

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

HOW do humans make up their minds? The question has more than one application. People who have the same background of beliefs, hopes, and expectations are likely to make similar choices in a large range of decisions. What they decide to do is in some measure predictable. Advertising men and propagandists make a living out of this predictability. The few that decide otherwise go against the grain of their times, often being punished for their independence. In some relationships and for some purposes, the world honors the independent spirit. Its expression in other situations is isolated, confined, and condemned.

The pressure on people of the psychological environment comes in many mixtures. A custom of friendliness—no more, perhaps, than a social shaping of spontaneous human feeling—may be interrupted by the onset of fear. In *Russian Journey* (1956), William O. Douglas gives an example:

Whenever I stopped to take a picture on a city street, someone would come up to talk. Twice these strangers froze with fright after a few words. That happened on the main street of Stalinabad when a forty-three-old man spoke to me in English. After a word or two he broke out into a cold sweat. Perhaps he saw an MVD trailing him; perhaps he had memories of Stalin's terror. Anyway, he turned abruptly and almost ran. Once, in Frunze, a twenty-year-old, English-speaking girl—an attractive brunette—came up to me on the street, touched my arm, and said in perfect English, "I would like to talk to you. You see, I like America very much." I suggested we leave the busy street corner and walk down the shaded avenue to a bench under the trees. We started down the street, when she turned to see a man following. She whispered to me, "I can't go on. I'm frightened. I must leave." And she left.

Sometimes the pressure of fear is relieved by the reassurance of group opinion. When Douglas was ready to disembark from the ship that had

brought him across the Caspian Sea to Baku, where he entered Soviet Russia, he offered the captain, a friendly man, a ball-point pen as a farewell gift. "I learned," he says, "another aspect of the average Russian."

He had been under a police system so long that he was fearful of accepting any favor from a foreigner. The captain at once stepped back, holding up his hand and saying, "No thank you." I persisted in my effort to reward him. He continued to say "No," each time more emphatically. Soon the crew gathered around; and when they saw the gift and heard the captain refuse it, they all shouted, "Take it, take it." The Russian crew, indeed, overruled their captain. Captain Simonoff blushed and finally, at the command of his crew, extended his hand and took the pen. Tipping his hat, he disappeared into a cabin.

These, one might say, are small matters, often duplicated around the world. Yet they illustrate how people everywhere make up their minds. Generalizing this aspect of the human situation, Ortega says in *Man and People*:

If we contemplate the countless ideas or opinions that forever hover and buzz around us, swarming from what people say, we shall observe that they can be divided into two great classes. Some of them are said as something that is self-evident and in saying which the speaker is confident from the outset that they will be accepted by what is called "everybody." Other ideas or opinions, on the contrary, are uttered with the more or less definite suggestion that they are not accepted opinions. . . . In any case, it is clearly apparent that the person emitting such an opinion is fully conscious that if this private opinion of his is to have any public existence, he or a whole group of like-minded people must affirm it, declare, maintain, support, and propagate it. All this becomes even more obvious if we compare it with the expression of opinions that we know or suppose to be accepted by everybody. No one thinks of uttering them as a discovery of his own or as something needing support. . . . this is because these opinions are in fact established usages, and "established" means that they do not need support or backing from particular individuals and groups, but that, on the

contrary, they impose themselves on everyone, exert their constraint on everyone. It is this that leads me to call them binding observances.

Ortega goes on, illustrating in effect the meaning of the Socratic maxim, "The unexamined life is not worth living":

At every normal moment of collective existence an immense repertory of these established opinions is in obligatory observance; they are what we call "commonplaces." Society, the collectivity, does not contain any ideas that are properly such—that is, ideas clearly thought out on sound evidence. It contains only commonplaces and exists on the basis of these commonplaces. By this I do not mean to say that they are untrue ideas—they may be magnificent ideas; what I do say is that inasmuch as they are observances or established opinions or commonplaces, their possible excellent qualities remain inactive. What acts is simply their mechanical pressure on all individuals, their soulless coercion. It is not without interest that in the most ordinary speech they are called "prevailing opinions."

Ortega calls this conception of "binding observances" the alpha and omega of all sociology. He deals with the other side of the matter in a brief essay on "The Hero" in *Meditations on Quixote*:

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. . . . 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. . . . The hero's will is not that of his ancestors nor of his society, but his own. . . . His life is a perpetual resistance to what is habitual and customary. . . . Such a life is . . . a constant tearing oneself away from that part of oneself which is given over to habit and is a prisoner of matter.

