

## WHAT WE HAVE TO WORK WITH

THAT the truth is mighty and will prevail, and that possession of it makes men free—these are old sayings, yet so widely repeated and so deeply believed that they may be said to lie at the heart of the hopes of modern man. Our freedom of speech and of the press obtains its force from this ultimate regard for truth, which is the basis of all humanist conviction, all liberal theory. We believe this, feel it, act upon it, yet are obliged by experience to acknowledge that, again and again, truth is not recognized when it is declared. *Finally*, truth may prevail, just as the laws of nature finally reveal themselves through the inexorable audit of experience.

The truth *does* seem to set individuals free, but there are times when it has little or no effect on human society. We have melancholy apothegms covering this reality, one being that all we learn from history is that men never learn from history. Indeed, for each affirmation about the power of truth there is a corresponding skepticism based upon everyday experience. The authority of truth is not denied, but its accessibility and practical potency are seriously questioned. In short, what we believe or know about truth is not enough. The hoped-for victory of truth over all obstacles is the climax of a long process which we do not understand well at all, and we are only in the middle of it, nowhere near fulfillment. Some lines of Richard Burton seem to sum up the present condition:

Truth is the shattered mirror strown  
In myriad bits; while each believes his  
little bit the whole to own.

We have no difficulty in agreeing with this. It is true to life. But we cannot give up our belief in truth, since it is all we have to work with. The question is: How should the work be done?

A MANAS reader has given much thought to this question. Is not, he asks, the one unambiguously "good" step to take simply "to increase public consciousness of what is going on and what may be expected if changes are not made?" But then, exploring the other side of the matter, he speaks of the difficulty of conveying a clear understanding of how the general good and individual good are united. So many people fail to grasp what is really in their own interest. In addition, there is the unfortunate fact that "decisions on public matters are so much beyond the power of the individual to influence, in so many questions, that the individual has little or no incentive to seek a thorough understanding of what is at stake." For example:

The most familiar situation of this type is the question of voting. What chance has the ordinary citizen to have a measurable effect on the outcome of an election? For the election, say, of a Federal Chief Executive? The plain answer is *none*, to all intents and purposes. Every one who has ever voted realizes, before he steps into the ballot booth, that the outcome of the election will be the same whether one takes part, or doesn't.

There is some rhetorical exaggeration here, since votes add up, but the sense of what this reader says may include other considerations, such as the confinement of political leaders to the gross and ineffectual alternatives of "feasible" decision.

But still we vote. A vague sense of duty impels us. It is little enough to do in support of a great tradition, the one act that remains for us as "responsible citizens." An obvious comment would be that a society which allows or encourages no more participation than occasional punching pinholes in ballots is something of a fraud so far as self-government is concerned. If we accept this criticism as just, then the thing to do is to restructure the society in ways that would enable the people to make some real decisions

concerning their own and the common welfare. The "incentives" which our reader says are lacking would soon appear, if choices were on a scale permitting a growing understanding of the relationships between cause and effect. This is the social wisdom implicit in E. F. Schumacher's title, "Small Is Beautiful." If our socio-political units were of a size which revealed the basic workings of our common acts, we could begin to act much more intelligently. This seems obvious enough.

That is one direction in which our thinking might go. It is concerned with creating arrangements that will let the good sense and intentions of human beings have play and practical effect. It offers a design solution of indisputable merit. The weakness of the political process described by our reader is the result of too much complexity. Planning for simplicity is the answer to that.

Another direction of inquiry would be to try to understand the apparent conflict between individual and social goals. It may be agreed that in the long term social and individual good are one. In the short term, however, they often appear seriously opposed. The basic question, here, is the relation between self-interest and what we speak of as "right." It needs to be recognized that for modern man "right" is a highly ambiguous term. The "moral ought" has little meaning except upon the foundation of religious or metaphysical assumptions, and such assumptions have received no deliberate attention or reflective support for generations. An effective "moral ought" in human life obtains its strength from the idea that all are part of a great system of being in which ethical principles are paramount realities. This idea is most clearly represented in existing tradition by the Buddhist teaching of Karma—termed by Emerson the Law of Compensation—and in Christianity identified as the rule that we reap what we sow. While the scheme of general harmony implied by this law is beyond full verification in immediate human experience, the

teachings and doctrines about its requirements were once widely accepted and followed.

