not because of the inclination and function of the sinews of his body (James-Lange Theory?), but for reasons of his own:

. . . since Athens has thought it better to condemn me, therefore I for my part have thought it better to sit here, and more right to stay and submit to whatever penalty she orders. Because, by dog, I fancy these sinews and bones would have been in the neighborhood of Megara or Boeotia long ago impelled by a conviction of what is best!—if I did not think it was more right and honorable to submit to whatever penalty my country orders rather than take to my heels and run away. But to call things like that causes is too absurd. If it were said that without such bones and strews and all the rest of them I should not be able to do what I think is right, it would be true. But to say that it is because of them that I do what I am doing, and not through choice of what is best— . . . would be a very lax and inaccurate form of expression.

Socrates remained persuaded that mind determines what men do with their lives, and that since mind seeks whatever is held to be good, the study of why things are as they are requires "a man to consider, with regard both to himself and to anything else, namely the best and highest good, although this would necessarily imply knowing what is less good, since both were covered by the same knowledge."

This explains why Socrates—or Plato—determined that the pursuit by the mind of knowledge of what is Good is the central

obligation of human beings, or that ethical understanding is the foundation of all knowledge.

Aristotle, who was more empirically inclined, declared that knowledge is what can be *demonstrated*—from evidence perceptible to the senses and by logical proof.

These are the two views of knowledge which have occupied human inquiry ever since. They occupy it now. There is of course a Plato and an Aristotle in every human, and since there is likely to be truth in both views the real question is which outlook has priority rather than which one is "true" and the other false.

In modern times—what we call the "scientific age"—the Platonic position has been pushed to one side (left to preachers and poets) while a vast amount of information about "causes" has been accumulated by the various branches of science. When it comes to human behavior, the scientists who concern themselves with why human beings act as they do are known as psychologists, and since humans, as scientists regard them, are essentially bodies, the psychologists started out by calling themselves physiological psychologists. William James made the classic case for practicing physiological psychology in his introduction to *Psychology: Briefer Course*. "A psychologist," he said, "wants to build a *Science*; and a science is a system of fixed relations." This shuts out freedom of will or choice. "So far, then, as our volitions may be independent variables," he continued, "a scientific psychology must ignore that fact, and treat of them only so far as they are fixed functions." So psychology ignores free will, and most psychologists, he adds, "have no hesitation in denying that free will exists." But at this point the temporarily suppressed Plato in James rises up to give warning:

When, then, we talk of "psychology as a natural science," we must not assume that that means a sort of psychology that stands at last on solid ground. It means just the reverse; it means a psychology particularly fragile, and into which the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint, a psychology all of whose elementary assumptions and

data must be considered in wider connections and translated into other terms.

Why, cherishing and affirming these doubts, did James set out to practice a physiological psychology which eliminates free will? Because, he explained, "the only way to make sure of its unsatisfactoriness is to apply it seriously to every possible case that can turn up."

We now have another—and intensely interesting—chapter of this inquiry to report on. Wilder Penfield, the eminent Canadian neurosurgeon, has just published a book, *The Mystery of the Mind* (Princeton University Press, \$8.95), in which he tells in a footnote:

As an undergraduate, majoring in philosophy at Princeton, I was much impressed by my reading of William James's *The Principles of Psychology*. That was, I suppose, the beginning of my curiosity about the brain and the mind of man.

From that time—which must have been a little before the outbreak of the first world war—and only a couple of years after James's death—he was probably haunted by the same philosophical questions that beset James. But as a scientist, a brain specialist and neurologist, he started out just as James had recommended:

The neurophysiologist's initial undertaking should be to try to explain the behavior of this being [Man] on the basis of neuronal mechanisms alone. . .

The challenge that comes to every neurophysiologist is to explain in terms of brain mechanisms all that men have come to consider the work of the mind, if he can. And this he must undertake freely, without philosophical or religious bias.

But what if, after a lifetime of work along these lines, he should find that this effort fails? Then, Dr. Penfield says:

If he does not succeed in his explanation, using proven facts and reasonable hypotheses, the time should come, as it has to me, to consider other possible explanations. He must consider how the evidence can be made to fit the hypothesis of two elements as well as one only.