So far, the images used to set the question of how people make up their minds have involved social relationships and decisions. But every individual lives in a personal cosmos of binding

observances—habits, "reflexes" (as they are or have been conditioned), instincts, and rules. When that personal cosmos fills with pain, we try to make changes in our lives, which naturally involves some making up of the mind. Getting at how this works is very difficult; "objective" factors weighing in a decision are often either nonexistent or invisible. But sometimes a sensitive psychologist can give a little light, as for example Carl Rogers, who said in one of his papers:

I think of . . . a young woman graduate student who was deeply disturbed and on the borderline of a psychotic break. Yet after a number of interviews in which she talked very critically about all the people who had failed to give her what she needed, she finally concluded: "Well, with that sort of foundation, well, it's really up to *me*. I mean it seems to be really apparent to me that I can't depend on someone else to *give* me an education." And then she added very softly: "I'll really have to get it myself." She goes on to explore this experience of important and responsible choice. She finds it a frightening experience and yet one which gives her a feeling of strength. A force seems to surge up in her which is big and strong, and yet she feels very much alone and sort of cut off from support. She adds: "I am going to begin to do more things I know how to do." And she did.

This seems an example of what another psychologist, Eugene T. Gendlin, calls "reflective attending." People who are in difficulties may sometimes back off and quietly think about both the disturbing and the undisturbing elements in their lives. This may result in a shift in the way they see. It seems clear that making up one's mind means a real change in attitude, not just a change in certain opinions, which are often only un-lived-out ideas. Gendlin says:

At such a time the individual may exclaim "Oh! . . ." well before he has had time to formulate words for the shift which has occurred in felt concreteness. After a few seconds he may employ many words. It is *one* bit of felt shift, yet thereafter, *many* details of what he was wrestling with will appear different, new facets will now seem relevant, different things will occur to him. . . . When such a felt experiential concreteness is carried forward so that it shifts or

eases even slightly, all these thousands of implicit facets have changed.

This seems understandable. It is like—or is—a part of "growing up." Where do the raw materials and perspectives which give opportunity for such a change come from? They come out of our environment and out of ourselves. The two sources are decisive. But telling what originates within from what is an external influence coloring what comes from within often seems impossible. Are the feelings of the heart more important than the conclusions of reason? Should impulses be given free rein, or just *some* impulses? Should we reason about our decisions? We ask, and answer, "Of course!", but may then reflect that people make terrible mistakes from both reasoning and failing to reason. Moreover, there are moments of extreme urgency when thinking things over is either impossible or seems wishy-washy. Obeying our reflexes may save or damn us. Most of the time, it seems, they rule decision and behavior. Call them, here, the consolidated authority of the past.

When Danilo Dolci, sometimes called "the Sicilian Gandhi," was in prison for organizing the fishermen and peasants of a town near Palermo to build their own road to the sea—a "strike in reverse," punishable because "unofficial"—he talked with another prisoner who had been convicted of banditry. The young man told this story:

Just married, he and his wife found a place on Madonna Street in Partinico. One evening he's home sitting at the table while his wife is making dinner. There's a knock at the door. She answers. It's a child, thin and gaunt: "My mother says soon as you strain the pasta could you leave us the broth, I mean the water? See, nobody at home's had anything to eat for three days, and she has to nurse the baby but the milk's stopped, so she wants to drink something to see if it gets the milk flowing." The woman sends the child home with some food and dishes out the macaroni. The husband gets up from the table, embraces her, and goes off to join the bandits.

Dolci estimates that in this part of Sicily, with some 33,000 inhabitants, there are about 350

brigands who have spent a total of 3,000 years in jail. The government spends \$750,000 a year for police and jails in the area, but the "4,000 people who needed jobs to make it through the week" have never seen a social worker.

Dolci, too, had made a decision:

I came here—to Trappeto, a village of peasants and fishermen on Castelammate Bay about thirty miles from Palermo—in 1952. Coming from the North, I knew I was totally ignorant. Looking all around me, I saw no streets, just mud and dust. Not a single drugstore—or sewer. The dialect didn't have a word for sewer. I started working with masons and peasants [he was a graduate architect], who kindly, gently, taught me their trades. That way my spectacles were no longer a barrier. Every day, all day, I learned more than any book could teach me about this people's struggle to exist. After work I'd ask questions, trying to comprehend their reality. And I discovered that Sicilians were not what Northern Italians made them out to be. (*Sicilian Lives*, Pantheon, 1981.)

