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DECIDING WHAT TO DO

DURING more than thirty-four years of publishing—since 1948—MANAS has given attention to literally hundreds of books—carefully written and sometimes ardently arousing books—devoted to analysis of what is wrong with life in the United States, and with world affairs. The subject-matter for such books is never exhausted; new material surfaces every day. New and qualified writers also appear to deal with these emerging issues. Sometimes they make clear recommendations; sometimes they call for more "research"; sometimes they are simply pessimistic, giving sufficient reason for their gloomy outlook.

Meanwhile, our condition does not improve. The writers of these critical studies reach only a small minority of the population, and while some of the readers may become active in various ways, the general tendencies of our society seem to remain unchanged. The observation of Joan Gussow, who calls herself a "nutrition activist," reporting her effort to reach over TV a larger audience with the message of sensible eating, might be extended in many directions. She said:

> Eating is not a bad habit. Unlike smoking, eating is not something you can give up altogether. It is something that you must learn to control. We are assaulted by temptations to eat—either we develop strong characters or we over-consume. Yet it is very difficult to promote thoughtful self-control on a medium which is devoted almost entirely to selling mindless self-indulgence. . . . Self-indulgence, not self-restraint, is what makes the economy go. . . . I would be interested in hearing about any shows in which moderation, self-restraint, non-consumption and conservation are characteristics of a contemporary hero figure.

This may seem a trivial matter, yet it indicates a larger "problem" of which dietary self-indulgence is but an instance. Choosing (at random) one of the critical books of recent decades, we opened to the first pages of William Appleman Williams' *The Great Evasion* (1964), finding this comment on President Johnson's "State of the Union" message in January, 1964.

> Its form, style, and tone served primarily to document the continuing devolution of public prose toward the model evolved by the advertising industry as appropriate and effective for communicating with and controlling the captive audiences of the mass media. The short, flat, and monotonously simple prosaic sentences approached a secular version of the catechism in which assertive, even aggressive, rhetorical pronouncements are presented as established truths and as reasoned, incontestable solutions to basic problems. . . .
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> The President defined four major problems facing the country. The search for peace was still unsuccessful, and had therefore to be continued with redoubled and increasingly deadly weapons. Unemployment not only existed, but threatened to continue its recent resurgence and become once again an overwhelming social problem. Despite imposing and ever increasing production totals, poverty remained so entrenched in America that it had become necessary to declare unconditional war on that blatant denial of the avowed effectiveness of the system. . . . Noble though it was as a declaration of concern and as a manifesto of intent, the speech was even more significant as a catalogue of failures.

There is hardly any point in compiling a large collection of such quotations, which are amply available. The time has come, Robert Heilbroner declared a few years ago, for the onset of American pessimism. The facts are there to confirm his judgment, bringing occasion, however, not for despair, but for intelligent revision of our expectations. Heilbroner also pointed out that the legendary American "optimism," which lasted until about the second world war, was grounded on a century of dramatic achievement during which everything seemed to go "right" for American enterprise. One might add that, with all this success, Americans saw little need to consult history for guidance. They, as the Founding

Fathers had seemed to declare, were a "chosen people, destined to show the rest of the world how to be successful. Children absorbed this idea almost from birth. It has saturated our literature for at least a century. But now we are having to ask ourselves where we "went wrong"—if that is a useful way to pose the problem—and to decide what to do.

The "problem" is twofold. There is first the question of what we as individuals can do—what is possible for us to do, and the determination of the reasons for actually doing it. Then there is the question of what we—or the nation—ought to do collectively. It is here, of course, that discouragement most naturally arises. Getting the "nation" to do what is sensible or "right" seems a virtually impossible project. No doubt books and articles containing informed opinion on this question have their use in the formation of intelligent minority opinion, but success in getting such proposals adopted seems in all likelihood to have to wait for the irresistible constraint of a great crisis, with our action, in that case, amounting to adjustment to necessity, accompanied by all the pain and grief, not to say disaster and even death, such ruthless adjustments entail for a mass society. It seems evident that further fuel and food shortages, with resulting astronomical prices, will almost certainly occur. War is another grim possibility, which is sure to precipitate countless other problems.

