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IN DEFENSE OF REASON

THE question of whether or not human beings have the power of choice—whether or not they are free, within certain limits, to act originally and creatively, according to their independent judgment—used to be regarded as entirely a religious issue, as the great controversy between Augustine and Pelagius makes clear. Today it is thought of as a scientific question. It is certainly the case that practically all scientific studies of the nature of man begin with an examination of shaping forces outside of human beings, seeking to explain human nature and behavior by causes which operate independently of anything resembling "human decision." Is man, then, anything in himself? It is difficult to find any sort of affirmative answer to this question in scientific literature.

The situation is a very curious one. Being human themselves, scientists pursue their investigations *as if* they had distinctive intentions and purposes unique to themselves; they employ logic, which is surely a discipline of the mind, to support and defend their theories; they possess, like other men, spontaneous concern for the values of justice, intellectual integrity, and responsible behavior, which are known to us only through our relationships with ourselves and other human beings, yet they have no substantial theory of man which can account for the independent reality of these qualities. In science, there is tacit acceptance of them for practical purposes, but explicit neglect or denial of them for scientific purposes.

There have been notable exceptions to this attitude or practice among scientists. Their difficulty has been that they have not known how to give an account of the distinctively human qualities of man in terms acceptable to the world of science at large. So they maintain open minds themselves, but practice reticence.

It is possible of course to offer an empirical account of the distinctive qualities of human beings. They are simply *given*, we may say; men have moral qualities, creative abilities, and now and then are splendidly heroic or extraordinarily wise. This we are obliged to admit, since our common experience reveals the fact and all literature testifies to it. But what the orderly mind of the scientist wants is a genetic or *causal* account of these qualities, and this it does not seem possible to supply. If, for example, you could explain a great work of art in terms of simple, mechanistic causation, what reason would there then be for calling it a "work of art"? For by explaining it as the result of a series of ticketed causes, the act of creation by the artist is made to lose its reality. The artist was merely the location where the lightning struck, where the event took place. He did not cause it, for indeed there is no longer a "he" in the intuitive sense that we use this pronoun. The "he" has been reduced to a concatenation of causes. "He" is an illusion.

Why this rule of—we might say "passion for"—reduction of human independence and unique capacity to nothing but a collection of external causes?

It could be said that there are two reasons—a good reason and a bad one. The good reason grows out of one of those human qualities which are "given," which is the desire to know, to reach certainty, to have an explanation for why things are as they are. Deep-seated in all men is the conviction that happenings in nature occur for reasons. When a volcano erupts, we say that pressures beneath the earth found a way of escaping at a place where the surface was thin and gases and lava could burst forth like a fountain. We don't say, except in poetry, that the volcano decided to create a pyrotechnic display. It seems

more *reasonable* to use the geophysical explanation.

But men do decide to put on pyrotechnical displays! Is it "reasonable," then, to deny that there is any distinction between human and geophysical behavior? The question is of course too simple. It might be argued, for example, that since peacocks like to make dramatic visual displays out of their tails, in order to attract the peahens, men make displays for similar reasons, although their motivations are of course much more complicated.

In short, one ideal of science, or of a certain sort of science, has been to learn how to ticket with causes everything that human beings do, so that, eventually, all human behavior can be explained as special cases of the more familiar sorts of mechanical, chemical, and biological causation we have been able to identify in the world of nature. Such science would be complete when it becomes possible to say that Man doesn't *do* anything at all; he is not ever a cause, but an effect, although a very complicated one, better spoken of as a vast constellation of effects which we now have traced to their causes and completely "explained." In those circumstances, man, as we now conceive of him, would no longer even exist.

One who pursues this objective with thoroughness and determination is not likely to want to contemplate the possibility that the world of nature (which includes human beings) is somehow a mix of endless causal chains and points of origin for *new beginnings* which cannot be traced to prior determinants. What chaos such a notion brings to the reductionist mind! So the idea that men may be and sometimes are sources of uncaused causation—which is the meaning of originality, freedom, creativity, and moral responsibility—becomes almost totally unacceptable. One might say that in such case the will to explain has become more powerful than the will to be human.

But there is also the bad reason to consider. Freedom involves responsibility, as has been suggested. If men can choose, they are accountable for what they do. As William Glasser says to his delinquent adolescents: "Don't tell me you come from a broken home; I know about that. I want you to stop stealing cars." Dr. Glasser found that there was no psychological health in mechanistic explanations. If people believe that they are doomed by their pasts, they will make no effort to improve their present, and their future will remain less than dubious.

So the bad reason for clinging to mechanistic explanations is the license it gives to drift and acceptance of what is. In a mechanistic world, there is no meaning for *ought*, no gap dividing what is from what might be. *Of course* we have to fight unimaginably destructive nuclear wars, and to get ready for them immediately, since our ancestors, the killer apes, have shown us the way that we shall always be, and our attachment to territorial imperatives comes to us honorably, through our genes.