Dolci was not yet thirty when he came to Sicily, but he had made up his mind what to do with his life. At sixteen he would get up three or four hours early to read the European classics—Goethe, Schiller, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Shakespeare—before breakfast. He read the Bible, the Koran, Lao tse, Confucius, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Later, after teaching architecture for a while, he went to Nomadelphia, a self-supporting charity for destitute orphans, and built housing for the children. After helping there for a while he became disturbed because Don Zeno, the priest who had founded Nomadelphia, accepted only Catholic children, and because this work "argued only to the converted," taking no account of "social problems outside." He had visited Trappeto as a boy with his father, and he decided to go there. "Tell Don Zeno not to worry," he said to a friend. "Tell him I'm going to become a priest." He went off, the friend said, "like a Gandhi." He arrived in Trappeto, having in his pocket the equivalent of five cents.

One of his purposes was to make banditry seem an undesirable option for a young Sicilian.

He has made some headway during thirty years of work. He got a dam built to make the land worth something for the peasants. For Dolci, his social labors in Sicily are a Platonic enterprise. People have to choose for themselves—he knows that—but a better display of options will be of immeasurable service. That was the profession adopted by Socrates—the display and discussion of options. The question before the Athenians—whether they realized it or not—was: Should justice or self-interest be the ruling principle in human life? In almost every dialogue, Socrates argues this question. Socrates declared for justice, admitting the extreme difficulty of defining it? and sometimes, at the end of the argument, only Socrates has been persuaded by what was said. Yet he went on saying it to the end of his life, and *at* the end of his life.

We have been talking about decision-making and have given a few examples of what seem admirable choices, and one in which the chooser could think of nothing else to do. There is also the larger question of the cultural background of reference-points for making up our minds, What we call "tradition" is a powerful and usually controlling influence. We could say that tradition is the total of what Ortega named "binding observances." For the Greeks the tribal encyclopedia of proper observances was Homer's epic literature. The poets and the historians, beginning with Herodotus, transmitted tradition. Mortal men, they believed, need to be upheld and guided by the acts of men which are deserving of immortal memory. In *Between Past and Future*, Hannah Arendt says: "To strive for immortality can mean, as it certainly did in early Greece, the immortalization of oneself through famous deeds and the acquisition of immortal fame; it can also mean the addition to human artifice of something more permanent than we are ourselves; and it can mean, as it did with the philosophers, the spending of one's life with things immortal."

The goal was to "immortalize" oneself, which, Miss Arendt says, does not so much mean

"believing in immortality" as, in the words of Herodotus, "to act in a certain way in order to assure the escape from dying." The Platonic "revolution" gave immortality a transcendental meaning. While begetting children was a familiar way of "living forever," dwelling in the neighborhood of "those things which are forever" is the philosopher's mode of achievement. This reaches beyond action, blending mortal human consciousness with the pure vision of the *nous*—which as Plato said, cannot be translated into words.

Tradition, then, was the means of offering to each generation of Greeks the ideal modes of life, the goals to be striven for. It was the consensus of remembered excellences, made immortal in song. History, as a part of tradition, was to preserve the achievements of men, and to bestow on both Greeks and barbarians the praise they deserved and to "make their glory shine through the centuries," as Herodotus declared in the first sentence of his account of the Persian Wars. This Greek spirit of impartiality, which came into the world "when Homer decided to sing the deeds of the Trojans no less than those of the Achaeans, and to praise the glory of Hector no less than the greatness of Achilles," is still, Hannah Arendt says, "the highest type of objectivity we know."

Both Plato and the modern scientific age have been critical of tradition, although for radically different reasons. Plato said that tradition, as transmitted by the poets, got in the way of independent moral decision. The hypnotic persuasiveness of Homeric imagery made it difficult, he said, for the Greeks to ask themselves how they should choose to live. Achilles had already answered that question, but Plato wanted such tradition replaced by the individually examined life. For the modern technologists, tradition was seen as a bar to progress. It stood in the way of doing things rationally. It was no longer a question of what one ought to do, but of how to do it efficiently and at the least cost. Plato opposed tradition in order to make the petrified

values of the past take on new life through day-to-day reflection. Technology wanted to get rid of values altogether, since in their "traditional" form they were irrelevant to understanding the world as a "process."

But today, the very "objectivity" on which the modern theory of knowledge is based is dissipating before our eyes. Even physics is known to be man-made construction using man-made abstractions, derived as answers to man-selected questions. The sciences, in short, are actually echoes of our own assumptions and impositions on nature, and are seen to be so when we turn to them for help in all but utilitarian projects. Hannah Arendt ends her long chapter on "The Concept of History" by saying:

The modern age, with its growing world-alienation, has led to a situation where man, wherever he goes, encounters only himself. All the processes of the earth and the universe have revealed themselves either as man-made or potentially man-made. . . . In the situation of radical world-alienation, neither history nor nature is at all conceivable. This twofold loss of the world—the loss of nature and the loss of human artifice in the widest sense, which would include all history—has left behind it a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass. For a mass-society is nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who are still unrelated to one another but have lost the world once common to all of them.