But the scientific view of the universe—a view avowedly based upon the facts of sense experience and deductions from them—includes no ethical principles or assumptions. Motive, under this mode of thinking, relapses into one-dimensional self-interest. Feelings of obligation have no part in behavior as guided by science. Since science unquestionably has given the intellectual classes of modern times their outlook and "value system," the idea of human life as a pursuit of transcendental meanings and goals has had practically no influence in the shaping of present-day institutions. Interest is the only recognized principle, and since the definition of interest depends entirely on human understanding of cause and effect (not to exclude the pressures of impulse and irrational desire), scientists have conceived their task to be showing people how to get what they want; and in the place of the regulation of desire by moral conceptions of good, we have only cost-benefit comparisons. If there is a scientific ethic, its substance is accumulated by such calculations.

In short, our culture provides no over-all ethical principle for reference when we are deciding what to do. Morality has become a department of market analysis applied to consumer demand. Dropped out of our thinking is the attitude given apt characterization by Robert Redfield—the view and feeling that "nature is part of the same moral system in which man and the affairs of men also find themselves," under which "man's actions with regard to nature are limited by notions of inherent, not expedient rightness."

In his essay on "Authority" (*New American Review* No. 8), John Schaar gives another version of past belief in an underlying moral order, then speaks of its loss:

Even the enlightened American Founding Fathers saw the Constitution as a partial embodiment of that higher order called the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God. Prophets and messengers were to

appear not only at the original birth, but also at times after the founding. . . . In addition, through actions based on myth and ritual the people themselves reenact and reaffirm the harmony between the ontological order and their own human realm. In sum, founders and prophets create and correct, and myth and ritual recreate and restore a community identity set within a cosmology. Identity and legitimacy are thus inseparable.

No one needs to be told that these ancient patterns of thought no longer prevail. The old moralities of custom and religion are husks and shells. With the growth of the special modern form of individual self-consciousness as consciousness of separation, men lose sight of the dependence of the group upon morality and of the dependence of morality upon the group. . . .

Affective life centers almost exclusively in the family, and other associations are more or less useful in the pursuit of private goals. Once the goal of self-sufficiency is reached, the individual retreats from group life. Or, individuals are held in formal association by the subtle arts of managerial psychology, the not-so-subtle arts of bureaucratic control, the revision upwards of personal desires and demands, and the redefinition of material goals in symbolic terms. It is, then, a question not of how many associations there are, but of what being together means.

The main point remains: modern man has determined to live without collective ideals and disciplines and thus without obedience to and reliance upon the authorities that embody, defend, and replenish those ideals. The work of dissolution is almost complete, and men now appear ready to attempt a life built upon no other ideal than happiness: comfort and self-expression. All ideals are suspect, all other straits and disciplines seen as snares and stupidities, all collective commitments nothing but self-imprisonments. . . .

Membership is instrumental: the association is an efficient means for the achievement of individual goals, not an expression of a way of life valued in and for itself.

Recognition of this far-reaching change in how men think about goals, how they justify their actions, and of how much, if at all, they wonder about what is right, and about the reasons for it being so, is surely basic to any attempt, in the words of our correspondent, "to increase public

consciousness of what is going on and what may be expected if changes are not made."

Of course, that a growing number of people *want to* work in this way is evidence of at least some change in attitude. There is, in short, the beginning of a movement in this direction. The questions raised by our correspondent are in behalf of working more intelligently for the common good. Ultimately, all such efforts require most of all an answer to the query: What have we got to work with?

The question is almost impossible to deal with directly. It might be better to decide what works poorly, if at all, in order to determine where effort should be placed. What we have to work with, after all, is little more than a vague faith in the potentialities of human beings. It follows that the first step might be to do what we can to remove the barriers to expression of those potentialities. What are the barriers? Where, most obviously, do we fail?

Well, there seems little use in trying to get people to think more clearly and act with greater wisdom in relation to matters of extreme complexity. The choices must be rescaled, made simple, and this means engaging in reforms which are comparatively easy to understand, involving activities open to a great many people. This is basic psychological verity in relation to human decision and change. It means that specialists who mean well will have to stop talking in the jargon of their specialties, which only they can understand. Schumacher has set an example in doing this. There is little point, moreover, in laying great stress on immeasurable disasters to come. Threat of hell-fire was unable to eliminate sin, and dire prediction paralyzes rather than arouses, when it goes beyond the level of ordinary comprehension.