These are some of the areas thoroughly covered by the analytical and prophetic books of the time. The strong possibility of having to face such emergencies calls for immediate action and long-term planning, but, as we know, the remedies, or supposed remedies, now being applied are manipulative methods which have already failed, and will continue to fail, all around the world. As William Appleman Williams put it in the first sentence of the book quoted above: "America's great evasion lies in its manipulation of Nature to avoid a confrontation with the human condition and with the challenge of building a true community."

What is "a true community"? It is, we might say, an organic association of humans who share their intelligence and are able to meet their problems and define and work toward their objectives self-reliantly, without significant obstruction from the outside. True community is the essential social unit toward which we must work, in order to live fruitful, unharrassed lives and to pursue objectives that will bring balance and permanence to our undertakings. That humans have the capacity to form such communities is plain enough. Ability is not at issue; choosing to form them is the issue.

Choices in that desirable direction may come slowly. Some species of compulsion from a minor or major "necessity" may contribute a push. Changes in taste—unpredictable although sometimes statistically noticeable—will help. Politicos with curiously mixed motives may open doors. A new cycle of dedicated journalism is already strengthening the minority outlook, giving it the beginnmgs of measurable strength. But journalism for a "good cause" often becomes seriously irresponsible, especially if it promises to be profitable. The resulting confusion may lead back to drift. But these, let us say, are nonetheless conditions that we can understand and cope with.

Yet there are other "obstacles" to getting where we want to get—the word is quoted for the reason that they may not be real obstacles, but simply actualities which attend any far-reaching change contemplated on a large or social scale. We have an illustration. Back in the early 1970s Larry Cole, director of the Lower East Side Action Project (LEAP) in New York, arranged a meeting of concerned individuals to talk about the systematic mistreatment of Puerto Rican youth who live in that neighborhood. Attending were John Holt, Paul Goodman, Nat Hentoff, and some others. Larry Cole set the problem in generalized terms:

> "Say Felix, here, wants to be a draftsman. In school they will not let him have the opportunity. They send him to a school where they don't have drafting. . . . I know at least thirty kids who come here who rate well above average in any kind of culture-free symbol test, I.Q. or whatever. Now what they have been receiving in school is not bad education at all. It has been anti-education. It is . . . anti-growing up, anti-being a man. Everything a kid has to do in New York City in terms of public facilities is anti-kid. The correctional institutions destroy you. The welfare institutions destroy you. We can talk about a kid dropping out of school, but we must see all of these little incidents together as a total push to keep these kids submerged. What do we do about it?"

There was some discussion but it didn't get far. How could it? An interchange with Paul Goodman illustrates the sort of "obstacle" we spoke of. Larry Cole said not one of the young Puerto Ricans who came to the LEAP center for help had ever been counseled by a school adviser to work toward one of the professions. Goodman, who had written at length about the spirit and constitution of a good community, and was widely influential among the young, raised this question: Should the Puerto Rican youngsters *want* to join the professions in a society like ours? Was this a goal worth striving for?

Cole said that the boy ought at least to have a choice. Goodman replied:

> "Before that, Larry, is the question of what is worth doing, not whether you get a better school or a better education. I feel we have a lot of kids here who have the same kind of garbage in their minds that any kid in Yale or Harvard has. They seem to think the same things are worth while. They have the same ambitions, want to climb up the same way, and who needs it?"

Goodman's point was worth making, but so was Larry Cole's. And, one might ask, did Goodman have the right to define the aspirations of a ghetto teenager on the lower East Side?

The question is fundamental. People want to bring about radical changes in our society. Will, then, the changes they have in mind—or would they, since the changes are obviously hypothetical—deny or cut off hopes for those who have dreamed only of "getting somewhere" in our society as it is? Maybe Felix *needs* to go to Harvard before he can wake up to larger possibilities.