The reference-points outside ourselves for making up our minds are virtually gone. Tradition is gone because we are unable to believe in habit, however much we still have to rely on it. The objective processes of nature are gone because we now understand that the abstract knowledge of those processes, brilliantly and laboriously assembled, is a human invention. So we are thrown back on ourselves, become as we were in the beginning, dependent on our inward feelings or idea-feelings, our reason, and our senses. We cannot, we find, think about the future by means of the categories and judgments of the past. The

future, which requires a change in both categories and judgments, does not fit with ideas from the past.

How shall we make up our minds? We shall, of course, go on doing it more or less as in the past, because we must, but in those occasional interludes when we have time to think, in what scheme of meaning shall we verify our premises? Is there in the world or in ourselves a structure of intent and meaning and fulfillment on which both heart and head are able to collaborate, and in which we can take part without desperately shutting our eyes to continuing uncertainties?

REVIEW

"DEBTS OF HONOUR"

FOR oblique praise one might say that the trouble with Michael Foot's *Debts of Honour* (Harper & Row) is that reading it makes you want to take a year off to find out about all the people he writes about, and to read them, too, for they nearly all wrote well. Michael Foot is an English journalist, editor, and lately politician—in 1975 he entered Parliament as a Labour candidate. He is now what the British call "Leader of the Opposition." As for his political career, of which we know little, it seems enough to say that those who disagree with him respect and admire him, judging from reports in the *Manchester Guardian*. Our concern is with his book, in which he tells about men and women from whom he has learned, who number fourteen.

We can think of hardly anyone in public life in America who is as conversant with literature and its values as Michael Foot. Perhaps this is more naturally an English endowment. It becomes most evident in Mr. Foot's sense of history. He seems to live in a present that includes about four hundred years. Significant figures of past centuries are *lively* in his thought, as though only yesterday they were actively among us, saying quotable things. Of whom does he write? First of all his father, and one soon sees why. Among his heroes is Thomas Paine. This chapter is the best (short or long) tribute to Paine we have ever read. *Harper's* reprinted it last August, which is why we sought out Foot's book.

Next on the honor roll of appreciative essays is one on Ignazio Silone. Anti-Fascist from his first novel, *Fontamara*, to his last breath (in 1978), Silone became anti-Communist from bitter experience, as did the other writers of *The God That Failed*. His maturation as an artist and human being is dramatized in *Bread and Wine* and *Seed Beneath the Snow*, which with *Fontamara*, make his great trilogy. These books show why, as Foot says, "Silone fitted easily into no party or

definable group; his every sentence bristled with his own brand of independence." Silone's comment on Stalinism "will never fade from the history books."

It was, according to his own description, way back in 1922, as he was leaving Moscow on one occasion, that Alexandra Kollontai had jokingly warned him: "If you should read in the papers that Lenin has had me arrested for stealing the Kremlin's silverware, it will mean simply that I have not been in full agreement with him on some problem of agricultural or industrial policy." And it was a year or two later again that another ineffable exchange occurred in Moscow which should surely have shaken the universe. Confronted with a dilemma of tactics posed by the British Communist Party, a Russian expert offered a simple if Jesuitical solution, whereupon the British Communist delegate interrupted: "But that would be a lie." Then followed Silone's great scene—"This naive objection," he wrote, "was greeted with a burst of laughter, the like of which the gloomy offices of the Communist International had certainly never heard laughter which rapidly spread all over Moscow, since the Englishman's incredibly funny answer was immediately telephoned to Stalin and the most important offices of State, leaving new waves of astonishment and hilarity in its wake as we learned later. 'In judging a regime it is important to know what it finds amusing,' said Togliatti, who was with me."

Silone, Foot says, was prompted to ask Togliatti: "Do you suppose that's the way they do things in the Sacred College of Cardinals? Or in the Fascist Grand Council?"

One flow of Foot's appreciation deserves repetition:

Silone himself could breathe only on the highest altitudes. He was obsessed by the perpetual interaction of morals and policies, thought and action, ends and means, the flesh and the spirit. He could not stoop. He would castigate not only the gaolers and executioners of totalitarian states, but the literary tradesmen who pandered to the lowest tastes, particularly those who trafficked in eroticism in the name of liberty. For the liberty he treasured, in his work and with his life, was something inexpressibly richer and nobler.