Well, what shall we do? If natural history is a study which is meant to compel us to become men like beasts instead of men like gods—an idea which is grievously unjust to the beasts, as Kropotkin and later writers have shown—then we still have a choice: We can decide to develop another sort of natural history or abandon it entirely in favor of the immediacies of our own intuition, our feeling that what is given in consciousness is better evidence of who and what we are than the claims of the reductionist scientists. So this is a threefold choice: between two sorts of natural history and between anti-human natural history and no natural history. Already a great many of the young are voting for the third choice, which is a pity, since there is really no escape from science, but only an escape into fantasy, which may be even worse than reductionist science, in the name of human freedom.

Fortunately, there are eminent scientists—one is tempted to call them the *real* scientists—who have opted for a better sort of natural history. Leaving the basic metaphysical questions to others, which is probably proper in a scientist, they are combining forces to show that reductionism of the sort we have described ends in a *reductio ad absurdum.* Carried to its logical conclusion, reductionism makes science itself ridiculous. A pioneer in this reform of science is Michael Polanyi, often referred to in these pages, whose modern classic, *Personal Knowledge* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), lays the foundation for a future science based securely on the humanness of human beings. L. L. Whyte is another thinker who has consistently labored for this sort of renaissance in scientific thinking.

The most recent publication with content along these lines is the book, *Beyond Reductionism* (Macmillan, 1970), edited by Arthur Koestler and J. R. Smythies, containing material opposing mechanistic simplification, offered by an impressive array of biologists and other scientists, including Viktor Frankl, the Viennese psychiatrist. Then, last year, the English archaeologist, Jacquetta Hawkes (in private life Mrs. J. B. Priestley), gave a lecture at the University of Washington in which she considered the alternatives which were suggested by her title: "Nothing But or Something More." Is man "nothing but" a focus of effects from causes with which he had nothing to do, or is he considerably more than this reductive way of practicing the human sciences would make him?

Miss Hawkes gets into her subject by speaking of her background of knowing leading scientists from childhood, through her family. She mentions Julian Huxley in particular, then relates:

> In 1954, in a book called *Man on Earth,* I was bold enough to say that I could not believe that the evolution of life on earth was exclusively the result of natural selection working upon random variation. Soon afterwards I was hit by a broadside from Julian. He wrote, to summarize, that I showed unforgiveable ignorance, arrogance and impertinence in my puerile questioning of neo-Darwinism. Its tenets, he explained, had now been proven mathematically and stood far more securely than the pillars of the British Museum.

The point of quoting this part of Miss Hawkes' paper is that it shows how tender and wondering are the feelings of some of our most distinguished scientists, underneath their tough-minded exterior. There is always the need to maintain the *discipline* of science, and the obligation to avoid any form of wishful thinking. Yet the human being in the scientist remains a presence that will not be denied, and is not denied, in the best of them. As Jacquetta Hawkes says:

> Later on, however, when the Huxleys were staying with us, we had an amicable discussion, and after I had managed to produce one or two of the more scientifically based difficulties in the doctrine, his whole attitude changed. He paced up and down my room in a state of emotion asking, "But if it's not natural selection working on random variation, what can it be? What can it be?"
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> I think it is fair to say that this change was due not to my undistinguished arguments, but to the fact that Julian Huxley is in some ways a man divided within himself. He not only reveres his brother, Aldous, but shares some of his tendencies toward mysticism. Then again, he has always been a field naturalist as well as an evolutionary scientist. He has a passionate love of animals and even plants, a native and unquestionable sense of awe and delighted wonder at their complexity, perfection and beauty. In fact, if it will carry more conviction to lapse into jargon, he may have a great knowledge of genotypes and their analytical study, but his deepest feeling is for the phenotype, the whole and living individual creature. Thus while he maintains an absolute faith in the doctrines derived from his illustrious ancestor and Charles Darwin, he can never be happy with the narrower, colder views of positivism, behaviourism and the general "nothing but" view of the universe to which they have tended to lead.