A psychiatrist who interested himself in this problem, Dr. Lester Greenspoon, described some years ago what seemed to him the astonishing lack of public response to the threat of nuclear annihilation, concluding that most people,

including the decision-makers, were simply unable to grasp enormities of this dimension. His research led him to conclude:

People cannot risk being overwhelmed by anxiety which might accompany a full cognitive and affective grasp of the present world situation and its implications for the future. It serves a man no useful purpose to accept this truth if to do so leads only to the development of very disquieting feelings, feelings which interfere with his capacity to be productive, to maintain his mental equilibrium.

People tend to deny or ignore what they feel they cannot cope with at all. The "unthinkable" is indeed beyond rational response. Dr. Greenspoon says:

It has been argued by some that solutions to the difficult and dangerous problems which beset the world would be more readily found and implemented if whole populations really appreciated the nature of the present risks. They argue further that ways must be found to *make* people aware, such as showing movies of twenty megaton bursts during prime television time. The consequences of such an endeavor might however, be disastrous. For if the proponents of such a scheme were to achieve their goal, what they will have done is to have overwhelmed these defense mechanisms and left people burdened with feelings they might have no way of coping with constructively. Contrary to expectations, those activities which they might seize upon could very well result in just the opposite of lessening world tension.

Yet the impact of terrible events which actually occur may sometimes reveal what does have a constructive effect on people's activities and lives. One would hardly suppose that the Nazi invasion of France was anything but evil, yet a curious by-product was noticed by Simone Weil in her *Need for Roots*. The occupation and division of France by the invaders into tightly separated regions, isolated by prohibition of correspondence, produced in the people much stronger feelings of identity with the countryside than they had had for centuries. They began to know in a realizing sense "that they belong to Brittany, Lorraine, Provence, or Paris." The decentralized regime of the Vichy government,

controlled by the Nazis, accidentally exposed the values of decentralization, generating a rebirth of the community spirit. The circumstances of invasion had made decisions simpler, and life became more genuine.

The same sort of transformation and elevation of spirit was experienced by the fighters in the French Resistance, whose daily life became a continuous struggle in the simplified terms of guerilla action in war. This continued for four years, bringing an intensity of being so real that, when the Liberation ended it, they felt dispossessed of a veritable treasure. They had now to return, as Hannah Arendt remarks in *Between Past and Future*, to "the 'sad opaqueness' of a private life centered about nothing but itself." The modern life of self-interest is actually little more than devotion to pretentious triviality, a posturing of busyness surrounded by elaborate props of conspicuous consumption. In the Resistance the committed Frenchman no longer had to disguise himself from himself. He could afford to "go naked." As Hannah Arendt says:

In this nakedness, stripped of all masks—of those which society assigns to its members as well as those which the individual fabricates for himself in his psychological reactions against society—they had been visited for the first time in their lives by an apparition of freedom, not, to be sure, because they acted against tyranny and things worse than tyranny—this was true for every soldier in the Allied armies—but because they had become "challengers," had taken the initiative upon themselves and therefore, without knowing or even noticing it, had begun to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear. "At every meal that we eat together, freedom is invited to sit down. The chair remains vacant but the place is set."

Here, then, is one of the shattered bits of the mirror that, when whole, will reflect the truth. Disaster is no formula for the awakening of human beings, but the simplicity which meeting disaster requires allows direct expression of themselves. The feelings of moral reality come to the front when disaster strikes. It is the human response, and not the disaster, from which we have

opportunity to learn. The intense engagement of human beings in simple things that *must be done* has an authenticating effect.

Interestingly, philosophers and sages have long advocated precisely this sort of action. Give up wondering about results, Krishna told Arjuna. Perform the duties that birth has imposed upon you—which means, for a modern man, what your capacities make you able to perform—and you will have accomplished all you can.

There are dozens of ways of giving this counsel, but all of them, when put into words, may sound a bit moralistic to us. Now called for, then, is the action which speaks louder than words. What sort of action? Paul Goodman put it well. He spoke of "the piecemeal social and cultural change that is brightly possible." The idea is to develop a quality, not of "life" but of individual being, which itself becomes a field opening the way to larger possibilities. In the least offensive words we could find—those of Arthur Morgan the program has this description:

We must begin far back, in the slow, thorough building of character which will be tried out in the realities of everyday living, and which by aspiration, disciplined by open-minded critical inquiry, will mature a philosophy of life reasonably adequate to the present day. As that quality of character is matured, it will result in leadership that will apply itself to the issues of the time. It will give concrete expression in everyday life to a new vision of the quality that life may have. When that vision is clearly expressed and clearly defined the people will gradually receive it as their own, and we shall in large measure have found the solvent for the complexities and limitations of government and of business—and of human life itself. The long way round, of building character, in the end will prove to have been the short way home to a good social order.