Disraeli is Foot's "good Tory." In the House of Commons in 1844, Disraeli made a speech which could now be reprinted annually (or more often) to the profit of all England (and Ireland). He said:

I want to see a public man come forward and say what the Irish question is. One says that it is a physical question; another a spiritual. Now it is the absence of the aristocracy; now the absence of the railways. It is the Pope one day and potatoes the next. . . . A starving population, an alien Church, and in addition the weakest executive in the world. Well, what then would gentlemen say if they were reading of a country in that position? They would say at once, "The remedy is revolution." But the Irish could not have a revolution, and why? Because Ireland is connected with another and more powerful country. Then what is the consequence? The connection with England became the cause of the present state of Ireland. If the connection with England prevented a revolution and a revolution was the only remedy, England logically is in the odious position of being the cause of all the misery in Ireland. What then is the duty of an English Minister? To effect by his policy all those changes which a revolution would affect by force. That is the Irish question in its integrity.

"No clearer voice," Foot says, "has ever been addressed to the Irish question." (One wishes he had gone on to suggest what that policy now might be, but perhaps this has become virtually impossible.)

Other British eminences considered in rambling anecdotal detail are William Hazlitt, Bertrand Russell, H. N. Brailsford, Randolph Churchill, Daniel Defoe, the Duchess of Marlborough, and Jonathan Swift. Swift's genius remains unquestioned, but his reputation was long blurred by charges of madness, starting with the slurs of Samuel Johnson. Foot mounts a magnificently conclusive defense, showing that Swift was not mad, never became mad, although, as with many others, his powers failed at great age. The most engrossing of these essays is on Lord Beaverbrook, for whom Foot worked for many years, and to whom he devotes the most pages. His life on Beaverbrook's *Evening*

Standard sounds like a three-ring circus. A sequence of little importance makes especially good reading, giving the flavor of Foot's prose:

Seaman Frank came to see us or rather we went in search of him, having heard the ever-memorable broadcast in which he described how he had lost his leg in the world-famous wreck of the *San Demetrio*; how when the torpedo had hit the ship it made a noise like the opening of the gates of hell; how he had run across "a gruel of men's bodies," to the life boats; how the shark had taken his leg; how he had made the miraculous return journey to his native Liverpool. Seaman Frank could talk like that at will, he was soaked in Joseph Conrad, if not the *San Demetrio* waters. I wrote a leading article called "English Seaman" with many overtones of Froude. For a few weeks we placarded his name over all our delivery vans and even started to remind him how splendid it would be for our sales when he went to sea again. However, a few had doubts from the beginning, and when we heard that a reporter from the *Evening News* was allegedly being dispatched to make some first-hand inquiries in Liverpool, we sent our best reporter, Leslie Randall, on the same trail and to get there first. Seaman Frank had never been nearer the sea than Birkenhead Ferry; he had lost his leg in a tram accident. He was an admirer of Conrad, long before Professor Leavis. But we hardly believed that Beaverbrook, for all his special interest, would be concerned with these distinctions, and Seaman Frank was allowed to withdraw quietly from the literary scene.

Beaverbrook, it seems, was a Conservative—it's hard to tell about such matters because the reader, if English, is supposed to know without being told—yet he was able to write a history book:

Beaverbrook, the historian, is always giving the evidence, if it is there, against his own preconception, against his own Party, even against his own heroes. Who could ever have believed that he of all people would have assumed the mantle of historian? Yet, it is true, and, in the case of his Conservative Party, he plays the part with a special relish and glee.

It is there, to his humour, we must always return. "If Max gets to heaven," wrote H. G. Wells, "he won't last long. He'll be chucked out for trying to pull off a merger between Heaven and Hell. . . . after having secured a controlling interest in key subsidiary companies in both places, of course."

Finally, for a number of reasons, Foot, the Socialist, felt obliged to quit the Beaverbrook papers. He wrote to his boss, familiarly known as Beelzebub:

Your views and mine are bound to become more and more irreconcilable. As far as this Socialist business is concerned my views are unshakable. For me it is the Klondyke or bust, and at the moment I am not sure I am going the right way to Klondyke."

They parted, and—guessing to fill in the gaps—Foot and some others apparently started a high-principled newspaper of their own, the *Tribune*, which eventually encountered some rocky times. Foot's wife, Jill, knew Beaverbrook and understood him, and for reasons not spelled out the old man, now in his seventies, offered Foot a check for £3,000, saving the paper from extinction. Only Foot and Jill knew where the money came from.