Then, drawing on material in *Beyond Reductionism,* the lecturer launches into a critique of reductionist views, pointing out that this mode of thinking has expanded a single method—the analytical—into a theory of all knowledge:

> What was really a method, one way of turning our brains upon limited aspects of the universe that has produced them, has tended to become a view of life, a totalitarian ideology. It has been held that nothing that cannot be measured and proved experimentally has any validity. Extreme, and I think we can say extremely naive, forms of behaviorism and positivism have captured able minds. Philosophy has been castrated, metaphysics made a dirty word.
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> Looked at in terms of *being*, reductionist thought suggests that the whole is no more than the sum of its parts and so leads to an old-fashioned mechanistic view. Applied to man this kind of thinking can still produce painful crudities. For example, that man "is nothing but a complex biochemical mechanism powered by a combustion system which energizes computers with prodigious storage facilities for retaining encoded information." Looked at in terms of *becoming*—that is within the dimension of time, reductionism suggests that the evolved form is explained by its origins, the fruit by its roots. This reduction to origins can be stopped at any point that pleases the reducer. A vast reading public was apparently delighted to be reduced to Desmond Morris's *Naked Ape*. Or, if we prefer it, we can go back to the assumption, to paraphrase, that there is nothing in man which was not first in the amoeba.

Coming to human development and the mind, Miss Hawkes draws on testimony from Jung and Chomsky to show that the human being has intrinsic characteristics not accounted for by any sort of mechanistic causation or "conditioning," finding even traces of a Lamarckian process in the consolidation by the species of lessons learned in the past. Mental activity, then, as a thing in itself, is a central and identifying characteristic of man, as is also his self-awareness, and these two are the foundation of uniquely human cultural development, which proceeds independently of the forces affecting "natural selection." The "struggle for existence" has little or nothing to do with the development of the arts, and high cultures in Meso-America illustrate the independence of the creative aspect of human achievement from the utilitarian and economic aspects of human existence.

Miss Hawkes is concerned with the prevalence of popular forms of reductionism which persist long after the emphasis in even the hard-core sciences has changed:

> The more extreme absurdities of behaviourism and logical positivism have died as they deserved among the elite, but they still spread among the rest of the populace. The mind is nothing but a computer, love is nothing but goal-inhibited sex, and so on. And still it comes down even from above: "Values and meanings *are nothing but* defence mechanisms and reaction formations," some of your value psychologists are saying. It is a kind of belittlement of man that goes with the breaking down of the whole person into little parts and finding nothing human in them; the kind of sub-humanism that sees defecating as being in some way more real and therefore more important than writing a poem.

The fact is, however, that these people are rapidly losing their audience. As Miss Hawkes says in her conclusion:

> Yet people cannot really stand it. The will to meaning proves to be at least as essential to us as the will to pleasure or to power, and the psychiatrists are finding that its suppression produces its own neuroses. Most significantly the young can't stand it and are creating, some of them, their counterculture. They are obviously quite right to turn back to the sadly neglected inner life, to seek to deepen and heighten consciousness. That, rather than production and consumption, is the specific responsibility of man. They are quite right to revolt against the monstrous tyranny of technocracy—a tyranny which has been made easier by our loss of faith in the value of our higher capacity as artists, thinkers, vehicles of religious experience. But they are wrong when they turn their backs on intellect and reason and try to lose themselves in an inner dream.

All through our discussion thus far, it is likely that, for some readers, a basic question has been rearing its insistent head: Why do these intelligent scientific thinkers who know better than the reductionist advocates change so *slowly*, and why are they so cautious? Don't they know that the world will probably pass them by?

The question is pertinent and needs an answer, since the world, or a large part of it, has already passed them by. In a remarkable book

published last year, *At the Edge of History*, the young humanist scholar and cultural historian, William Irwin Thompson, gives what is certainly the right answer. In his final chapter, "The Re-Visioning of History," he shows how far away from the intellectual life of the common people the academic community has drifted, so that many professors don't even know what the rest of the world is thinking and believing. The intellectuals may be reading Herman Kahn's version of the year 2000, but hundreds of thousands are reading—or were a few years ago—the prophecies of Edgar Cayce, and some people are devising new mythologies from them. And when a thread of reality is shown to exist in some of these prophecies, such as the idea of a great drowned continent at the bottom of the Atlantic, as a result of recent discoveries, the academicians take no notice of it, while the common people begin to think that Cayce told the undiluted truth. Who can distinguish the true prophets from the mere emotionalists? Who can recognize the realities of history behind the glimmering romance of myth? Better, most scholars say, to ignore the whole disturbing ferment of popular interests and go on with our proper business.

Yet the proper business of the learned is not so easily defined. As Mr. Thompson says:

> The tragedy of history repeats itself, for the university that was once persecuted and controlled by the church has now become the church of the technocratic world. The Galileos of today are not likely to be kneeling before cardinals and mumbling the truth under their breath, they will be kneeling before professors with tenure. And so the university will go about its *business*, while a new race of intellectuals grows up outside it to challenge its imaginative ability to create. Unfortunately for all of us, it will be difficult to distinguish the charlatan from the original thinker. The tragic condition of the double-bind will be as true outside the university as it is within.