Then there was the visiting teacher who joined a ghetto school, dressed like a "hippie," behaving like one, and telling the girls she taught to do the same. The principal said to her:

> "Miss D., our girls are too uninhibited, that's exactly their problem. Being totally uninhibited does not necessarily lead to happiness. It creates anxiety. At what point do your impulses carry you away? At what point do you stop? Drugs? Murder?
>
> "Look, Miss D., It's the upper- and middle-class students shirking middle-classness and the bounds of their parents' values, who relate to the hippie teacher. They want a way out of their society. Our girls have never really been in society m any meaningful way, and we have to help them get there, and get them into jobs and professions."

There are lots of reformers and planners who never think of circumstances and wants of this sort, and others who may think of them but not regard them as needing attention. They want, you could say, to *change* people for their own good. They seldom consider the question: Does *anyone* know enough to try to change other people, for *any* reason? People who do bad or deliberately antisocial things may have to be restrained, but this is probably far from changing them, although simple restraint instead of "punishment" might have a surprising effect.

Well, what might be taken as guiding text by persons who are beginning to think of themselves as would be agents of change? This means people who want to help—who are willing, as Appleman put it, to confront "the human condition and with the challenge of building a true community." At the end of his classic work, *The Ruling Class* (McGraw Hill, 1939), Gaetano Mosca spoke of such individuals with rare understanding. They must, he said,

> be persuaded once and for all that the situation that confronts us today is such that, in order to be worthy

> of belonging to the chosen minority to which the lot of every country is entrusted, it is not enough to have won a university degree, or to have managed a commercial or industrial enterprise successfully; or even to have risked one's life in the trenches. Long study and great devotion are necessary
>
> Every generation produces a certain number of generous spirits who are capable of loving all that is, or seems to be, noble and beautiful, and of devoting large parts of their activity to improving the society in which they live, or at least to saving it from getting worse. Such individuals make up a small moral and intellectual aristocracy, which keeps humanity from rotting in the slough of selfishness and material appetites. To such aristocracies the world primarily owes the fact that many nations have been able to rise from barbarism and have never relapsed into it. Rarely do members of such aristocracies attain the outstanding positions in political life, but they render a perhaps more effective service to the world by molding the minds and guiding the sentiments of their contemporaries, so that in the end they succeed in forcing their programs upon those who rule the state.
>
> We cannot suppose that there will be any lack or deficiency of such generous souls in the generations that are now rising. But it has happened more than once in the long course of human history that the efforts and sacrifices of such people have not availed to save a nation or a civilization from decline and ruin. That has occurred, we believe, largely because the "best" people have had no clear and definite perception of the needs of their times, and therefore of the means best calculated to achieve social salvation. Let us hope that that clear perception will not be wanting today in the nobler elements among our youth, and that it may so enlighten their minds and quicken their hearts that they can think and act in peace as resolutely as they fought in war.

What will these "generous spirits" do? Can we locate them on the present scene? Do they have followers or are they more or less unknown? On what plan or principle do they act?

Ortega, no longer with us, was one who lived up to Mosca's standards by working toward enlightened public opinion. He did much to make it possible for others to understand their own time. Another, very much with us, is Danilo Dolci, an Italian trained as an architect who decided that the impoverished people of Sicily had greater need of his talents and energies. By the time he was twenty-five (he is now fifty-seven), Dolci had "burned off his dross" working for destitute children in a Tuscan commune. In a postscript to Dolci's latest, *Sicilian Lives* (Pantheon, 1981), his translator, Justin Vitiello, says:

> Then in 1952, "more interested in how human beings could thrive and create together [than in] how with stones you could devise harmonious structures," he left for Trappeto in western Sicily—"the poorest place I have ever seen."
>
> Dolci still lives in Trappeto. Through his efforts and those of peasants and fishermen who joined his nonviolent protests, sit-downs, fasts, strikes-in-reverse (where the unemployed and underemployed do public works without authorization to demonstrate the need for jobs), Trappeto now has paved streets, sewers, a drugstore, and a government subsidy to improve its terrain and port. That is to say, it subsists—although roughly 25 per cent of the villagers must still emigrate to find work.
>
> But more important, Dolci, getting his own hands soiled and blistered from the first, has helped to develop in the larger territory of western Sicily a method of grass-roots consciousness- and conscience-raising as a spur to democratic action and radical, peaceful change. He has toiled with and learned from Southern Italians. Through true respect for the indigenous population and admiration for the real qualities of its culture, Dolci earned trust, and the people have let him excavate the values most deeply rooted in their ancient agrarian-artisan civilization. Realizing what could be done to put human and natural resources to best use, Dolci and his co-workers have pressed over the years for the construction of dams to have water from winter rains for the three growing seasons; for the distribution of water for irrigation by peasant cooperatives, not by the Mafia; for the development of wine, produce, and artisan cooperatives (now the major form of healthy economic organization in western Sicily); and for the creation of schools where, because peasant children and their parents actually participate in choosing pedagogical methods and designing programs, education is authentic in serving communal needs.

How does Dolci think of what he has been doing? In the Prologue to this book, he speaks of the people he joined in Trappeto in 1952.

> Their inner lives, their most intimate experiences, could be frightening, fascinating, or both at the same time. At the beginning of our work, these people, mute for centuries, uttered, literally, their first words. These initial tremors turned into waves of communication, then into an acceptance of responsibility for their future, at first on a personal level, next in groups, and finally in the whole area. And all that meant development.

Wendell Berry is a farmer and writer who has his own subsistence farm in Kentucky and who works for the restoration of the small farm in American life, as the foundation not only of healthful agriculture, but of general human culture as well. His books are both critical and prescriptive. His influence is wide and growing. In the Foreword of his *Gift of Good Land* (North Point Press, 1981), something of a sequel to *The Unsettling of Americ*a, he says:

> . . . I have seen enough good farmers and good farms and a sufficient variety of both, to convince me beyond doubt that an ecologically and culturally responsible agriculture is possible. Such an agriculture is now being practiced, productively and profitably, by a scattering of farmers all over the country. But there remain, I believe, two immediate obstacles to its success.

These are the delusive rewards of "agribusiness" and the tiny number of small farms that are now left, partly because of the prohibitive cost of land. Yet small or naturally scaled farming *can* be done, and Berry tells how in his books. A curious confirmation of Berry's conviction that agriculture is the foundation of culture might be recognized in the fact that Berry's writings are increasingly popular, despite the likelihood that only a small proportion of those who read his books are farmers. The readers sense the larger validity in what he writes. It is not too much to say that, as a result of reading him, they are making choices they would not have thought of before.

It is by such means that free development toward a better life for all begins to make itself felt. Signs of similar efforts among the few who are pioneering in industry and trade can be found. Nothing earth-shaking has happened—nothing at all of that sort—but alterations of attitude are slowly proceeding. This, one might say, is the only legitimate and lasting answer to the "pessimism" we spoke of at the beginning. There are more and more of those who are "devoting large parts (or even all) of their activity to improving the society in which they live, or at least saving it from getting worse."

REVIEW
AN AMBIGUOUS LANGUAGE

IN *The Fire and the* Sun (Oxford University Press, 1978, $2,95), subtitled "Why Plato Banished the Artists," Iris Murdoch says:

> We, or at any rate we until recently, have tended to regard art as a great spiritual treasury. Why did Plato, who had before him some of the best art ever created, think otherwise? He was impressed by the way in which artists can produce what they cannot account for (perhaps this suggested certain ideas to him), and although he sometimes, for instance in the *Apology* and the *Ion,* holds this against them, he does not always do so. He speaks more than once of the artist's inspiration as a kind of divine or holy madness from which we may receive great blessings and without which there is no good poetry. Technique alone will not make a poet. Poets may intuitively understand things of the greatest importance, those who succeed without conscious thought are divinely gifted. And although, as the jokes in the *Protagoras* suggest, Plato thought poorly of literary critics ("Arguments about poetry remind me of provincial drinking parties"), he was obviously familiar with the most cultivated and even minute discussions of taste and literary evaluation. . . . He even dubiously allows that a defense of poetry might one day be made (as indeed it was by Aristotle) by a poetry-lover who was not a poet. Yet although Plato gives to beauty a crucial role in his philosophy, he practically defines it so as to exclude art, and constantly and emphatically accuses artists of moral weakness and even baseness. One is tempted to look for deeper reasons for such an attitude; and in doing so to try (like Plotinus and Schopenhauer) to uncover, in spite of Plato, some more exalted Platonic aesthetic for the dialogues. One might also ask the not uninteresting question whether Plato may not have been in some ways right to be so suspicious of art.