Here Dr. Penfield is repeating the alternatives proposed by Sir Charles Sherrington, with whom he had studied neurophysiology at Oxford, and who had said at the end of his life: "That our being should consist of two fundamental elements offers, I suppose, no greater inherent improbability than that it should rest on one only." Now, in his turn, Dr. Penfield, "at the close of [his] professional career," declares his conviction that there are indeed "two elements" needed for understanding man's life and mind. He says: "A remarkable body of material has come into my hands and I have stumbled on exciting discoveries."

What are these discoveries?

For any hope of understanding them well, the reader must go to Dr. Penfield's book. We cannot even attempt to summarize them here. They come out of the grain of his long experience as a neurosurgeon, treating hundreds, probably thousands, of cases of epilepsy, from which he learned about the play of consciousness, the relation of brain damage to human awareness, memory, and choice. He finally reached the conclusion that human life and intelligence are impossible to understand without the conception of mind as having a reality of its own—something far more than the epiphenomenal shadow or reflection of the workings of the brain cells.

Brain surgery is perhaps unique in causing no pain, and can therefore be carried on with the patient in full consciousness. In fact, the conscious collaboration of the patient, as Dr. Penfield shows by describing several operations, is essential to what the surgeon endeavors to do. Most impressive of all, it may be, among Dr. Penfield's discoveries is the fact that while he could, using an electrode, cause particular memories to come before the mind's eye of the patient, the patient knew that the *doctor* was stirring these recollections. The neurologist found that the presentation of a memory to the mind could be caused by an outside stimulus, but *not* a human decision. "There is no place in the cerebral

cortex," says Dr. Penfield, "where electrical stimulation will cause a patient to believe or decide." What he terms the "highest brain mechanisms" parallel or correspond to the volitional activity of the mind, but they do not cause it.

This mechanism, as it goes out of action in sleep and resumes action on waking, may switch off the mind and switch it on. It may, one can suggest, do this by supplying and by taking away the energy that might come to the mind from the brain. But to expect the highest brain-mechanism or any set of reflexes, however complicated, to carry out what the mind does, and thus perform all the functions of the mind, is quite absurd. . . .

During brain action a neurophysiologist can surmise where the conduction of potentials is being carried out and its pattern. It is not so in the case of what we have come to call mind-action. And yet the mind seems to act independently of the brain in the same sense that a programmer acts independently of his computer, however much he may depend upon the action of that computer for certain purposes. . . .

For my own part, after years of striving to explain the mind on the basis of brain-action alone, I have come to the conclusion that it is simpler (and far easier to be logical) if one adopts the hypothesis that our being does consist of two fundamental elements. If that is true, it could still be true that energy required comes to the mind during waking hours through the highest brain-mechanism.

Because it seems to me certain that it will always be quite impossible to explain the mind on the basis of neuronal action within the brain, and because it seems to me that mind develops and matures independently throughout an individual's life as though it were a continuing element, and because a computer (which the brain is) must be programmed and operated by an agency capable of independent understanding, I am forced to choose the proposition that our being is to be explained on the basis of two fundamental elements. This, to my mind, offers the greatest likelihood of leading us to the final understanding toward which so many stalwart scientists strive.

From this it seems reasonable to say that the Platonic clans are now gathering once again.

## *COMMENTARY*

### **CALIFORNIA CONSERVATION PROJECT**

IN a paper describing the tree-planting program reported in this week's "Children," Andy Lipkis tells about the various problems which he and his young associates have had to solve in order to keep the planting going without serious interruption. Besides the continuous need for funds to pay for tools and materials, truck rental, mobile tanks for irrigation, and other irreducible expenses, there were psychological obstacles to overcome prejudice, misunderstanding, and opposition in the bureaucratic structures of organizations whose cooperation is essential; and in the merely impulsive character of most popular support.

Learning how to replace dying pine trees in the San Bernardino Mountains region with seedlings of hardier species turned out to be the simplest part of the work. Andy and his friends soon realized that interpreting the project to the public, sustaining the enthusiasm of financial supporters and increasing their number, and introducing tree-planting to the young in ways that would lead to lasting involvement, are the ingredients of success.

Most adults, he found, suppose that "the Government" is doing whatever is necessary to save our trees. But the Forest Service budget has been cut and federal funds aren't available. People are shocked by this discovery, but when they learn that "a bunch of kids" are planting trees, they seem to lose interest, since our forests, after all, are "being taken care of."