Which is a way of saying that the only trustworthy guide in the exercise of human intelligence is human intelligence. We can hope for no salvation from either Holy Writ or the word of the physicists—nineteenth-century physicists, that is. The institutions will not save us. The "authorities" are mostly timid men who do not realize that the time has come to make some changes in the assumptions of their disciplines. Either that, or their disciplines will be jettisoned by an angry populace that has grown tired of all the delays.

In a paragraph toward the end of his book, Mr. Thompson returns to this dilemma of the double-bind. He knows that changes are going on at both ends of the cultural spectrum: discoverers are turning up finds that ought to affect both history and archaeology, but no reputable academic dares to point to their possible significance—he would probably lose his job. Meanwhile the people, not willing to accept the industrial-technocratic doctrine of progress any longer, are turning to bizarre cargo-cult teachings that they improvise almost from day to day. There seems to be no middle ground: if you loosen up from academic conservatism, you become some sort of True Believer. As Thompson puts it: "one purchased discipline at a cost of imagination; one purchased imagination at the cost of discipline; a disciplined imagination was a contradiction in terms." With this sort of Hobson's choice before them, it has been quite natural for scientists and academics to move very slowly indeed.

The dilemma is real. Thompson muses on one form of it presented by the views of a Mixtec Indian he met at Monte Alban, Mexico, site of notable ancient remains. The Indian told him that the date of 1500 B.C. for the remains had been rejected by the archaeologists as "too early." The Indian thought it right, and Thompson was inclined to agree, but then he found that by agreeing he had half committed himself to other beliefs of the Indian, such as that space ships had originally planted the Meso-American culture on earth and that the helmets on the large negroid Olmec heads were actually the head-gear of space pilots! What price open-mindedness!

There is both truth and irony in his conclusion:

> If one twisted his head around in the position recommended by the Mixtec Indian (and some new books) to entertain the view that primitives aren't primitive and that when they say that the gods came out of the sky bringing the arts of civilization, we are to take them literally then the university which Plato founded, has ended up in Plato's cave. It is much easier to hold onto the idea of the "cargo cult," and to see the followers as people suffering from the stress of a highly complex, pluralistic society that no longer provides the mythic comforts of a religious society. For a person like myself, a cultural historian working within a university, it becomes much simpler to follow Plato and Oviedo and identify the gods with the superior technology as the denizens of the lost continent of Atlantis. The two theories of course, are not mutually exclusive, and many of the uneducated have already made up their minds in favor of the gods, which only forces the professors back to protect themselves from their eager sci-fi, hippie students. As the mind of the university hardens and the minds of the dropouts loosen almost to the point of coming apart, one will be able to appreciate why the ancients believed in keeping knowledge as a secret mystery for the initiate.

This is plainly a time when the best of the scientists and professors ought not to be left alone, to fight their battle for the continued use of reason.

REVIEW
THE GREAT MORAL DILEMMA

Two books we have for review may be usefully considered together. One is *Race and the American Romantics* (Schocken, 1971, $12.50) edited by Vincent Freimarck and Bernard Rosenthal, made up of writings on the issue of slavery in the United States by Poe, Whitman, Hawthorne, Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau, Bryant, Lowell, and Melville. The other book is *Mohandas Gandhi*, a short life by George Woodcock (Viking paperback, 1971, $1.95). These books go together because the problem set in both of them is the resistance of human nature to goodness and right, and the slow response of men to appeals to act decently and justly, especially when powerful institutions are actively rationalizing and enforcing policies with an opposite tendency.

In the nineteenth century, no really workable solution for this problem was found. The Civil War was not a solution. The Abolitionist Movement, as Kenneth Rexroth has remarked, was the first "American Left"—a view extensively developed by the radical historian, Staughton Lynd—but only lately has it been realized how completely the Civil War failed to achieve its objectives, so far as liberation of the American Blacks is concerned. Of greatest interest in *Race and the American Romantics* is the inner struggle of thoughtful, sensitive men who abhorred violence, yet found themselves hating the institution of slavery even more. One could say that they found no resolution for this dilemma, and were forced to live with its terrible moral contradiction as best they could. Tougher, coarser souls had meanwhile no difficulty in choosing a position and declaring themselves.

It is saddening, and perhaps chastening, to realize that so many of the fine minds of the nineteenth century were in some sense racist, despite their strong humanitarian impulses. Saddening, because one hates to discover that so fine a story-teller and poet as Edgar Allan Poe shared the views on slavery of its staunch Southern defender, John C. Calhoun; and chastening, since these nineteenth-century views are bound to make the reader wonder a bit about the prejudices he may harbor without knowing it. Writers and intellectuals, like others, are the children of their age, and moral ideas seem to change very slowly on a mass scale. The people of the state of California, for example, might ask themselves why it took so long for them, as a self-governing community, to outlaw capital punishment. It certainly should have been evident before the year 1972 that, in the recent words of the State Supreme Court, "capital punishment is impermissibly cruel," and that it "degrades and dehumanizes all who participate in its processes." Vengeance, the court declared, is "incompatible with the dignity of an enlightened society." Concluding the decision, the court observed that its finding that capital punishment is unconstitutional under the California constitution is "not grounded in sympathy for those who commit crimes of violence, but in concern for the society which diminishes itself whenever it takes the life of one of its members."