This is the mood and style of Iris Murdoch's inquiry. She is in her way a quiet defender of the arts, yet determined to give full weight to Plato's criticisms in the hope that what remains will have essential validity. She is obviously a thorough scholar, aware of the subtlety of Plato's views, and she gathers together a great many of his statements on the subject in this book of 88 pages. While she has full respect for his mind and philosophy, she supposes him to have some personal ambition and in one place suggests that he may have been envious of dramatic poets who could command the attention of enormous audiences.

Modern Platonists will learn something from her work without having to share in all her opinions. Two other books, one on the same subject, the other a splendid exposition of Plato's philosophy, would be good to read at the same time. Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* shows that most of the time Plato dislikes the poets because the attention they claim, and the fascination they exert, interfere with the search for self-knowledge. Havelock proposes that the mimetic poets were the "TV sets" of their time, constituting a tribal encyclopedia. It was the business of Socrates to unsettle conventional opinions and in this the mimetic poets were an obstacle rather than a help. The other book is *Therapeia* by Robert E. Cushman, a remarkably complete and balanced presentation of what Plato thought and taught, with interpretation which Prof. Cushman usually supports with quotation from several dialogues. (*Therapeia* is now available from Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., and *Preface to Plato* was issued by Harvard University Press in 1963.) Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* expresses a view that Plato might have shared, and this, too, would be good to read.

Plato, it seems clear, was an urbane and highly civilized "puritan." His objection to art—ironically enough, since he was himself a supremely accomplished artist—is summarized by Iris Murdoch as essentially religious:

> Art is dangerous chiefly because it apes the spiritual and subtly disguises and trivializes it. Artists play irresponsibly with religious imagery which, if it must exist, should be critically controlled by the internal, or external, authority of reason. Artists obscure the enlightening power of thought and skill by aiming at plausibility rather than truth. Art delights in unsavory trivia and in the endless proliferation of senseless images (television). Art is playful in a sinister sense full of a spiteful amused

> acceptance of evil, and through buffoonery and mockery weakens moral discrimination. . . .
>
> Enjoyment of art deludes even the decent man by giving him a false self-knowledge based on a healthy egoism: the fire in the cave, which is mistaken for the sun, and where one may comfortably linger, imagining oneself to be enlightened. Art thus prevents the salvation of the whole man by offering a pseudo-spirituality and a plausible imitation of direct intuitive knowledge (vision, presence), a defeat of the discursive intelligence at the bottom of the scale of being, not at the top. Art is a false presence and a false present. As a pseudo-spiritual activity, it can still attract when coarser goals are seen as worthless. We seek eternal possession of the good, but art offers a spurious worthless immortality. It thus confuses the spiritual pilgrimage and obscures the nature of the true *catharsis* (purification). Its pleasures are impure and indefinite and secretly in league with egotism.

Iris Murdoch is less of a puritan than Plato. Her forthright defense of art, which comes at the end of her little book, deserves repetition:

> The artist is a great informant, at least a gossip, at best a sage, and much loved in both roles. . . . Art is far and away the most educational thing we have, far more so than its rivals, philosophy and theology and science. . . . The demands of science and philosophy and ultimately of religion are extremely rigorous. It is just as well that there is a high substitute for the spiritual and the speculative life: that few get to the top morally or intellectually is no less than the truth. Art is a great international language, it is for all. . . .
>
> The most obvious paradox in the problem under consideration is that Plato is a great artist. It is not perhaps to be imagined that the paradox troubled him too much. . . . He kept emphasizing the imageless remoteness of the Good, yet kept returning in his exposition to the most elaborate uses of art. The dialogue form itself is artful and indirect and abounds in ironical and playful devices. Of course the statements made by art escape into the free ambiguity of human life. Art cheats the religious vocation at the last moment and is inimical to philosophical categories. Yet neither philosophy nor theology can do without it; there has to be a pact between them, like the pact in the *Philebus* between reason and pleasure.