This is not the language of science, yet the theme has its own sort of science, constituted of the wisdom drawn from the everyday experience of a sagacious man; and it is not the language of religion, although it invites restoration of a common moral sense of human fraternity, ideals, and obligations.

## *REVIEW*

### OTHER WAYS TO LIVE

THE books of William Irwin Thompson have passages of flashing brilliance in them. The insights—mostly psycho-historical—help to break the mold of conventional assumption, and while they do not provide "answers" (easy answers are of no use), the ways of thinking suggested open doors to trail-breaking lines of reflection. Some readers may be irritated by what seems a too easy certainty in his generalizations. This may be only a matter of style, and the ideas are nonetheless valuable. They can be used by the reader, if he chooses, as a help in taking the position William James proposed at the beginning of this century in *On Some of Life's Ideals*. James declared that most of the things we try so hard to do will not "make any *genuine vital difference* on a large scale, to the lives of our descendants." For those who measure achievement in terms of concrete items of progress, James's view will seem an extreme of pessimism:

The changing conditions of history touch only the surface of the show. The altered equilibriums and redistributions only diversify our opportunities and open chances for new ideals. But with each new ideal that comes into life, the chance for a life based on some old ideal will vanish, and he would be a presumptuous calculator who should with confidence say that the total sum of significances is positively and absolutely greater at any one epoch than at any other of the world.

The real life of human beings goes on within each one. The increments of beinghood come about, James said, when there is the marriage of a deeply felt ideal with an act, or a flow of action. As a result of this union, one is more of a man or a woman—more of a human being. This, indeed, is a foray on the way to conquest of the kingdom of heaven—a step by step affair—leading to the compensation or fulfillment of which James speaks: "no outward changes of condition in life can keep the nightingale of its eternal meaning from singing in all sorts of men's hearts."

Almost laconically, William Irwin Thompson rings the changes that reveal painful repetitions of our historical past. In his new book, *Darkness and Scattered Light* (Anchor, 1978, \$3.95), he says:

The Renaissance witnessed not only the creation of a world economy but the explosion of new religions, and so the contemporary explosion of new religions may be seen as part of a large cultural transformation. As these new and challenging definitions of reality begin to threaten the old world view, we should expect to see a massive attempt on the part of established industrial society to snuff them out. When the Church discovered that tiny and insignificant sects and heresies could really threaten the colossus of the One True Church, it responded to the challenge with the Inquisition, and the seventeenth century witnessed an era of intense religious warfare as the Church tried to abort the birth of the modern world. A. N. Whitehead has described the seventeenth century as "the century of genius," but it was also the century of the Thirty Years' War. Descartes was a genius, but he was also a soldier. In our end is our beginning, and now as we look at the Protestants against the Catholics in Ireland, the Moslems against the Jews in Israel, the Christians against the Moslems in Lebanon, and the Hindus against the Moslems in Bangladesh, it seems as if we have returned to the age of religious warfare. The passion of sect against sect seems to be the antithesis of everything we think of as the nature of the modern world as we travel about in our jumbo jets. When we pick up the newspaper in the morning, what we see is a tissue of contradictions, the very paper itself expresses the utter fragility of the civilization we take for granted in our talk of technological progress.

Here is a man who, when he says "we," means all of us in the world, not just the self-satisfied people of the dubiously prosperous West, and writing in this way comes naturally to him. It is good to have provocative thinking about history at this universal level. We all need to do such thinking, in order to recognize what is happening in the world, in order to see it in a comprehensively human light.

Even the pessimism of Thompson's analysis is needed to help people to avoid repeating the false optimisms of the past. We expect too much of

"drives," victories, agreements extracted by pressure, and, of course, our insane military remedies and solutions. Mr. Thompson anticipates the contradictions that will inevitably arise as a result of relying on these familiar methods:

People who are frightened, angry, and out of work will easily give up their civil liberties to a paternalistic state which promises to take good care of them. With pension plans collapsing, the federal government can come in to become the guarantor of pension funds and the savior of the American middle-class dream of security. But the more people surrender their civil liberties in return for governmental paternalism, the more the terrorists of the extreme Right and Left will seek to disrupt the government. The more terrorism there is, the more government will seek to protect the population through strong emergency powers. The people will clamor for security and demand to be driven to work in tanks, but the more authoritarian order is imposed, the more revolutionary anarchy will be stimulated. And so the whole culture will spin downward to darkness in a tightening spiral.