The dilemma which confronted humane Americans of the nineteenth century, in relation to slavery, grew out of the moral reality which is here recognized. A resolution was found, and by no means an easy one, only in the twentieth century, by Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi's answer to injustice and oppression and violence, if carefully studied, is likely to lead to considerable patience with the men of the nineteenth century, who found the moral decisions created by the institution of slavery so difficult to meet.

Emerson, for example, felt bound by his allegiance to the transcendentalist credo that "the improvement of the world would stem from self-perfection," and he could not admire the political passions of abolitionism. Only the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act moved him, reluctantly yet determinedly, in the direction of political action.

In their Introduction to *Race and the American Romantics*, the editors say:

> In 1851, addressing the citizens of Concord, Emerson had delivered an attack on the Fugitive Slave Act which, no less than Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," called upon his countrymen to disobey unjust laws. He fiercely defended abolitionists against the accusation that their activity was responsible for the severity of slavery laws in the South, and he denied the validity of any laws. that were "evidently contrary to the laws of God." Such an unequivocal position represented in Emerson's mind a moral authority that rendered absurd any sophistries designed to defend the Fugitive Slave Act. "Against a principle like this," insisted the usually genteel Emerson, "all the arguments of Mr. Webster are the spray of a child's squirt against a granite wall." This intensity of feeling notwithstanding Emerson still remained uncomfortable in the role of political activist. Or to state the matter more directly, the struggle between the call to political activism and the call of self-perfection remained to haunt him.

Unfortunately, the language used here to describe Emerson's feelings makes him sound priggish and spiritually "ambitious," but Emerson was not at all like that. Rather, he must have had a deep faith that it is basically more important for a man to order his own life than to order other peoples', since what a man does of his own will is likely to last, while what others are coerced into doing may not last at all, and may lead to unpredictably ugly consequences. These matters cannot really be so neatly defined or explained as Freimarck and Rosenthal seem to suggest. They do, however, speak of entries in Emerson's journal which tell of sleepless nights spent in wondering how he should respond to the question of slavery:

> Chastising himself at first for failing to be more politically active in resisting slavery, he went on to soothe himself with the notion that the internal slaves imprisoned in the human mind demanded his attention more than the human slaves held in physical bondage. That he remained opposed to slavery, to the obscene compromises of America's Websters remains unquestionable. His renewal of the attack in 1854 against Webster's compromise alone attests to that. But Emerson could never be comfortable in the role of polemicist. Ultimately, like Thoreau, Emerson gave his stamp of approval to the total political commitment of John Brown. But to do so, he had to resort to rhetorical magic and equate John Brown's action with an act of divine love. Never comfortable with public action, and never quite finding a key for the regeneration of the world in private contemplation, Emerson ultimately found neither course satisfactory. His transcendental theology was too ingrained to be shaken loose by an institution he regarded as vile, but the institution was too heavy a weight to be borne by transcendental doctrine. In the end, Emerson could commit himself wholly neither to public activity nor to private theology.

Thoreau made a similar move from an inward outlook to a form of activism, but he went further than Emerson and apparently with fewer doubts. The essay on civil disobedience came before this move. The position he took in the essay was this:

> "It is not a man's duty," he wrote, "as a matter of course to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he give it thought no longer, not to give it practically his support." Here was the essence of his argument. One did not seek to confront the government; one sought where possible, to obey its laws. Only when those laws prove] morally odious did the individual violate the law and let his "life be a counter-friction to stop the machine." The point is that action was private, singular. Abolitionists were at fault for trying to achieve their majority when in fact the single man in the right constituted "a majority of one already." One can scarcely repeat too often the privateness, the spirituality of this philosophical position.

But in "Slavery in Massachusetts" and "Plea for Captain John Brown," Thoreau seems shocked out of this position. As the editors say, "It is now Cromwell, more than Christ, who exists in history as the man to be emulated. . . . Thoreau was ready to accept the implications of what John Brown had done." He wrote: "I shall not be forward to think him mistaken in his method who quickest succeeds to liberate the slaves."

The activists of the abolitionist movement were firmly convinced not only of the righteousness of their cause, but of the appropriateness of their means. As Rexroth says, they thought of the Civil War as a great

revolutionary struggle, and when the North was victorious, they believed the revolution had been won. Disillusionment was resisted for many years; one might even say that that revolution must now be won all over again, and on a more Gandhian basis.