Would, one wonders, an assemblage of American journalists roar at Foot's letter of resignation, somewhat in the spirit of the Soviet Communists' hilarity when they heard that English delegate say, "But that would be a lie!"

COMMENTARY

DOLCI TO COME

WE haven't read all Danilo Dolci's five or six books—just some of them—and James McNeish's biography, *Fire Under the Ashes* (Beacon, 1966)—but these have been enough to establish a permanent interest in what he does or writes. We strongly recommend the biography, and also *A New World in the Making* (Monthly Review Press, 1965), which gives Dolci's ideas about "planning." In it he tells of his visits to the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Senegal, and Ghana. The conversations he held in these countries are fascinating and inspiring.

The quotations from Dolci on page two are from his latest book, *Sicilian Lives*. After preparing this material for the press, it seemed to us evident that the entirety of the "Prologue" Dolci wrote for his book would make a splendid lead article; so, if our request for permission to reprint is granted, it will appear in a couple of months. Meanwhile, we might say that during May and June his translator, Justin Vitiello, will conduct a tour of Sicily "to study Sicilian folklore and nonviolent organic development." Students with two years of college-level Italian will earn credits by the tour. Prof. Vitiello has worked as a translator with Dolci for the past five years. His address is Temple University (Language Dept.) , Philadelphia, Pa. 19122. The students will spend weeks at the Center for Organic Planning, established by Dolci in Trappeto, and visit other regions.

Readers interested in Bruno Bettelheim's criticism of public school primers (in last July's *Psychology Today* and the *Atlantic* for November) would do well to consult "Letters to the Editor" in the March *Atlantic*. Agreeing, one teacher charged the schools with *disabling* perfectly normal minds by demanding cerebral acrobatics. Another teacher said: "We don't teach reading; we literally teach tests." So there are children "who are good at phonics tests but can't

read." Commenting, Karen Zelan, co-author with Bettelheim, tells of a brilliant six-year-old boy whose teacher refused to move him to the second primer because he hadn't mastered the first primer's "phonics exercises." When the boy's mother proposed that maybe he didn't need them, the teacher said it didn't matter if he could read, what *did* matter was going "step by step through the workbooks." And that, Karen Zelan remarks, is "making the means the ends."

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

ON TEACHING DISQUIETING FACTS

A READER has sent us an article, "A Slaughter of the Innocents," by Layna Verin, a teacher and writer in the herds of health, medicine, writing, which appeared in the *Berkeley (Calif.) Gazette* for Jan. 11. Miss Verin begins:

The hideous slaughter of nuclear war and the possible destruction of all life, at least in the northern hemisphere, is agonizing to contemplate. Even worse is the realization that it is literally a slaughter of innocents and particularly infants, children and youth, those who have just begun their lives. It is children who are most susceptible to the after-effects of radiation and who, if they are not instantaneously vaporized or incinerated, will be subject to the most torturous decay and death in its aftermath.

Yet we have kept silent. Children are not informed of the facts about nuclear war. They have only the vaguest idea of its realities. They have no notion at all of the kind of weapons that exist, of the speed with which they can be deployed, of the lessening time-span between a nuclear alert, such as the two false alerts that occurred in 1980, and an actual attack. They know nothing of the increasing reliance on computers which will effectively prevent any human intervention once an alert is given, nor do they know that in such an event we are doomed and that in death there will be no difference between "We" and "They."

Recently I spoke to a group of students at Berkeley High School. One young woman asked me: "We have a bomb, and they have a bomb, right? And if we drop a bomb on them, they will drop a bomb on us?" Yes, she is right. But this was all she knew. What an appalling lack of information her question reflects, what a failure on our part to deal with the most critical question that confronts us as human beings and to give our children the protection of knowledge.

The writer means, of course, as she explains, that "knowledge" gives protection in the sense that it brings awareness of the threat to all human life in nuclear weapons. She means that when the young understand the implications of nuclear war they will add their voices to "the massive outcry that is necessary if we are to stop the preparations

that have escalated into an insanity of such terrifying proportions."

But is the high-school girl who knew only that both countries have bombs, and if bombed would retaliate, so different from the rest of us? And are we all, in our comparative ignorance, unable "to deal with the most critical question that confronts us as human beings"?

The matter is doubtless arguable, but one might think of more important questions that suffer greater neglect. What, for example, is the best way to use our time until we die? Is campaigning for the possibility of longer lives—not cut off in their early bloom—really the most important or "critical" thing for people, young and old, to do?