The statement may seem too sweeping. Most generalizations suffer from this defect. Despite their intuitive confirmation from psychological experience, they take no account of the countless interventions life imposes on the working out of abstract formulations. Human beings are both lethargic and stubborn. There is more than one way of resisting. There are forms of integrity which blossom under stress. There are hungers and aspirations in people which have been covered up by too much middle-class prosperity. Nature has ways of prodding the somnolent and well-fed. Krishna gave this oblique encouragement to Arjuna in the final discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, saying that the principles of his nature would arouse and impel him to do what needs to be done. "Being bound by all past karma to thy natural duties, thou wilt involuntarily do from necessity that which in thy folly thou wouldst not do." Krishna, one could say, is the x-factor which sometimes prevails in human decision. The dolefully repetitive patterns of human behavior

can be altered through interventions, sometimes by nature, sometimes by a heroic species of man.

Seeing this from some sort of height where we can be uninvolved is a preliminary to good decision. The act of seeing combines disenchantment with recognition of what needs to be done. Mr. Thompson is resourceful in his way of suggesting these things:

C. G. Jung has said that a victory for the Self is a defeat for the ego, so perhaps we can assume that the defeat of the civilizational ego is the victory of the new planetary identity, the Selfhood of the earth. What the confrontation of ego and Self is all about is, once again, the interface between opposites. . . .

The interface between opposites is now conscious and unconscious, culture and nature, civilization and savagery. At this moment we can perhaps best see it as the interface between chaos and creation in the emergence of a new world culture. . . . Now things seem wild and all-inclusive but as the stable pattern for a world culture emerges, it will grow stronger, more exclusive, and limited.

What is the direction of the great transition in which all will participate, some eagerly, some grudgingly, and some by making the trouble that seems a necessary part of every cycle of growth? One aspect of it is well described:

The movement is one from technological control and avoidance of mother nature to working with natural forces at a subtle level. In the terms of the New Alchemist John Todd, it is a movement from hardware to information.

In this shift from hardware to information there is developing a new relationship between culture and nature in the emergence of a new instinctive technology. Always before, our efforts were to replace instinct with technology, to replace nature with culture. Whenever we were threatened by the expressions of a wild and uncontrollable nature, we would send in the cavalry, the marines, the antibiotics. Now we are beginning to realize that there are other ways to live; we are beginning to see that health is not a collection of quick fixes for a catalogue of diseases but an integral way of life.

At the same time there is a return to mysticism. In the past an iron wall of skepticism and disbelief isolated our worrying, ambitious self

from the Socratic daimon within. Now the wall is coming down, bringing opportunities confusingly mixed with unfamiliar dangers. There is indeed no gain without hazard, no release without delusive demand for immediate resting-places. Pain is an inevitable concomitant of *continued* thinking, and we may be tragically misled by our hedonist habits, supposing that "feeling good" is the goal of our existence.

An interesting speculation occurs at the end of the chapter we have been quoting, in which the author suggests transcendence of the poles of social and individual life through understanding and deliberate synthesis. Mr. Thompson says:

At the moment, the emergence of the collective consciousness is polarized around the opposites of China and America, for these two countries are more than nations; they are archetypes. China expresses the power of the group, and as one large racial unit, sees the collectivity of the *species* as the evolving unit. America expresses the power of the individual. . . . The shadow side of American individuality is fragmented communities and disrupted ecologies; the shadow side of Chinese Communism is totalitarian suppression of the evolution of consciousness through the higher Self. America and China are opposites now, but in the attraction of opposites, each is fascinated by the other. In the next quarter century, I think we will see a marriage of these opposites, bringing communalism to America and individuality to China. If we are lucky and the meeting of opposites is a marriage and not a war, then we should begin to see the evolution of a new collective consciousness.

One thing that may encourage such a marriage is the spontaneous American admiration, so widely expressed, of what revolutionary China has accomplished in behalf of the people who constitute the largest mass society in the world. The other nations have made a bad mess of this task. So, obviously, we have a lot to learn from the Chinese. Perhaps our open-mindedness and willingness to learn will loosen the hold of collectivist dogma for the ruling Chinese, helping them to realize that a brotherhood of pliable, manipulated people is not, after all, much of a

brotherhood. Who could really enjoy it, once he is having regular square meals?



