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MYTHS: A BRIEF EXPLORATION

THE increasing popularity of the idea of myths as the keys to larger human meanings makes an inquiry into their function in thought of considerable importance. Hardly any general term is more loosely applied than myth, yet the word's implications are so capacious that this does not seem a serious abuse. What were once called legends, allegories, parables, complex metaphors, and symbolic personifications are now all spoken of as "myths." Myths seem always to be in some sense "explanations." They have to do with how things have become as they are, why men are as they are, and with how things and people may be improved. They deal with "becoming," and with the motives behind acts of becoming. They describe the obstacles and barriers to becoming. They might be said to provide a simple, "illustrated" psycho-dynamics. It is now often maintained that whatever conception of ends and means a man lives by can be called a myth, since almost invariably what he regards as his *knowledge* has so many gaps in it that it does not really serve as a basis for action. A man bridges the gaps in his knowledge by a synthesizing myth. What he knows of "science," if he makes it a part of his faith or world-view, comes in by being absorbed into his myth. As scientists know, what they think of as scientific knowledge is continually being stretched out and changed or deformed beyond recognition by men who suppose themselves to be living according to the dictates of science.

A clarifying formulation of the human situation, from this general point of view, is made by Northrop Frye in *The Stubborn Structure:*

> Education is concerned with two worlds: the world that man lives in and the world he wants to live in. It would, of course, be nonsense to say that the former was the business of the sciences and the latter the business of the humanities and the arts. But it is true that science is primarily the order of nature, the world that is there: it is true also that the form of the world man wants to live in is the form of the world he keeps trying to build, the world of cities and gardens and libraries and highways that is a world of art. We come closer to their relation if we say that the two great divisions of liberal knowledge embody two moral attitudes which are also intellectual virtues. The distinctive intellectual virtue of science is detachment, the objective consideration of evidence, the drawing of rational conclusions from evidence, the rejection of all devices for cooking or manipulating the evidence. Such a virtue is most obvious in the sciences that are founded on the repeatable experiment.

But the virtue of detachment can and is also practiced in the field of history and in other studies which are nonexperimental and non-predictive. And even in the arts the careful exercise of craftsmanship has a moral resemblance to impartiality in the sciences. But in the arts are to be found elements and intentions that seem quite absent in the sciences, as so defined. The arts reach after values; they are the human means of becoming. They are concerned with "the portrayal of objects of desire and hope and dream as realities, the explicit preference of life to death, of growth to petrifaction, of freedom to enslavement." Frye continues:

> Literature is not detached but concerned: it deals with what is there in terms of what man wants and does not want. The same sense of the relevance of concern enters into many other verbal areas, into religion (where the concern is "ultimate," in Tillich's phrase), and a great deal of philosophy and history and political theory and psychology. It extends into most areas of applied science, and if it does not enter pure science as such, that is only because the detachment of science is the aspect of concern that is appropriate to science. And just as the language of science seems to be largely mathematical, so the language of concern is verbal in a certain way. Briefly, the language of concern is the language of myth. Myth is the structural principle of literature that enters into and gives form to the verbal disciplines where concern is relevant. Man's views of

> the world he wants to live in, of his situation and destiny and heritage, of the world he is trying to make and of the world that resists his efforts, forms in every age a huge mythological structure, and the subjects I have just listed form the main elements of it.

Just for the purpose of discussion, let us divide myths into two kinds—the myths of origin and the myths of transformation. The myths of origin tell about how the world came into being and how man appeared. These are important for the human sense of who we are and what the world is, and the relation between it and ourselves. Our *meaning,* and therefore our destiny, may be contained or implied in the unfolding of the mystery of our origins. Always at stake in the acceptance or rejection of a mythic account of origins is how it contributes to the sense of meaning in our lives, for without meaning we waste and die. Five years after publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species,* Benjamin Disraeli spoke with distaste of the question it had put before society: "That question is this: Is man an ape or an angel? I, my lord, am on the side of the angels." He preferred the Bible myth. Darwin believed that man descended from the Old World monkeys, and he persuaded the world of science of this view, and although the doctrine has had many amendments, evolution means hardly anything else to a great many people. The "killer-ape" books, warning of the aggressive tendencies carried forward from jungle habits in our genes, are sufficient to show how this conception of human origins has affected our ideas about human possibility and destiny.

On the other hand, it is important to recognize the background of the scientific critics of religious doctrines, who, even in the eighteenth century, were by no means free from determined persecution by the Church. Nor were the campaigners for Darwinism unaware of the heavy hand and cruel ordinances of the administrators of religious orthodoxy. They knew what had made Lamettrie say, in 1748 (*L'Homme Machine*):

> If Atheism were universally disseminated, all the branches of religion would be torn up by the roots. Then there would be no more theological wars: there would no longer be soldiers of religion; that terrible kind of soldier. Nature, which had been infected by the consecrated poison, would win back her rights and her purity. Deaf to all other voices, men would follow their own individual impulses, and these impulses alone can lead them to happiness along the pleasant path of virtue.