Earlier we suggested that Gandhi did provide a resolution of the dilemma which was left without clues in the nineteenth century. But Gandhi, unlike the successful abolitionists, understood far better the small measure of his "success." The validity of his ideas is perhaps better understood in the light of this realism. One could say that he was brilliantly successful in achieving the political liberation of India. As George Woodcock puts it, "he had made sure that, even if India were to be governed badly, it would be governed at least by Indians." But the partition of India and the violence to which it led made him feel, in the last years of his life, "that he had failed indeed." Woodcock writes:

> Gandhi's sense of failure at the point of India's liberation and the disillusionment of those who today observe India and compare it with the Spartan commonwealth of renewed villages that he envisioned, are both appropriate reactions (though, as I shall seek to show, they do not take account of the totality of his achievement). For Gandhi was a political activist, judging his theories by their results. What he thought, he tested in practice. Practice in turn helped to shape his thought, so that he could talk with accuracy of his career as a series of "experiments with truth."

George Woodcock is a Canadian writer of anarchist persuasion; he is hardheaded but at the same time more appreciative than most Westerners of the shrewd wisdom and practical psychological value of some of Gandhi's apparently absurd ideas. On balance, he sees in Gandhi's thinking the resolution we have suggested:

> If a viable alternative to the mystiques of violence that have recently characterized radical movements in the West and in the Third World alike is to be devised, there are few directions of search likely to be profitable; one of them is a continuation into changed times and circumstances of Gandhi's "experiments with Truth." The virtue and meaning of those experiments were conferred by their relation to existence; they become most significant when they are considered in relation to the life in which Gandhi developed and realized them in action.

COMMENTARY
SCIENCE AND CULTURE

WHAT William Irwin Thompson calls the "tragic condition of the double-bind" (see page 7) is the central problem of public education. It grows out of the unimaginative conservatism of academic science and scholarship, on the one hand, and the resulting "cargo cult" fantasies which tend to dominate popular opinion, on the other.

Two other writers on education help to set the problem more exactly. In *Mission of the University* Ortega has an important chapter on the difference between science and culture. Culture is what men live by, their ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, fact and fiction. Science is not the same as culture; science develops, not in relation to life, but according to its own internal necessities and interests. Science may contribute to culture, but it is not, as Ortega says, a *"vital* concern."

It might be added that science has virtually nothing to say about human beings as *subjects,* as centers of moral and cognitive consciousness who make decisions and act upon them. Science is devoted to the great abstraction of the "objective world," while man's life is an intensely subjective reality.

The other writer is Northrop Frye, whose recent book, *The Stubborn Structure* (Cornell University Press, 1970), has lucid passages on the relation between science and the structure of conviction by which men live, which Frye calls their "myth of concern." When culture absorbs science, Frye shows, it transforms scientific ideas into mythic elements. It is then no longer "science" but part of a philosophy of life. Frye, one could say, shows how this happens, and Ortega shows that it is inevitable.

We need not concern ourselves too much with terms—others will do as well if the word "myth" seems inadequate here. If we recognize that there are good myths and bad ones, ennobling faiths and degrading ones, and that *all* men live by faith, the word used does not matter so much.

It is foolish, Frye thinks, to speak of "demythologizing" man's thinking, since the demythologizers are all mythmakers. It is desirable rather to become aware of how we think, and to improve the quality of the process through increased self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness is the root of all autonomy, and autonomy is a synonym of freedom. As we see more clearly what we are doing, we become better able to teach.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
CAN THIS BE PLANNED?

OUR office atlas—an old one, to be sure—shows only a county (pop. 11,000) in Ontario with the name of Lincoln, so this will have to serve as identification for the long letter now to be quoted from the Lincolnshire *Echo,* dated Aug. 27, 1971, in the clipping sent to us by a Canadian reader who lives in the Province of Quebec. The writer of the letter is Mrs. Susan Davies, a retired lady who returned to spend the rest of her life in Lincoln, where she was raised. Her subject is children's playgrounds, specifically, the one she played in as a child, which wasn't then called a playground, as it is today, since it was quite different in appearance. As Mrs. Davies says:

> The area was between Mount-street School and Lark-lane, Newport. It is, I believe, although now levelled out, still known as "The Hollows," but it used to be rough grass with natural hollows and hummocks, complete with a collection of old rubber tyres and boxes and other useful things for many imaginative games.
>
> Perhaps as a very frequent weekend and holiday visitor to my relatives, I was able to "stand back," as it were, and observe the value of that waste ground to growing children.