So, recognizing that the renewal of the forests now being killed by smog will depend upon *continuous* public education, and upon *continuous* effort with young people and children's groups, Andy formed a non-profit corporation (California Conservation Project, 1745 Selby Ave., No. 18, Los Angeles, Calif. 90024), to seek funds, and worked out a carefully planned educational program to parallel the tree-planting

in the field. He is now completing arrangements for an environmental education center in the Los Angeles area which will include a nursery for raising smog-resistant trees. The Center will include experiences designed to give lasting scope to the natural inclination of the young to take part in life-fostering activity. The tree-planting helps to convert inclinations into lifetime traits of character.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### IDEALS AND FULFILLMENT

WHAT ought to be said to the young about the Bicentennial? The question may be awkward. When we review the spirit of 1776—read Paine, Jefferson, Washington, and Adams—dip into Madison and Hamilton in the *Federalist Papers* for a while, and then into later testaments of the American Dream—it is difficult to think of anything to say.

The reason may be that we ought to have gone on from the eighteenth-century inspiration, but failed to do so. We are still preoccupied with our "Rights," when, as Mazzini pointed out more than a century ago, the time came when we should have graduated from demanding rights to the stance of broad Responsibility, from which all Rights are born. It is not easy to explain this to the young, who are aware mainly of their longings for personal fulfillment. It is not easy to find examples of the assumption and fulfillment of responsibility. The newspapers are filled with declarations of rights and the corresponding demands, and with endless accounts of the neglect and betrayal of responsibility. Mazzini saw this clearly back in 1835, when he wrote in "Faith and the Future":

. . . our weapons are our interests, and our chief instrument of action is a theory of rights. . . . Our former aim has vanished from our view, the new, dimly seen for an instant, is effaced by that doctrine of rights which alone directs our labors. . . .

. . . the liberty of the republicans—although they instinctively proffer the words duty, sacrifice, and mission—is still a theory of resistance; their religion—if indeed they speak of any—a formula of the relation between God and the individual; the political organization they invoke and dignify by the name of *social*, a mere series of defenses raised up around laws framed to secure the liberty of *each* to follow out his *own* aim, his own tendencies, and his own interests; their formula of association is society founded on Rights; their faith does not overpass the limits traced out nearly a century ago by a man—

himself the incarnation of struggle—in a declaration of rights. Their theories of government are theories of *distrust*; their organic problem a remnant of patched-up Constitutionalism, reduces itself to the discovery of a point around which individuality and association, liberty and law, may oscillate forever in a resultless hostility.

Mazzini called for a new social order founded upon the idea of duty. He maintained that "the true emancipation of the peoples can only be effected through the conscience of the peoples." The law of association must supplant without negating the doctrine of rights.

The past is fatal. . . . The French Revolution—I say it with deep conviction—crushes us. . . . We expect its programme to furnish us with both men and things; we strive to copy Robespierre and St. Just. . . . But while we thus ape our fathers, we forget that their greatness consisted in the fact that they aped no one. . . .

The idea of a new epoch, by implying a new aim to be reached, leaves the initiative to the future. and thereby awakens the general conscience to activity. It substitutes spontaneity for imitation. . . . We separate ourselves forever from the epoch of exclusive individuality, and still more decisively therefore, from that individualism which is the materialism of that epoch. We close up the paths of the past.

We could say that Mazzini's vision is still the vision we need, since he was wise enough to "leave the initiative to the future." He did not ideologize human progress. He spoke of responsibility, duty, and conscience as the springs of the necessary action. "We elevate the political question," he said, "to the height of a philosophical conception." And surely, if we consider the present situation of the world, and the extremity of our once so hopeful expectations, that is exactly what needs to be done.

These, it seems evident, are the things we ought now to be saying, whether we repeat the inspiring rhetoric of Mazzini, the thoughtful analysis of John Schaar, or the intense reflections of Richard Goodwin in *The American Condition*. Talk of the splendors of the American Revolution is bound to be anti-climactic unless so conceived.

But how is this to be gotten across to the young?

The fact is that the awakening of conscience and a sense of duty, in America of today, is functional rather than theoretical. The ecological movement may be superficially a matter of self-interest—of survival—but it is deeply moral in feeling and in the sources of its strength. Many of the young are involved in activities which are closely related to the vision of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, and so are the scores and hundreds of expressions of concern for the welfare of the natural world which have followed her call and cry.