Lamettrie dared to attack openly the perversities of theological tyranny. He believed that a naturalistic hedonism would suffice to take the place of religion; but as we now know, the myth of the "noble savage" leads to other tyrannies. The point, then, is that what men believe about themselves and their origin is no casual matter to be left to angry revolutionists to settle with any weapons at hand, but a matter for deep and undisturbed deliberation. Whatever we say about who we are and where we came from, whether on scientific authority or mythic suggestion, will have a shaping influence on our lives. Neither the myths of origins nor scientific doctrines should be made into the ammunition of partisans and ideologists.

The other sort of myths are myths of transformation—of regeneration and change. The origin myths are usually about the gods, while the transformation myths are about godlike heroes. The hero, about whom Ortega has written so movingly in his *Meditations on Quixote,* is one who sets out to change the world; and to do this he may first have to change himself. From a mythic point of view, the two may not be different undertakings. This sort of hero is a rebel who is determined to reform or regenerate the established order. He is Prometheus, who defies Zeus to bring the fire of self-consciousness and creative capacity to human beings; or he is Arjuna who marshals his forces to recover his rightful kingdom. He is a Hercules who cleanses the stables of state, or a Hamlet who would drive out the rottenness, but in this case fails because of his obsession with revenge. Often the hero breaks the rules of a lower order to bring men to perception of a higher life. He usually pays the price as did Socrates, as did Christ.

As a matter of fact, science is comparatively silent on the subject of cosmic origins. There are theories, to be sure, but they have to do with matter, not the principles of order, which are better understood for an existing world. Nor do the available theories have any bearing on our lives. Only when a theory has a manifest connection with human destiny do we really get concerned about it, for then it will color our decisions. The chief decision we have to make, now, about existing cosmological theory may be only to realize we have no need to keep track of its changes, since their consequences are irrelevant to our central concerns. Conceptions of cosmology may *become* relevant, as science grows increasingly subjective, but at present the main conclusion to be drawn is that scientific cosmogony has nothing in particular to say to us about our lives and how we should live them.

A mythic cosmogony, however incomplete, might have something to say to us, for the reason that it says something about the world in terms that have meaning to us. Take for example the account of world beginnings to be found in the *Rig Veda*. What was there before the beginning of things? The hymn answers:

> Nor Aught nor Nought existed; yon bright sky
> Was not, nor heaven s broad roof outstretched above.
> What covered all? what sheltered? what concealed?
> Was it the water's fathomless abyss?
> There was not death—yet there was naught immortal
> There was no confine betwixt day and night;
> The only One breathed breathless by itself
> Other than It there nothing since has been.
> Darkness there was, and all at first was veiled
> In gloom profound—an ocean without light—
> The germ that still lay covered in the husk
> Burst forth, one nature, from the fervent heat.

What gave the heat? Love, or Kama, or primeval desire—we are told—"first arose in It, which was the primal germ of mind; and which sages, searching with their intellect, have discovered to be the bond which connects Entity with Non-Entity," or being with non-being. In a commentary given in his *Indian Philosophy* (I, 102), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan says:

> According to the hymn, desire constitutes the secret of the being of the world. Desire or kama is the sign of self-consciousness, the germ of the mind, *manaso retah*. It is the ground of all advance, the spur of progress. The self-conscious ego has desires developed in it by the presence of the non-ego. Desire is more than thought. It denotes intellectual stir, the sense of deficiency as well as active effort. It is the bond binding the existent to the non-existent. The unborn, the one, the eternal breaks forth into a self-conscious Brahma with matter, darkness, non-being, zero, chaos opposed to it. Desire is the essential feature of this self-conscious Purusha.

Radhakrishnan has a note calling attention to the fact that Greek mythology "connects Eros, the god of love, corresponding to Kama, with the creation of the universe," and in the *Symposium* Plato says that Eros or Love is "unbegotten, nor is there any mention of his parentage to be found anywhere in either prose or verse."

There is no question—in this metaphysical rather than mythical view of beginnings—of denying physical levels of causation, just as, in the case of a great symphonic composition, there is no question of denying the existence and necessity of musicians and their instruments because the prior reality—one could say the "final" cause—of the performance is the mind and creative genius of the composer. So with the psychological basis of cosmology in the Rig-Vedic hymn—the *explanation* lies in the motivation given by cosmic desire—the longing or will to be, to grow, to unite with further reaches of existence and experience, to extend the radius of self-consciousness to a more inclusive self-realization. The fact that the actual processes of this "coming into being" of a universe or world must be enormously, incalculably complex might help to explain the endless personification in antique religion, although in the metaphysical versions of the myths there is a philosophical lining of principles behind the embellishments which decorate cosmic allegories.