**COMMENTARY**  
**A NOTE ON ARTHUR MORGAN**

WE quote a good deal from Arthur Morgan in these pages—in both the lead article and "Children" in this issue the reason being that he says simple things that need saying with great impact. Why was he able to do this? Probably because he thought about those things all his life. More than just "thinking," of course, is necessary, and Morgan's professional activity was one of the ways in which he put his thinking to work. We don't recall Paul Goodman ever saying anything about him, but Morgan certainly embodied the qualities Goodman urged that a professional ought to possess.

Morgan's profession was one of doing things that people need to have done he was an engineer. He made the most of the social dimension of this work, setting an example that has been inspiring to many others. He demonstrated, you could say, a way of working back to the kind of thinking about life that once supported all men in their hope of finding out and learning how to do what is right—a way which, at least for him, was both religious and scientific, yet free of the institutional weaknesses and bypaths of existing science and religion. Today, in the United States, there are dozens of groups of people starting to work in this way, expressing much the same thinking, although often in quite different words. These are the ones who know what they are doing, and are able to see the difference between what works and what fails. They are the only people actually competent to testify, these days, on "what is going on."

What was it about Arthur Morgan that made him so impressive as a human being? Well, he practiced a profession based on science—physical science. He learned well the art of observation of nature in order to use his scientific or engineering knowledge effectively. This made him a fine engineer, but it wasn't responsible for his rare distinction as a human being. Wondering about

this, we decided that Morgan guided his major decisions in life on the basis of moral principles he had fixed upon before he was twenty-one, and that he was obedient to those principles *as if* they represented actual scientific knowledge, with just as much claim on him as engineering principles. They *were* moral science for him. The power in his thought was almost certainly generated in this way.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### LOOKING AT CHILDREN

THERE are many things to become exercised about in relation to children. The young are neglected and abused by careless and cruel parents. Because they are defenseless minors their rights as human beings are typically ignored in the workings of our social system. They are sometimes committed to mental hospitals without a hearing of any sort. Less obviously, many adults see children as either "cute" or annoying nuisances. The "care" of a child, for such grown-ups, is often no more than sentimental indulgence alternating with harsh commands.

Such offenses against the young are frequent enough for their effects to emerge in statistics or their practical equivalent in the experience of those who work with children. Addiction to unnaturally sugary foods is well known to such people. Only with difficulty can such eating habits—result of unconscious conspiracy between the food processors and parents who know and care little about health—be broken and replaced with a liking for natural, nourishing foods.

Meanwhile, harshness seems virtually the rule in the practice of the adult social systems when it comes to the management of children who, innocently or otherwise, run afoul of the law. The law inevitably reflects the typical indifference of adults. Of the Massachusetts laws as they affect children, John Holt noted, after studying them, that "one would suppose that they dealt with dangerous criminals rather than children." The schools are charged with the task of policing them. "Nothing," moreover, "in the wording of these laws encourages the idea that the state looks kindly on children and wants to help them." On the contrary, "the impression is that the state considers unattended children a danger, and wants them all safely locked up."

Various writers, Holt among them, have written books on such subjects. The catalog of crimes against the young is long, and likely to grow longer. And if we include the subtler offenses—of the sort recorded by such writers as Virginia Axline (*Dibs*) and Robert Coles (*Children of Crisis*) and Eva Le Shan (*The Conspiracy Against Childhood*)—there is no end to the injustices against the young. The situation seems almost without remedy, for how can passing laws improve a relationship wholly dependent on love and trust?

A more hopeful conclusion would be to admit, first, that people are quite imperfect—with both good and bad tendencies in them—and to realize that we have allowed or caused our society to develop in ways that encourage the bad and shut out the good. This shows up statistically in what we do to children; but we know the good is still there by reason of many exceptions and what is accomplished by the strenuous efforts of a few reformers who write such books. Since it doesn't work to *tell* people to be "different," and since bumper sticker methods ("Have you hugged your kid today?") are little more than a maudlin confession of failure, other ways of dealing with this problem are called for. How, for one thing, could we redesign the pattern of our lives so that children would be more likely to be treated with kindness and understanding? What arrangements would help the good to come out?

In *Escape from Childhood* (Dutton, 1974), John Holt has a chapter on the effects of the isolation of children from family life. He says:

I do not claim that young people were happier before modern childhood was invented, or that in some ways it did not improve the lives of some children, or that even now it is always and everywhere bad for everybody. All I am saying is this, that it doesn't work well for many people, and that those people for whom it doesn't work ought to be allowed to try something else.