It might be best to learn from this example and, instead of straining to find appropriate words which can be understood by youngsters in relation to the Bicentennial, to help with actual programs that represent a fresh inspiration. For example, here in Southern California a young man—now twenty—he was fifteen when he started thinking about conservation—has organized a tree-planting program to replenish the national and other forests in this region where trees are dying because of air-polluting smog. A few years ago Forest Service botanists noticed that the conifers in the San Bernardino region were slowly dying off. The smog, they found, was responsible. The "ozone" component of smog reduces the flow of sap in vulnerable species of pines, with the result that the cambium layer loses vitality. This enables the beetles which prey on weakened trees to invade beneath the bark and lay their eggs. Since the trees lack the sap to expel the beetles, within months the trees may be ringed and then die.

This student at a California State University—Andy Lipkis—learned about what was happening to the pine trees in the San Bernardino mountain area, and at the same time heard that seedlings of smog-resistant species might be made available from a California State Forestry nursery. Putting two and two together, he organized a tree-planting program for Southern California, overcame bureaucratic obstacles,

secured a little financial help, and, enlisting the services of numerous children's groups, began to plant trees in the afflicted area. During the past summer, some five thousand children, from about eight to sixteen years of age, went into the mountains to plant trees, and then returned at regular intervals to water them until they could survive without further attention. Children, Andy and the cooperating leaders found, happily learn how to plant with conscientious thoroughness and a natural pride. This is an activity which is now in its third year, and is likely to increase in scope, for the trees are still dying at a faster rate than smog-resistant seedlings are being planted. The goal for the future, Andy says, is to replace all the dying trees with seedlings. This will mean setting out between forty and fifty thousand small sugar pines and Sierra redwoods every summer.

Children, as Piaget and many others have pointed out, learn best from what they *do*. What do they learn from planting small trees? It is difficult to say exactly what they learn. It may be suspected, however, that they gain a feeling of fellowship with the trees and the mountains, simply from participating in the living processes of growth.

Thinking about this process is the responsibility of the educator. He needs to think about it, even if he can't "explain" it. As a matter of fact, the fellowship of life and the ranges of ideal responsibility aren't ever successfully rationalized beforehand, perhaps because they are so intimately a part of the being of humans. Yet a good teacher or leader helps them to "come alive."

## *FRONTIERS* Vinoba on Gandhi

A BOOK which has come in for notice from India, *Vinoba on Gandhi*, compiled by Kanti Shah, the editor of *Bhoomiputra* (published in Baroda), may be read in various ways. For one thing, it shows how the Gandhian movement rose out of the classic tradition of religious philosophy which pervades the life of the Indian people. Nowhere else in the world is found this religious intensity, and Westerners have difficulty in understanding the weight of the allusions, by Gandhi and others, to figures and ideas in Hindu and Buddhist tradition. There is hardly any wholly independent expression of the secular spirit in India. What there is of it seems plainly borrowed from Western lands, and in India has a somewhat profane quality. Western readers are likely to find this omnipresent religiosity of India oppressive, just as Indians find tiresome Western aggressiveness and braggadocio. Meanwhile, in this declining epoch, the East borrows from the material vulgarities of the West, while the West seizes upon the showy side of Eastern religious practice, both becoming poorer by the exchange. (There are, of course, better though less noticeable exchanges going on.)

There is little point in trying to understand these qualities of the Indians unless one plans to go deep beneath the surface, where unities instead of differences are to be recognized. *Vinoba on Gandhi* would be serviceable for such an undertaking. Actually, there is continuity from the heroic India of old in the life and achievement of Gandhi. An obstacle, perhaps, to seeing this lies in the fact that Gandhi deliberately submerged himself in the life of the common people. He spoke their language, used ideas already in their minds, and sought to restore lost dignities and revive ancient aspirations. Gandhi does not really move about in the modern world, but in the majestic world of Indian thought, marking for identification the tendencies and habits of the modern world in terms of the values of ancient India. And he is at some pains to show that the

values are *timeless*, not displaced or reduced by modern Western conceptions, save in human weakness and ignorance.

Vinoba was singled out by Gandhi as one who would carry forward the work of liberating India from the cultural imperialism of the West. This book, based upon some 300 sources in Vinoba's speeches and writings, shows how he has pursued the task. Vinoba is no imitator of Gandhi. He is his own man, and so able to present Gandhian thinking as an expanding *idea* rather than an echo of what Gandhi said.