The transitions from mythic religion to transcendental philosophy are plain enough in the passage from Vedic religion to the philosophy of

the Upanishads, in Indian thought, and the philosophizing of Greek mythic tradition and the teachings of the Mysteries is equally apparent in Plato.

Today, while the very foundations of scientific theorizing are under severe criticism for their dehumanizing effects on thought and behavior, there is still a great deal of bias based upon scientific assumptions in the interpretation of myths. It is assumed, for example, that man somehow appeared on earth as a symbol-devising animal, different from all the rest, and that thereupon, as he began to think, he invented the myths to account for the forces and wonders of nature; and it is assumed, further, that with the development of the practical arts (first agriculture, then others) he became able to devise myths with an element of philosophic content in them. In other words, Man added mind, self-consciousness, symbolic representation, ideas of good and evil, and the conception of moral struggle to a world that had come into existence without the help or participation of any of these dynamic forces. To anyone without our peculiar historical conditioning, this account of human origins would probably be completely incredible.

Granted that we do not "know" about such things; but it must also be recognized that elaborate hypotheses which neglect the moral and metaphysical significance of cosmogonical myths could be fatally confining to both our thought and our behavior. We have the critical sophistication which our intellectual development and historical experience have made possible, or inevitable, but it is becoming abundantly clear that a rich content of affirmative convictions—essential to the *usefulness* of the critical faculty—seems almost entirely lacking. This makes for a nightmare sort of existence, and not only in literature and the arts. So the question of whether or not anybody has ever really known or could have known about these things becomes crucial to our lives, since the quality of our lives is to such a large extent determined by what we think of our nature and our destiny.

We do have the hero myths, as distinguished from the cosmogonical myths, and we find these easier to "accept." If the creation myth of Brahmâ—who brings the universe into being by thinking of himself as the father of the world—creating, so to speak, by thought-projection of himself (as related in the *Vishna Purana*)—is too much for us, we might find the later incarnations of the intelligence he represents, such as Krishna, sources of wisdom and helpful instruction. The hero of whom Krishna is the higher self or divine aspect, Arjuna, is a type of every human being. The teacher-disciple relationship represented in the *Bhagavad-Gita* is already entering the foreground of present-day consciousness, being seen as a clue to some of the elements missing from our lives. And more and more, the best criticism is employing tools of this sort to illuminate the meaning of fine literature. The extraordinary popularity of a writer like Herman Hesse is an illustration of this trend, and—at another level—the story of Jonathan Livingston Seagull. These themes will soon be a part of the everyday awareness of modern thought, since they seem to speak to a great hunger in the people, especially the young, of our time.

The rather extraordinary revival of interest in William Blake is another example of this tropism of the human spirit. Roszak's development of the idea of the Politics of Eternity in *Where the Wasteland Ends* and William Irwin Thompson's contrast of this conception of spiritual transformation with revolutionary politics is still another instance of how we are becoming increasingly conscious of the role of the incarnated hero—once only a remote and mythic figure.

We might say that the cosmic myths have to do with the stage-setting for the action in the drama of human life, while the hero myths are concerned with what that action can or ought to be. We may be able to get along for a while

longer without taking the cosmogonic myths seriously, but if there can't be any human drama without a world for its stage, then it seems likely that we must sooner or later learn to think of the world as the sort of place where men have a natural role, a place which *belongs* to them as well as for which they are responsible, and which came into being with some kind of foresight concerning the action that was to take place. The world-making, in short, has to be in true harmony with the *man-making*—and if the old myths contain authentic meaning, then the two processes are closely related, and may even be interdependent. Radhakrishnan has a passage on this:

> The sources of man's spiritual insight are twofold: objective and subjective—the wonders of the world without and the stress of the human soul. In the Vedas the vast order and movement of nature engages attention. Their gods represent cosmic forces. In the Upanishads we return to explore the depths of the inner world. "The self-existent pierced the openings of the senses so that they turn outwards, therefore man looks outward, not inward into himself; some wise man, however, with his eyes closed and wishing for immortality, saw the self behind." From the outward physical fact, attention shifts to the inner immortal self situated at the back of the mind, as it were. We need not to look to the sky for the bright light; the glorious fire is within the soul. The soul of man is the keyhole to the landscape of the whole universe, the Akasa within the heart, the limpid lake which mirrors the truth. The altered outlook brought about a consequential change. Not the so-called gods, but the true living God, the Atman has to be worshipped. God's dwelling place is the heart of man. "Brahmana kososi," "Thou art the sheath of Brahman." "Whosoever worships in such a manner as he is another, another 'I am,' does not know." The inner immortal self and the great cosmic power are one and the same. Brahman is the Atman and the Atman is the Brahman. The one supreme power through which all things have been brought into being is one with the inmost self in each man's heart.

So the cosmogonical myth and the hero or savior myth become one.