But let us agree that trying to eliminate the threat of nuclear war has nonetheless *great* importance. Then the question might be: When and how do you inform children of the nature of this threat? Other questions present similar problems. When and how do you explain to children that politicians are likely to be corrupt, that statesmen are often indifferent to the life and welfare of whole populations, that parents, whatever their intentions, may be terribly wrong in what they think and decide?

In short, how is Evil best introduced to children as a fact in life? Or should you wait until life itself gives the instruction?

Bruno Bettelheim has what seems a good suggestion: Fairy stories and myths prepare children for the encounter with evil, and in a way that does not scare them half to death. But even here, care is indicated. We know a five-year-old whose dreams were haunted by the cannibalistic old witch, night after night, because his music-loving parents took him to see Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*.

Well, let's say that high school is probably the time for explaining something of what nuclear war and preparations for it mean. Layna Verin writes:

In the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* for November there are two articles concerned with

children and atomic war. One relates a teacher's experience with a high school class in a Quaker private school. It stresses the lack of information which these students, who are far better informed than public school students, had about the arms race. The second article, "Nuclear Ignorance," surveys American history texts and finds that "even the most elementary facts about nuclear weapons are completely absent." It ends with a question put to the author by a student 14 or 15 years old.

"You say these things have been used before?"

"Yes, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki." Pause. "In World War II."

A downward glance, his eyes serious, a little guarded: "Huh. I had never heard of that."

The writer tells of attending a meeting of medical men, scientists, and military experts on the medical consequences of nuclear war, about a year ago in San Francisco. Speakers described what a one-megaton bomb would do to that city. One out of every three inhabitants would be dead in days or weeks, doctors would be injured or killed, hospitals destroyed, the city and surrounding areas turned into a fiery inferno. Aghast, some of those present were moved to do what they could do to inform the public thoroughly about these terrible things.

Layna Verin says:

Is it not incumbent upon us, then, to educate our children about this evil, this plague which by our silence we have allowed others to inflict upon our world? We must tell them the truth and give them an opportunity to voice their fears and to express their passionate indignation. Perhaps in their innocence they will be wiser and more courageous than we.

We must insist that education on nuclear war be included in the school curricula, that attention befitting the critical nature of the problem be given to this education and that creative forms of expression by the students be encouraged. A proposal to this effect has already been submitted to the Berkeley school system and your support is needed.

According to Lester Grinspoon, a Harvard psychiatrist, a similar movement was undertaken twenty years ago on the East Coast by a group of well-informed scientists, although the audience sought was the general public. The program was not effective. Puzzled by the lack of response, the

psychiatrist pursued extensive research and then reported to the 1962 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, saying that while it seems evident that "the very existence of a whole civilization, and perhaps more, is threatened, . . . judging by people's behavior, it does not appear as though most of them, including both decision-makers and the public, have wholly grasped this fact."

If they really believed that their lives and those of their loved ones were threatened, we would expect them to be seething with concern and activity. . . . Are we to believe simply that the facts are not available to people and that the mass media have conspired to hide the truth?

Although the mass media may not be diligent in spreading the truth, he points out that there are still those "without any special resources" who do understand the implications of nuclear war. What about the others?

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 would interfere with his capacity to be productive, to maintain his mental equilibrium.

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.

When and *how*, then, should the threat of nuclear war be presented to children?

FRONTIERS

'Naive, Unsophisticated, and Unbelievable,'

RESPONDING to mention of a self-help group called Recovery, Inc. (for former mental patients) in *Frontiers* for last Dec. 30, a reader sent us extracts from *Mental Health Through Will-Training* by the late Abraham A. Low, the Chicago psychiatrist who founded the group in 1937, at the request of some of his patients. There are now, our correspondent says, about a thousand such groups in the United States—eighty-one in California—and former patients have established groups in Canada, Ireland, England, and Israel. Organization is minimum and the groups most often meet in rent-free facilities provided by churches and community centers. There is a fee for membership in the national organization, but "recovering mental patients and nervous people are not asked to become members; they are asked only to obtain the textbook, read in it, and listen during the first few sessions of the group before attempting to take part." The leaders are ex-patients who volunteer their services, using the methods set forth by Dr. Low, which they understand from personal experience.