Vinoba believes that Bhoodan and Gramdan—the giving of land to the landless and the entrusting of land to village management—are natural fulfillments of Gandhi's program of spinning. A stateless, village society, evolved through widely applied non-violent action, is the goal. Following is Vinoba's historical perspective on the Sarvodaya movement:

The [Indian National] Congress began its work in 1885 and then the word "Swaraj" [Self-Rule] was discovered in 1906. Till then the work had been confined to serving the poor and criticizing the Government. In 1906, at the Calcutta session of the Congress, Dadabhai Naoroji declared that India's ills could not be cured except through Swaraj. Thus it took 21 years to reach the word "Swaraj." Then Gokhale and Tilak took up the word and gave it greater currency. Then Gandhiji came and the movement for Swaraj became intensified. In 1921 Gandhiji talked of "Swaraj in one year." This, to be sure, did not come off, but it created a climate. Ultimately Swaraj came in 1947, *i.e.*, 62 years after the founding of the Congress. Thus we may say that what we have achieved in the past 18 or 19 years [the Gramdan program] is not a small thing. The idea of reorganizing society on non-violent lines gained strength and popular sanction. In village after village people came and signed the Gramdan document in hundreds of thousands.

The idea of Sarvodaya [Welfare of All] has thus arrived at an important milestone. . . . It provides the ground-work, the foundation, for the realising of Bapu's dream of village Swaraj. A possibility has been created for bringing to fruition Bapu's half-fulfilled hopes. We have a unique opportunity to tend

from the roots the establishment of a non-violent social order. . . .

So long as gramdan is not accomplished we cannot have every village living like a family. We get no basis for our total work.

Vinoba wholly rejects the idea that Gandhi "pursued politics." He points out that after the liberation of India, Gandhi recommended that the Congress Party abandon its political role and devote itself to social service. Gandhi himself did this, having already started while "festivities were going on in Delhi in celebration of independence."

You will remember that just before his death Gandhiji issued the directive that the Congress, having achieved its aim of securing Swaraj for the country, should convert itself into a Lok Sevak Sangh and take up the service of the masses. It was his last will and testament as regards the Congress and was written just a day before his death. In it he had said: "The Congress has achieved political freedom but it has yet to achieve social, economic and moral freedom in terms of the millions." It was Bapu's wish that for furtherance of this work a Lok Sevak Sangh should be formed, that the Congress should merge itself in it completely, and that in addition all the workers engaged in constructive and social work, such as *khadi* and village industries, basic education, women's welfare, Harijan uplift, Hindu-Muslim unity, Shanti Sena [Peace Brigade] and economic well-being, should bring themselves under it. He felt that such an organization should cut across all parties and sects and pledge itself to the task of making every village in India self-sufficient. . . .

Gandhiji's advice, had it been implemented, would have been a blessing to the Congress. The Congress then would have lived for ages to come. He wanted so to change the character of the Congress as to make it immortal. Name is greater than form. Bapu wanted to destroy the form of the Congress in order to perpetuate its name. Our Congress has a special place in the history of freedom movements in the world. The great work that the Congress did for the freedom of India has no parallel anywhere in world history. The Congress waged a non-violent war; Gandhiji wanted that the name of this Congress should shine forth forever. . . . For its future Gandhiji had a grand, sublime conception according to which the Congress would undergo a metamorphosis and dedicate itself to constructive work, so that it would not only retain the influence it had acquired as a

result of its work in the past but add to it. It was a noble conception. When I ponder over it, I can see that it has the grandeur of Upanishadic thought. Without real genius such a conception is not possible.

Did Gandhi really expect the Congress to dissolve into a welfare body—to give up its hard-earned power? That is not Vinoba's point:

Logic is one thing, genius quite another. A logical statement cannot be refuted by logic. On the plane of logic it is valid. But Bapu did not see things the way a man of mere common sense saw them. This is not to say that Bapu was not possessed of common sense. But he had an uncommon sense—a sort of sixth sense—as well, and he could therefore see what other people could not, namely that if the Congress took up the work of government, its program of *lokaniti* would degenerate into politics. . . . Today the situation is such that there is no individual or organization in the country with enough moral authority whose voice would be listened to by the entire country. . . . Moral leadership is entirely lacking and a kind of inertia, emptiness and bewilderment has seized the people. They do not know what they are to do, where they are to go. We would not have come to this sorry pass if Gandhiji's words had been heeded.

The subtleties as well as the simplicities of the thought of Gandhi and Vinoba are on every page of this interesting book, which may be ordered for about a dollar (add postage) in paperback, and \$7.00 in hardback, from Sarva Seva Prakashan, Rajghat, Varanasi, India. (Or, perhaps, in America, from Greenleaf Books, South Acworth, N.H.)