In her perceptive discussion of the culture of the Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest, Jacquetta Hawkes was impressed by the way these Indians harmonized their lives by following the principles of the teaching of their mythic origins and destiny. Yet she could not help but notice the strict conformity to custom on which this harmony depended. Contrasting their lives with the common life of Western humanist man, who prides himself on his freedom from conformity, she wondered if one could say that the Indians had not yet come out of their hierarchical interdependence to undertake what Jungian psychologists term "individuation," while the Westerners have done so, but-have failed miserably to preserve the harmony that once prevailed—long ago—in the traditional forms of society.

> It seems to me [Miss Hawkes wrote] that if the intermediate stage, the individual humanism which we still try to serve, is to control the next revolution of the wheel we have got to see that the acceptance of the irrational is a part of reason—which is to say that reason must honor what is still beyond its grasp. These Indians live by an intuitive psychological wisdom which we have lost. We, with all the handicaps of our greater consciousness, have got to try to incorporate psychical factors fully and generously into the life of the mind—hitherto much too narrowly defined by Western man.

Which doubtless means that there is need to internalize the feeling of order once obtained from custom, ritual, and mythic tradition—the task that our "greater consciousness" now imposes. It does not seem likely that we shall be able to do this without feeling ourselves to be part of the cosmic order, more or less as the old cosmogonical myths suggested or declared.

REVIEW
GANDHIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY

GANDHI did not think much of parliamentary democracy. He had seen it in operation around the world and called it the tyranny of the majority. Only one other man, Jayaprakash Narayan, has made the same sort of observation and reached the same conclusions as Gandhi, and he, unfortunately, does not write very much. Early in the 1950's he abandoned active participation in Indian socialist politics and allied himself with the Sarvodaya and Gramdan movements of Vinoba Bhave.

In a pamphlet, *Swaraj for the People,* published by Sarva Seva Sangh, Rajghat, Varanesi, India, Jayaprakash refers to his paper, "Reconstruction of Indian Polity," which he years ago circulated privately among his friends, saying that he had hoped to extend this criticism of parliamentary democracy with a more extensive discussion of alternative proposals for self-government, but that his active involvement in a mass movement had made this impossible. Accordingly, he has put into this pamphlet the essentials of the reforms he has in mind. The basic criticism of the existing form of democracy, repeated here, is that nine tenths of the voters feel *"left out of it all."* While he speaks of the Indian experience, much of what he says has a measure of application in Western countries:

> It is very common to hear the remark made by common people even in the countryside that though Swaraj [self-rule] came, it had not come to them. They complain that they are ruled much in the same manner and by the same kind of people as during British rule. They find that not even in local affairs have they a hand or that even the humblest civil servant is in any manner accountable to them, on the contrary, they find that he lords it over them and even exacts illegal gratification much as in the old days. The truth must be faced that the people have not been able to experience the sensation of *Swaraj.* It is only the very thin layer of the educated middle class, and even of them only those engaged directly in political activity, who are involved in the working of our democracy.
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> The result of this state of affairs is that our democracy is found to be resting on a very narrow base. It is like an inverted pyramid that stands on its head. Our obvious task is to set this picture right and stand the pyramid on its base. The mere fact that every adult Indian has the right to vote does not make the pyramid broad based. The crores of individual and disparate voters are like a heap of particles of sand that can never be a foundation for any structure. The particles must be united to form bricks or encased within concrete moulds to be able to act as foundation stones. It is, therefore, obvious that if stability is to be imparted to our democracy, the base must be broadened and the top layers suitably architectured into the basic structure. If the base were strong, there would be little danger of the whole edifice of democracy toppling down at the adventurer's touch. Ours is a country of historic ruins. One has only to visit any of the ruins to see what happens when an edifice falls to the ground. It is always the roofing that comes down first, then the walls; the upper storeys first, then the lower, and the foundation stones are found intact even after the passage of thousands of years. The durability of the structure—no matter how ambitious—depends on the strength of the foundation and the lower supporting structures.

Even though there are great differences between the social structure of India and that of a modern industrial state, the fact remains that the analogy of an inverted pyramid applies to both sorts of society. The political action originates in a few, by comparison with the total population, and the sense of participation is increasingly slight, no matter where you look. In this pamphlet Jayaprakash proposes the gradual return, not so much of "power," in the grand, controlling sense, but of responsibility, to the vast majority of the people who are at the base of the pyramid, so that from the exercise of responsibility they will gain what power they need to accomplish what is necessary.