Nor do I claim that modern childhood is bad simply because it is new, or that it is in every way a radical departure from previous ways of dealing with

children. Children as far back as we know have always been owned and controlled by adults. What is both new and bad about modern childhood is that children are so cut off from the adult world. Children have always been bossed around by their parents. What is new is being bossed around only by their parents, having almost no contact with adults *except* their parents.

Here Holt is speaking of the loss of community in modern life—the breakdown of the normal (educational) environment. He is saying, in his own, teacher's way, what Arthur Morgan said in "The Small Community: Seed Bed of Society."

The older way of dealing with children, as considering them as part of the adult world, was not something carefully planned and thought out. It grew out of the natural conditions of life. For one thing, in any society where there is always more to do than people to do it, children will naturally be expected to help as soon and as much as they can; and when they are still too small to help, there will not be any special people around who have nothing to do but look after them. We constantly ask ourselves, in anxiety and pain "What is best for the children, what is right for the children, what should we do for the children?" The question is an effect as well as a cause of modern childhood. Until the institution was invented, it would hardly have occurred to anyone to ask the question or, if they had, to suppose that what was good for children was any different from what was good for everyone else.

Of course, not all parents and adults worry about what is good for children. Since the way we live now makes the responsibility of caring for children easy to delegate or shift, a great many miss the lessons of doing what is necessary for the young. They are no longer sensitized by the performance of natural *duty*. Neglect of children becomes the tendency, a habit writ large in institutional neglect, and confirmed in law by the punitive measures such as Massachusetts passed around the turn of the century.

What can we do about all this? Well, we can begin to bring other patterns into being, and a number of concerned parents are doing just that, improvising, because they must, since so many existing circumstances seem to bar the way to

intelligent change. But something else can be done, something which really comes *first*, and might turn into the real source of all the other good things we long for in relation to children.

It comes first because it is basic in human behavior—the basic determinant. Holt puts the matter clearly in the last chapter of *How Children Learn* (Pitman, 1967). People, he says, are very ignorant about children. Specialists make theories and parents read their books, but they need instead to be *with* children, watch them, feel with them, and even "think" with them. This is the real importance of what John Holt writes. His accounts of working with children are manuals filled with examples of *being with* children, getting inside their minds and seeing the world as they see it. If we don't—can't—do this, we can't help them much, but will only blunder along being sentimental and impatient by turns. The psychologists—most of them—are not much help, either. They are more the inheritors of doctrine than people who collect wisdom from experience:

They have not seen enough children in their native habitat—homes, schools, playgrounds, streets, stores, anywhere. They haven't talked or played with enough of them, or helped them or comforted them, or coerced them, or made them pleased, or excited, or rebellious, or angry.. Unless he is very fortunate, a young psychologist is very likely to have his head stuffed full of theories of children before he has a chance to look at any. When he does start looking at them, it is likely to be in a very special laboratory or testing situation. Like many teachers, he may not recognize the many ways in which children betray anxiety, because he has never seen them in a situation in which they were not anxious. . . . he may be so much a prisoner of his theories that he cannot see anything that does not fit into them.

Holt writes, he says, to persuade people "to *look* at children." He wants parents, teachers, psychologists, "educators"—everybody to look at children "patiently, repeatedly, respectfully," and to learn how to be a child again. The more people who do this, the happier and more filled with hope will be our children's lives.

## *FRONTIERS*

### **Ego Trip or Transcendence?**

A TOUGH-MINDED reader objects to what he regards as a use or misuse of "rhetoric"—to suggest to readers that the immortality of the soul is an idea worth considering. In the lead article in *MANAS* for Feb. 1, a case was made for thinking about this idea and a book was recommended. As for the "rhetoric" involved, it is impossible to do any sort of writing without rhetoric, which is simply the use of ideas and language to direct attention to some region of thought or action that may be worth looking into. One can't help using rhetoric except, perhaps, in a text on mathematics or some technical treatise.

There is of course much bad use of rhetoric, which seeks a conclusion by plausible trickery, exploiting the mores and popular belief. The Greek Sophists made rhetoric into the art of winning arguments by the omission of facts and the seduction of the minds of their hearers. Bad rhetoric plays on human vulnerability to make a point, often a specious point. This is the charge of our critic, who says: "Craving immortality for one's individual self is a vain, selfish ego trip." He adds that "it is a foolish one, considering the lack of evidence that there is any such possibility."