What led Mrs. Davies to write her letter to the *Echo*? Apparently, another observer of the conventional, pipe-fitted-swing area that the Hollows has become wrote in to the paper saying that the children needed an "Adventure Playground." Mrs. Davies writes to point out that they once *had* one, but it got cleaned up, levelled off, and, one could add, made uninteresting. It was, in short, polluted with adult efficiency and do-good rationalism.

By contrast, Mrs. Davies says of the old Hollows:

> One asset was that by its very nature it was not considered as a place to keep clean in, but the mothers in their native wisdom knew where their children were and they could be called home easily.
>
> Also, it had its attractions, which were created by the children themselves, catered for approximately the three to 11-year-olds, which meant that young children were under the watchful care of older brothers and sisters.

That expression, "catered for," by some quirk of association, made us remember the grown men who spend their days, and maybe their nights, trying to think up new premiums to put in cereal boxes that will get the children to pester their parents into buying whatever else is in the box. Then there is all the "catering" that is done to children in the television programs. Probably the men who most successfully think of what to do next to fascinate little children get forty or fifty thousand dollars a year. What an occupation for so-called grown-ups! When will people like that start getting ashamed of themselves? Somebody should speak to Ralph Nader about it. Of course, the parents who leave television sets around are almost as much to blame. It might be that a machine that duplicates such Machiavellian infamy ought to be boycotted by everyone who loves children—or even loves adults. . . . Well, back to the Hollows, and the good kind of catering:

> The most interesting part of this area was a patch of ground that traditionally belonged to the three to nine-year-old group. Looking back, I can now see how this particular group's activities in this setting was a spontaneous, natural adventure playground with the potentialities and disciplines of a modern nursery school.
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> An outsider passing by would have seen a collection of piles of "junk" made up of corrugated iron, wood, orange boxes, old baking tins and jugs. On closer inspection, it would have been noticed that there was a system and tidiness about the piles, and those really "in the know" would have been aware that concealed in the holes in the ground were cotton bags full of broken crockery of assorted shapes and colours.
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> We children knew every piece of iron and wood; they were precious to us. Each piece had its place and, if lost or broken, was replaced as soon as possible. At the beginning of each playing day they magically became shops and houses.
>
> The absorption and interest in this small community was complete. The older children, who

had been part of it when younger, took a kindly interest in it when passing through on their way to more mature pursuits.

Our day started as early as possible. Each construction had to be erected and stocked. Pebbles, grass and weeds were sold as vegetables.

We would sit contentedly mixing up mud, putting it in baking tins, and decorating the tops with wild flowers and leaves. The very young were allowed to help and filled small buckets with dirt to help make pies.

Paper dolls and shapes were cut out and coloured.

All these various items would be put on the tiny shop counters and we would happily go to and from each other's shops buying and selling with our bags of pottery money. This money must have been in circulation in this children's community for a considerable time, because our parents had played the same game.

There was a strict discipline about the value of the colour and size of the broken pieces of pottery. The children had grown up with the rules and any new pieces added to the currency were seriously judged and valued.

Once the shops had been erected for the day they stayed up. When the children went home for meals all was silent until they returned. As bedtime approached and mothers began calling, each piece of wood and iron was reluctantly taken down and put in its own pile, the baking tins were emptied out, and the money buried again.

A picture shows the playground in this area as it is now—swings and slides with nice little girls sitting sedately here and there on the equipment. "The planners," says Mrs. Davies, "perhaps rightly, saw it as an area to be tidied up, but for several decades of children it had been a happy and vitally solid part of their early and formative years."

So it looked like just a dirty old vacant lot. As buildings grew up around it, the place couldn't be left that way! Is that what happened? What sort of imagination do planners need to develop to take Mrs. Davies' kind of awareness into consideration in making their plans? What happens to children who grow up starved for this sort of experience, without ever knowing what is missing from their lives? Do the law-and-order people ever ask questions like this?

Mrs. Davies has more to tell:

Quarrels did occur. Some were make-believe in imitation of the adult world. Others were real to that situation. The quarrels quickly became settled because of tradition and the closeness of the community. Vandalism against the "shops" was rare and usually done by an outsider. The older and tougher boys had a soft spot for what had been their "shops." Their shocked attitude against outsiders who knocked the kids' shops down was sufficient protection.

During the day this shop game was alternated with other traditional games of skipping, hopscotch, marbles, etc., and the officially erected swings near the Mount-street School were well used.

Mrs. Davies says in conclusion:

Childhood is short and in later life it is good to be able to remember the anticipation a child feels when he rushes out early in the morning to a full day's interest before him, and to feel grubby but contented at the end of the day.

The child does not realize it, of course, but it is also another day's lesson on how to live with others, how to communicate, and how to create and build. Children will make interest for themselves from very little, but when even that very little is taken away, as it is in our modern towns, then frustration and destructiveness increases, as I witnessed many times when living in London.