He is working for the restoration of the *panchayat* (village council) mode of government at the community level—which once prevailed, in traditional form, throughout India—and for the general and technical education, in modern terms, that will make the fulfillment of responsibility possible for the members of the villages and small

towns where the great majority of the people live. The basic idea is that authority and power should always be *functional,* never extending beyond either the experience or the competence of the persons involved. This of course means decentralization, and decentralization means the reduction of the manipulative power of the central authority, including the power to make war. In short, the program envisioned by Gandhi, seconded by Vinoba, and now given programmatic form by Jayaprakash Narayan, is the evolution of the *polis* in ways that will make possible a warless world. It seeks, he has said elsewhere, "a new moral consciousness [that] will perhaps in time replace the present political system based on the struggle for power, with a system based on harmony and cooperation." In this pamphlet he writes:

> Devolution of power so that the Center has only as much of it as required to discharge its *central* functions and all the rest is exercised by the lower organs, need not necessarily imply a weak Center. It is all a matter of competence: at each level the elected authority does *all* that it is competent to do. And, because at each level the authority concerned finds that there are tasks which lie beyond its competence, it has to federate with other authorities at the same level so as to create a higher level of authority. It may be parenthetically observed that even nation states find in the present age that there are tasks that the strongest of them cannot face, and so, opinion is growing in favour of a world union of peoples. It is this factor of competence that is a guarantee of the strength of the Center in this system, because it is in the interest of the lower authorities to give all power and opportunity to the Center to do efficiently and expeditiously all that they themselves cannot do. Defense, foreign affairs, inter-State relations, currency, regulation of imports and exports, preservation of national unity are, for instance, tasks that fall within the competence *only* of the Center. A central government that is armed with these powers cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as weak, just because the range of subjects in its charge is not so wide. On the other hand, the top-heavy, sprawling Center, poking its finger into every pie might have the appearance of strength and power, but in actual fact it would be weak, flabby, slow-moving and ineffective.
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> National unity or strength does not depend upon the list of subjects that a central government deals with, but on such intangible factors as emotional integration common experiences and aspirations, and, above all, upon large-hearted wisdom on the part of national leaders.

How is the responsibility of the villagers for their own local government to be restored? First by education, second by persuading the various political parties to adopt a hands-off policy in relation to the local choice of panchayat members, or village governing councils, and third, by making sure that the assumption of responsibility by the villages for self-government is real and not "make-believe." Here Jayaprakash remarks:

> It is possible to construct the outward structure of Panchayati Raj and to give it no substance. That would be like a body without a soul, dead from the start, a still-born child. . . . The people must be trusted. There is a tendency among those who have received some education to distrust the ability and intelligence of the common people, and it is possible to talk of devolution of power without in reality surrendering any power. No one can learn to discharge responsibility unless responsibility is really given to one. Withholding of responsibility either on account of lack of confidence in the people or of reluctance to surrender power, would lead naturally, as it has already done to a considerable extent, to an attitude of irresponsibility in the people who will be forever on the lookout for heroes and miracle-workers to solve their problems. It is out of such a psychological situation that dictators are born. For democracy to be a success, it is necessary that the people are prepared, and given full opportunity to shoulder responsibility.

Panchayats made up of men who are merely local officials representing a central authority are a fraud so far as true democracy is concerned. The panchayats must be responsible to the people of the local community, not to a central authority. This means developing effective small units of government—the villages.

Jayaprakash takes up the major objections that have been made to the idea of panchayat rule and discusses them one by one. He again points out how vital it is that national political parties keep out of the panchayat elections, since an

effort to "capture" a panchayat official by a party would corrupt the restoration at its beginning.

He next discusses the close dependence of socio-political autonomy in the villages on economic autonomy, saying:

> *First*, it is clear that such an economy must be a smallmachine and labour-intensive economy. At the same time, it is also clear that there must be a constant and planned effort to improve the small machine, so that without adding much to its cost, its efficiency and productivity keep on rising. For this the necessary research must be planned and encouraged. . . . For my purpose the debate between the modern and the traditional is irrelevant. What I am suggesting is, indeed, a most modern type of economy, the like of which does not exist or has existed anywhere, and to create which the utmost possible help of science, including social science, would be required. In other words, a new machine technology as well as a new-socio-economic technology, would have to be created. It is not the type of decentralization that exists in the highly centralized economies of the West or of Japan that I have in mind. Decentralization in those countries is subservient to centralization and is a mode of existence for the latter. For me the dominant pattern of the economy is one of decentralization with such centralization as is found unavoidable. There has to be a certain balance between the two, no doubt, but the decentralized sector is not to be just a complement of the centralized one.

The *focus* is always on the base of the pyramid, where the people are, not on the interests and concerns of an administrative class which is used to wielding power and defining welfare and progress in its own terms. There are gradations of centralization, to perform necessary functions, but all in the interests of the great mass of people, who are never to be manipulated for managerial or elitist purposes. That is the sort of rule we have now, all over the world, in the name of the people, and it is a vast deception; moreover, it works very poorly and often not at all.