What, one wonders, would be acknowledged as evidence by this reader? What would be acceptable or convincing? Must we conclude that none of the ideas men hold close to their hearts, as deeply intuitive realizations, have any value or validity because they cannot be subjected to public test? That only the "provable" is worth thinking about? It seems fairly clear that the most inspiring ideas we have—love of truth, love of justice, regard for one another—indeed, all those convictions and loyalties which lie at the root of the integrity of scientific inquiry, are without demonstrable proof, as Michael Polanyi shows in *Science, Faith and Society*. At the end of a long discussion he wrote:

The method of disbelieving every proposition which cannot be verified by definitely prescribed operations would destroy all belief in natural science. And it would destroy, in fact, belief in truth and in the love of truth itself which is the condition of all free thought. The method leads to complete metaphysical nihilism and thus denies the basis for any universally significant manifestation of the human mind.

As for belief in immortality being an "ego trip," it can certainly be that. It seems quite evident that the Theravada Buddhist denial of a continuing subjective unit of consciousness or self is based on this all too likely possibility. But Plato's advocacy of immortality was certainly no ego trip, and other great minds have offered conceptions of immortality which it would be juvenile to regard as only egoistic longing. These thinkers are simply revealing their reflections on how the transcendental aspect of the universe may work.

Materialism is made up of little more than inferences from the proposition that the universe has no transcendental aspect that matter as we know it is all. Too many great thinkers have contested this view for it to be accepted without questioning. Our article quoted from several of them.

Our correspondent, however, to give him his say, or a portion of it, concludes:

Humanistic psychology is helping us to learn to experience the subjective reality of feelings that over-indulgence in linear thinking has caused us to ignore or repress. Diverting attention away from this concern with reality, by seducing us with visions of immortality, is, I feel, a serious mistake. To teach faith in immortality is to sing a lullaby song, when what the world needs is music to wake it up to the opportunity our generation has to see to it that succeeding generations will not be cheated as ours was.

Linear thinking is a pejorative term for an excessive preoccupation with logical thinking. It is the only kind of thinking that can be followed and analyzed. Apart from valid and restraining intuitions, it is all we have to protect us from

emotional extravagance. We need it whenever we reason about whether things may be true or not, or how they may be true. Holistic thinking—linear thinking's opposite, perhaps—is really a kind of open-hearted *musings*, what Whitman meant when he said, "I laze and invite my soul." But perhaps Whitman should not be listened to, since he was utterly convinced of immortality.

Interestingly, a contemporary psychologist—a psychiatrist, that is, and certainly a humanistic one—Robert Jay Lifton, in a recent book, *The Life of the Self* (Simon & Schuster, 1976), devotes his second chapter to five ways of thinking of immortality. Its symbolism, he believes, is crucial to the mental health of humans. Citing Jung, he writes:

His study of mythology convinced him of the enormous importance of the idea of immortality for the conscious and unconscious aspects of the human psyche. But he also said: "As a physician I am convinced that it is hygienic to discover in death a goal toward which one can strive, and that shrinking away from it is something unhealthy and abnormal;" and "I . . . consider the religious teaching of a life hereafter consonant with the standpoint of psychic hygiene."

Dr. Lifton admits that this goes beyond symbolic meaning for immortality, and is not, therefore, "scientific," and this is true enough. It is also true that Jung held reincarnation or rebirth to be "an affirmation that must be counted among the primordial affirmations of mankind"—an "archetype," in the Jungian vocabulary. In the book suggested for study in our Feb. 1 article, *Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery*, it is said:

In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung relates that he had listened attentively to the Indian teaching of reincarnation and searched the world of his own experience for authentic signs to justify this idea, since he required empirical evidence before he could accept it. Nothing convincing could be found until, in his final years, he had a series of dreams which seemed to illustrate the process of reincarnation in a deceased person of his acquaintance. Thereafter he viewed the problem of rebirth in another light, though without declaring a settled opinion.

Yet Jung discussed his life's meaning in terms of reincarnation.

Dr. Lifton's fifth mode of thinking about immortality—perhaps its highest form—is equally interesting:

The fifth mode is somewhat different from the others in that it depends solely upon a psychic state. This is the state of "experiential transcendence," a state so intense that in it time and death disappear. When one achieves ecstasy or rapture, the restrictions of the senses—including the sense of mortality—no longer exist. . . . One feels oneself to be different after returning from this state. . . . Experiential transcendence includes a feeling of what Eliade has called "continuous present" that can be equated with eternity or with "mythical time." This continuous present is perceived not only as "here and now" but as inseparable from past and future.

This is some of the thinking to which reflections on immortality may lead.