Lincoln is still a warm and human place to live in. It has not yet reached the stage of being a neat formation of concrete and glass, housing thousands of people, with small squares of grass and one tree and with notices saying, "No children allowed to play here."

There is no reason why imaginative and adventurous areas for children should not be incorporated near new housing ventures. In fact, it is essential that they should be.

Even large cities used to have odd places like the Hollows where children could play, but most of them are gone now. Another kind of planning is needed.

FRONTIERS

What Came in the Mail

MANAS has its share of under-thirty readers—most of them students—who write in asking questions, making suggestions, and requesting extra copies of particular issues. But we also have some over-eighty readers, and when we hear from them it always seems that they have lived rich and varied lives. A letter which arrived recently said in part:

> I often wonder how we are going to get out of the mess we have made of our country. We have become such wasters and have such mistaken ideas of what a "Good Life" is that something very radical must come. . . . If I find more good quotations when I look through my scrapbooks, I shall send them. At present I am not too well, age weighs heavily on my shoulders, I am eighty-five. I live in a home for the aged, another modern invention, and what I could write about these homes!

With this letter came a clipping which showed, among other things, that while the dissenting members of the younger generation may not know what the Good Life is, they are pretty certain about what it *isn't.* The young are qualified experts on what ought not to be done, and the rest of the country is slowly coming around to agreeing with them on a number of points.

This is not, of course, good enough. We have Ralph Nader and some others like him who tell us about all the things that ought to be stopped, and they can be expected to continue in this job for as long as need be; but judging from the present rate of change they'll be needed forever. So it isn't good enough. The problem is rather to discover how to help people to *want* something better, not just vaguely or desperately, but specifically, so that, with a minimum of organization, they can begin to act on better ideas of the "Good Life."

A lot of people have already gone to work in these directions, usually in reaction to the obviously bad things about modern life. There are a great many advocates of sensible diet and natural foods and organic gardening methods. Lots of young parents are starting schools. Few of the new schools are able to last, but some do, and the ones that survive are probably doing some good, with everybody learning from the experience of improvising and getting along with small material resources. Many thousands of young men are determined not to go to war, and as a consequence of taking this step some are wondering what sort of a life will have some consistency with war resistance. The best of today's scientists are totally disgusted with the perversions of scientific discovery by aggressively acquisitive technology and wonder how a new beginning can be made in man's cognitive relations with nature. The universal hunger for community is producing countless experiments in new forms of cooperative living, some of them bizarre and ridiculous, others exciting and inspiring. At all these levels, quite plainly, practical changes are on the way.

But these are, you could say, areas of limited vision. They represent attempts to correct mistakes and abuses that have had serious visible consequences which can be seen on every hand. No doubt reforms of this sort are necessary, and probably prerequisite as conditions for being able to see and think in terms of a larger vision, or a more comprehensive way of conceiving the meaning of the Good Life. But there is a sense in which our order of proceeding may be backward or reversed.

In a normal situation, the philosophical attitude or basic sense of meaning governs everything else. A man with high purposes tends naturally to develop good habits, because he sees that their efficiencies serve his purposes well. And so on, down the line of the practical applications of his vision. If a man decides to have the good habits, first, without thinking through to the reason for them, he may start a sect and elevate what he eats to almost a religious rite. He may, as one book did recently, declare that we ought to

put an end to crime by giving up white sugar. Without vision, forms and practices become objects of excessive veneration, since human beings do have the capacities for total commitment, and they want to feel that what they believe in is the way, the truth, and the light.

We know what too tender a regard for religious forms can do to people, in the process of a few hundred years of indoctrination. As objects of total commitment, they can lead to genocidal wars, such as the long religious wars of Europe, such as the recent horrors in Bangladesh, and to brutal intolerance and killings as today in Ulster, Ireland. And a similar passionate attachment to economic theories and political forms, whether or not they are understood, can lead to the purges and wars which have made the twentieth century the bloodiest of all.

But perhaps the mess we have got our country into is so bad that we can't begin to think with vision about the meaning of the good life without acquiring a few constructive habits, and perhaps the sectarianism of all the little reform movements, in diet, in community, in dress, and other peripheral activities must be endured in the same way that parents now endure the passionate attachment, for a few years, of the young for, say, surfing, or motorcycles and scooters, since these and similar enthusiasms are a natural part of growing up. We don't expect the young to start in to think seriously until they have gotten these urges out of their system, or have brought them into balance with the other activities. The capacity to philosophize comes with maturity, and the basic ill of our country seems to be that it has no maturity, and so must move toward responsibility and the capacity for vision as, in general, the young do, by taking on lesser disciplines first and making progress unevenly, by fits and starts. Just now we seem to be having more fits than starts.