We have given only a few of the highlights of this interesting pamphlet by Jayaprakash Narayan. The simplicity of what he proposes should not be mistaken for lack of depth. The dry complexity of modern economic theory is largely the result of the need to justify, rationalize, and make work an unwieldy system that misconceives authentic human ends and defines objectives and dynamics in terms that no one but experts can understand. The system rests on false principles and, like the Ptolemaic astronomy, is uselessly complicated as a result.

COMMENTARY
THE HERO

IN *Meditations on Quixote,* first published in Spain in 1914, Ortega accepts the claim of Don Quixote, that while people may be able to take away from him his fortune, they cannot take his effort and courage. For Ortega, will and courage are the essence of heroism. The hero, in Ortega's thought, is a man determined to change the world. His will is real, but what he wills has as yet no existence. It exists only in the hero's vision, in his imagination.

> Such a phenomenon [Ortega writes] is unknown in the epic. The men of Homer belong to the same world as their desires. In Don Quixote we have, on the other hand, a man who wishes to reform reality. But is he not a piece of that reality? Does he not live off it, is he not a consequence of it? How is it possible for that which does not exist—a projected adventure—to govern and alter harsh reality? Perhaps it is not possible, but it is a fact that there are men who decide not to be satisfied with reality. Such men aim at altering the course of things; they refuse to repeat the gestures that custom, tradition, or biological instincts force them to make. These men we call heroes, because to be a hero means to be one out of many, to be oneself. If we refuse to have our actions determined by heredity or environment it is because we seek to base the origin of our actions on ourselves and only on ourselves. The hero's will is not that of his ancestors nor of his society, but his own. This will to be oneself is heroism.
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> I do not think that there is any more profound originality than this "practical," active originality of the hero. His life is a perpetual resistance to what is habitual and customary. Each movement that he makes has first had to overcome custom and invent a new kind of gesture. Such a life is a perpetual suffering, a constant tearing oneself away from that part of oneself which is given over to habit and a prisoner of matter.

This is the heart of Ortega's conception of man and the meaning of human life. The most "authentic" man is the man most occupied in re-creating himself according to his will. To be oneself is for Ortega to be what one wills, and this is ever a heroic undertaking.

The hero exposes himself to ridicule, since his vision is always contrasted with what is, and comedy—the weapon of conservative parties—stands ready to mock every failure and faltering of the hero. Then, as Ortega remarks, the people laugh; and he adds wryly: "It is a useful laughter: for each hero whom it hits it crushes a hundred frauds."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

BULLS, MAGIC, AND JAILS FOR CHILDREN

ORDINARILY we would pass up a book on bullfighting for children, but since *Shadow of a Bull* was highly recommended by a reader who is also a children's librarian, we read this story by Maia Wojciechowska (Atheneum, 1964), and enjoyed it from beginning to end. The author, we learn, was believed by both Ernest Hemingway and Barnaby Conrad to know "more about bullfighting than any other woman." This is probably true, since a sure sense of detail and numerous bits of information add to the interest of the story—such as the fact that it takes a bull about twenty minutes of encounter with a *Torero* (bullfighter) to learn that he must attack the man and not the cape, which doubtless explains why bullfights last only about this length of time.

The story is about a Spanish boy who is born in the shadow of an oppressive tradition:

> When Manolo was nine he became aware of three important facts in his life. First: the older he became, the more he looked like his father. Second: he, Manolo Olivar, was a coward. Third: everyone in the town of Arcangel expected him to grow up to be a famous bullfighter like his father.

For Manolo this becomes a painful but apparently unavoidable destiny. He would like to be himself, but his obligations to his town, to the admirers of his father, who have now befriended him and his mother—for his father had been killed by a bull when he was only twenty-two, and Manolo only three—make him feel that he must try to be a bullfighter. His father had indeed been a great *torero,* killing his first bull at twelve, without training or practice. He was the hero, the legend of the town, and Manolo, his son, was expected by the people to follow his father's example. But he did not *want* to; and he was *afraid.* Had his father ever been afraid? He read the books about his father, the scores of articles kept in a great album, but nowhere was there the slightest evidence that his father had ever felt fear.

The boy is taken to see many bullfights by six men of the town, who speak of him always as the successor to his father. An old count makes Manolo his protégé and plans his first bullfight for the season when he will be twelve, so that he can demonstrate that he is indeed the son of his father. Desperate, the boy practices secretly at night, while the fear in him grows.

Meanwhile he has pain at the suffering of the horses, the death of the brave bulls, and the stoic endurance of wounds by men who have been gored by the bulls. One youth is wickedly gouged from knee to upper thigh by a bull, and Manolo visits him as he waits for the old doctor to come, who arrives at last, hours after the young bullfighter was gored. The doctor lets Manolo watch him treat the wound, and talks to him afterward. This time the *torero* has been fortunate; there will be no infection; the barber who gave first aid washed away all the foreign matter from the torn flesh. But Manolo sees and hears all this, and in his heart knows that he wants to be a healer like the doctor, not a giver of wounds like the brave bullfighter. But no choice is open to him. Even his mother is resigned to the career the community has chosen for her son.