The founder of this movement apparently received the same sort of treatment by his professional colleagues as other innovators in the healing arts. Dr. W. H. Bates, the ophthalmologist who began telling school children in the New York public schools to throw away their glasses and then taught them how to see without them, and the California M. D., Henry G. Bieler, who wrote *Food Is Your Best Medicine*, were both ostracized by orthodox practitioners. Of the founder of Recovery, Inc., our reader says:

The first small group formed through the initiative of ex-patients was housed in and supported by the Psychiatric Institute of the University of Illinois. Dr. Low had discarded the psychoanalytic method in which he was trained and eventually his simple self-help method aroused the hostility of his colleagues. All but one clinic were closed to his patients, forcing him to return to private practice. No longer shielded by the Psychiatric Institute, the new-

born Recovery organization had to fight for survival in the outside world. Dr. Low supervised one meeting a week, and other meetings were held in private homes. It became evident to Dr. Low that experienced "Recoveryites" could conduct their own meetings without professional supervision, and that the training of leaders would make it possible to start groups in other states. In time the home meetings were moved into public facilities, following the lead of a group in St. Louis which threw its doors open to the public. Dr. Low wrote *Mental Health Through Will-Training* for general lay use and the guidance of groups. (Politics, religion, and sex are excluded from discussion.) The group does not take the place of a physician and does not diagnose or offer advice. But the people who take part give impressive evidence of getting well.

The thing that becomes most apparent from reading about this work is that self-help is *self-help*. No one is allowed to overlook this principle. The group has developed a simplified vocabulary for considering what the participants are trying to do. Inventing reasons for not doing what needs to be done is called "sabotage." Illustration:

George: When I was little I would get myself worked up so much that I would take my fists and hit myself on the head. All through public school and high school and college I made life miserable for myself and my parents. I practiced the angry and fearful temper. I must mention that I could never hold a job before getting Recovery training. In December I was working for a Loan Company, and again I felt like quitting because I didn't like the work. I stayed home and thought I should call the boss but I didn't. Frankly, I don't think he missed me much. But the next day I asked Frank to call the office and tell the boss I was too sick to work. But Frank talked me out of this. He said that is sabotage. And when it came to me that the doctor said if you fear to do something you do not fear the thing but your sensations; you fear being embarrassed or self-conscious. And the cure is to do what you fear to do and to brave the sensation. So I phoned the office and the boss just asked me to come back soon. That only proved that the doctor was right and that I was afraid of my own embarrassment. After that I felt embarrassed on several occasions but faced it and did not try to ease out of it.

Involved in recovery from ills of this sort is, Dr. Low says, "*the will to bear discomfort.*" Getting well cannot be made easy. It is bound to involve some pain. The doctor said in relation to another patient, one who thought he couldn't hold a pen in his hand:

If you want to maintain the values of health and self-respect, of initiative and determination, of character and self-discipline, what you have to learn is to bear the discomfort of controlling your impulses, of steeling your will, curbing your temper. This calls for an attitude which, far from exalting the virtues of comfort, places the emphasis where it belongs: on *the will to bear discomfort.* When Phil embraced the Recovery doctrine that discomfort, even in our "advanced" days, is a thing to be patiently borne, bravely faced and humbly tolerated he discovered forthwith that his "I cannot" write was nothing but an "I care not" to be uncomfortable. He then revised his distorted valuations, braced himself against that part of life which means discomfort and realized to his amazement that with the emphasis properly shifted things were done more efficiently and life was quite comfortable again.

In his work Dr. Low of course distinguished between sufferers from somatic or neurological conditions and those "available for psychotherapy." At first, the "Phil" of the above account rejected Dr. Low's "prescription."

He obviously shared the current view that in order to deal effectively with a nervous complaint the patient must be subjected to a searching investigation for the purpose of unravelling hidden mysteries of thought and tracking down the crafty maneuvers of mischief-brewing emotions. If this were true my rule would be naive, unsophisticated, unbelievable and decidedly unsuited to the purpose. But it may be that what is really naive and unbelievable is the modern trend to view thought as mysterious and emotion as mischievous. And I shall advise you to reject this contemporary superstition that your thoughts are forever scheming against your welfare and your feelings continually plotting against your health. I shall grant that in our present-day setting leadership is lacking and confusion rampant. And with the amount of confusion governing this world of ours it is easy to get thoughts muddled and feelings confounded. But Recovery refuses to be modern, and the leadership which it supplies aims precisely at teaching you how to conquer confused ideas and

perturbed emotions through simplicity of thinking and humility of feeling.

While the active workers in Recovery, Inc. avoid publicity of a "popular" sort, they are glad to welcome to their meetings persons who might be benefitted by their work. *Mental Health Through Will-Training* (first published in 1950) is available (at \$12.00) in a 1981 printing by Christopher. Recovery centers are listed in phone books in many cities.