Well, the story has a happy ending. Manolo learns the importance of personal integrity from the old writer and critic of bullfighting who had been present when his father killed his first bull, and who comes to see him meet his own first challenge. There is a way out for Manolo, a way with honor, if not with glory, and the boy finds it. And what the reader thinks of, in his relief at the end, is the sad, unjoyous faces of the *matadors* who are themselves captives of their dangerous trade.

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If you like books which end with two heroes riding home to fame and fortune on the back of a dragon, then *The Farthest Shore* (Atheneum,

1972) by Ursula Le Guin, third in the series which began with *A Wizard of Earthsea,* followed by *The Tombs of Atuan,* will not disappoint. Except that neither of the two later books comes up to the level of *A Wizard of Earthsea.* This probably isn't possible. But there is the same healthy quality about all three books, even though a heavily cruel mood has to be borne in the first part of *The Tombs of Atuan*—in which an old kingdom has fallen prey to pretenders and religious bureaucrats, requiring a humane princess to be rescued from the claws of custom, which Ged, the hero of *Wizard,* appears to accomplish during the third act; and in *The Farthest Shore* Ged wears himself out in his last great feat of overcoming a dark, malignant power, and puts aside his wizard's staff to retire to a simple life. But no one who has read *A* Wiz*ard* will need much encouragement to go on and read the other two, and there is fun and derring-do in both.

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With both reluctance and a feeling of obligation we turn to Larry Cole's *Our Children's Keepers* (Grossman, $6.95)—reluctance, because of the horrors it reports, but obligation because these things are done to children in the name of the people of the states of the nation. We have a competitive, aggressive, acquisitive, dog-eat-dog, devil-take-the-hindermost view of our economic lives and activities, and since economic goals really do dominate all others, the devil *does* take the hindermost in a great many cases. A look at our jails and our prisons is enough to make this clear; a look at our schools tells a similar story; and when one looks at schools for children which are also jails, the evidence that the devil gets the hindermost becomes a horror story.

Larry Cole grew up in California and went to New York to complete his psychological studies. There he got into settlement work and after some experience in Harlem decided to stay in New York and work in the slums. He started LEAP, standing for Lower Eastside Action Project, which became a kind of school and home-base for Cole's efforts to bring a little justice to New York's "Street Kids."

Our Children's Keepers relates the experiences Cole had in investigating the "training schools" and "guidance centers" for alleged or actual delinquent young around the country—which are really prisons, "chaotic, overcrowded, brutal prisons." Who runs these places? Are they evil people?

The reader of *Death at an Early Age* (Jonathan Kozol) has an answer to this question. They are people who are confined by their own fears, habits, complacency, and self-righteousness. They have a lot of reasons and excuses for what they do. So this is another expose book. Such books have to be written. It doesn't do to ask whether they "do any good," They *have* to be written, and read, until the day comes when people reorganize their lives and communities in ways that don't have criminal effects on the lives of children—effects which go on and on because too many people feel a need *not to know* about what happens in the human dust bins of our society. It is as Mr. Cole says:

> Anyone working for social change must assume that the public is ignorant of the problems he perceives. He must work first to erase that ignorance. But the fact that the public is *chronically* uninformed is symptomatic of its unwillingness to be informed, to see the unpleasant side, and, more basically, to assume the responsibility to act that an awareness of unpleasant information might demand. That, more than any other single factor, is what keeps children and others living in uninhabitable institutions.

How do systematic cruelty and injustice work in these places?

> Within the system that keeps our kids there is a conspiracy to prevent any humanizing change: There are three *status quo* conspirators: the civil service, the unions, and the professionals. Born out of struggle and exploitation themselves, civil service and unions offered great hope and progress at one time or another to the poor and powerless. Civil service came in as a reform move to counter the politicans' control of jobs under the spoils system. Unions developed out of the exploitation of the worker by big industry and

> had a hand in the cessation of destructive practices of child labor. Professional groups offered the public some kind of accrediting body that would assure them higher standards of professional care and treatment. All important reforms. But for the institutions that now affect children, these reforms have, as far as the children are concerned, gone full circle, and represent the legal and organizational base on which the exploitation of children now depends.

Mr. Cole supplies a bill of particulars. He tells about what happens in New York's Youth House, in a girls' institution in Denver, in children's prisons in Louisiana, and about cages for lost children in San Francisco. He also tells about the handful of heroic people who are getting something done to improve the conditions in these places. The work takes a calling and a talent for that sort of thing, but it needs support from as many people as possible. And from everybody it needs reflection on why institutional reforms eventually go "full circle," and on what sort of "reforms," if any, wouldn't turn out that way. Reading Larry Cole's book would give a sharper edge to such reflection.

FRONTIERS

The War and the Papers

READERS who want comprehensive background on how the *Pentagon Papers* came to be published, on Daniel Ellsberg, who gave them to the *New York Times,* on Tony Russo, who helped him, and on the trial of these two men, will find it amply supplied in the November 1 issue of *Win,* the twice-monthly magazine issued with the support of the War Resisters League. *Win* is $3 for six months, $5 a year, and single issues are 30 cents. The address is Box 547, Rifton, New York 12471.

The contents of this issue of *Win* are mainly the work of John Kincaid, who contributes a long interview with Ellsberg, a brief sketch of Tony Russo's personal history and role in connection with the release to the public of the Pentagon Papers, and an informative discussion of the issues of the trial. With another *Win* writer, Kincaid interviews William G. Florence, identified as a "former Pentagon Chief of Secrets," putting of record the gradual development since World War II of an elaborate system of secrecy and concealment from the public of governmental decisions at the policy level. Then, in the review section of *Win,* Kincaid describes the difference in the contents of the three available editions of the Pentagon Papers—the *New York Times* version (Quadrangle and Bantam), the Gravel edition (Beacon), and the edition issued by the Government Printing Office. He also contributes a long and excellent review of Ellsberg's recent book, *Papers on the War,* to which attention was given in MANAS for Dec. 6.

A combination of factors caused Daniel Ellsberg to take the steps which finally opened him to prosecution by the Government. He explains in the interview with Kincaid that as a consultant on policy for highly placed officials in Washington he came little by little to realize that neither facts nor the opinions of experts with extensive background in both Far Eastern history and recent Indochinese affairs, including the conduct of the war, exercised very much influence on presidential decision. The reliance on violence and threats of more violence seemed always to determine what was done, although political tensions at home affected the forms of action taken. Then, his own reading of the Pentagon Papers through, "really stripped the war of any legitimacy" in his eyes. He realized that—

> The U.S. was perfectly aware that in supporting the French, first through our general aid and then after 1950 with direct aid totalling 78% of the cost of the French war, we were backing what amounted to a cynical French effort to reimpose its rule against the wishes of the great majority of the Indochinese. The fact that, as we suspected, Ho Chi Minh and some of his associates were communists as well as nationalist leaders didn't, of course, give that effort any legitimacy.
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> This threw into a different light all that came later, which I knew better than the earlier history. In particular, it gave me a new sense of urgency about ending an effort which I saw totally misrepresented as an effort to aid an ally to whom we had made commitments. I saw instead that the war was essentially an American war from the very beginning and that the violence would never have approached the scale of war had not the U.S. financed the continuation of that violence and provided equipment and eventually direct combat support. So, I realized fully, then, that it was up to us to stop the killing immediately. Any thoughts of gaining a more graceful end that might take months or years longer were quite out of line. Efforts toward ending the war should be aimed toward ending it immediately and stopping what is a process of murder.

Meanwhile, Ellsberg had met at a conference sponsored jointly by Princeton and the American Friends Service Committee some young men who were going to jail because of their anti-war convictions. This experience impressed him, and he began to read writers on nonviolence Joan Bondurant and Martin Luther King. He became convinced of the Gandhian principle that truth-telling must go hand in hand with nonviolence, and releasing the Pentagon Papers to the newspapers was for him a way of telling the truth.

The question of what the trial is really about is dealt with by Kincaid in this interesting passage:

> According to the 65-year history of U.S. espionage law, the disclosure of national defense information is a crime *only* when that disclosure is made "with intent or reason to believe that the information to be obtained is to be used to the injury of the United States, or to the advantage of any foreign nation. . . ." Yet, in this case, for the first time in the history of espionage prosecutions, this government has cleverly excluded "intent." Although the government admits that the law has never been used this way, it has given no reasons for excluding intent, except to say that the subsections of the law under which Ellsberg and Russo are being tried do not require proof of intent.
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> This leaves the government in the ludicrous position of *not* charging them for doing what they did, that is, copying national defense documents. Subsection (b) of the Espionage Act states that it is a crime to copy such documents, but the government did not invoke it because it also specifically requires proof of intent.
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> The exclusion of intent is very important to the government because it means that most of the salient and embarrassing political issues raised by this case are now excluded from courtroom discussions.

A portion of Ellsberg's book which our review left unmentioned is covered in Kincaid's interview. "How is it," Kincaid asked, "that liberal, Harvard-educated, urbane men can become so involved and wrapped up in this whole process or conspiracy of lies and brutality?" In reply Ellsberg suggests a reading of Albert Speer's *Inside the Third Reich.* At the root of the motivation of these men is a longing for association with power, and the assumption that sometimes some "good" can be done by staying close to the top. But the net effect, Ellsberg says, "is to keep silent in the presence of what they know to be lies and terrible inhumanity." A great deal more attention needs to be given to questions of this sort.