It seems best to leave the argument about art open, as Iris Murdoch does. The great paradoxes of the human condition are not to be resolved, except symbolically—by the metaphors of art—but must remain to puzzle us until, by an ineffable balance, we resolve them for ourselves. Meanwhile, there are a number of passages which show the seriousness of this book. Its title, *The Fire and the Sun,* derives from the allegory of the Cave. The artist, Miss Murdoch suggests, is a Cave-dweller who is able to "recognize for what they are the objects which cast the shadows."

> The bright flickering light of the fire suggests the disturbed and semi-enlightened ego which is pleased and consoled by its discoveries, but still essentially self-absorbed, not realizing that the real world is still somewhere else. (The "lower" general education offered in the *Republic* could promote a moderate and fairly rational egoism.) The Delphic precept does not enjoin that kind of self-knowledge. The true self-knower knows reality and sees, in the light of the sun, himself as part of the whole world. In spite of their different aims, it is arguable that Plato and Freud mistrust art for the same reason, because it caricatures their own therapeutic activity and could interfere with it. Art is pleasure-seeking self-satisfied pseudo-analysis and pseudo-enlightenment.

There are many statements clarifying Plato's intent. Soul is identified as "the only self-mover," and the *nous,* or higher mind, is the guide of the soul in its decisions and actions. *Nous* has access to the eternal Forms of Truth. Iris Murdoch finds the non-omnipotent God of the *Timaeus,* the artificer, a better moral ideal than the Jehovah of *Genesis* who makes the world "out of nothing." The Forms, she says, "seem to me a more profound image of moral and spiritual reality than the picture of a personal Father, however good." When it comes to applying Plato's standards in art criticism, Miss Murdoch risks particular judgment:

> Bad art is a lie about the world, and what is by contrast seen as good is in some important evident sense seen as *ipso facto* true and as expressive of reality: the sense in which Seurat is better than Burne-Jones, Keats than Swinburne, Dickens than Wilkie Collins, etc., etc. Plato says in the *Philebus* that an experience of pleasure may be infected with falsity. Learning to detect the false in art and enjoy

> the true is part of a life-long education in moral discernment.

Another passage reveals a Platonic meaning of *virtue:*

> When Plato says (*Philebus* 48d) that to enjoy the ridiculous is to obey the command: do not know thyself, he is using (though perversely) an important principle of literary criticism: that which militates against self-knowledge is suspect. To know oneself in the *world* (as part of it, subject to it, connected with it) is to have the firmest grasp of the real. This is the humble "sense of proportion" which Plato connects with virtue.

This seems a relieving idea! In a positive view of art Iris Murdoch speaks of "the playfulness of good art which delightedly seeks and reveals the real." She goes on:

> Thus in practice we increasingly relate one concept to another, and see beauty as the artful use of form to illuminate truth and celebrate reality; and we can then separate what Plato spoke of but wished to separate from art: the way in which to desire the beautiful is to desire the real and the good. . . . Although art can be so good for us, it does contain some of those elements of illusion out of which its detractors make so much of their case. The pierced structure of the art objects whereby its sense flows into life is an essential part of its mortal nature. Simone Weil, that admirable Platonist, said that a poem is beautiful insofar as the poet's thought is fixed on the ineffable. Art, like (in Plato's view) philosophy, hovers about in the very fine air which we breathe just beyond what has been expressed.

To what does art invite? To harbors of contentment or to Promethean unrest?

COMMENTARY
IT'S ABOUT TIME

JUDGING from our recent mail, the tide of anti-nuclear, anti-war opinion is rising in America. Four communications deserve wide circulation. Barry Childers (C/o Ferris, 28 Forest Drive, College Station. Texas) gives six pages of excellent counsel to people who want to draw attention to "the increasing danger of nuclear war," and are "searching for ways to do something to help prevent it." Letters are one good way. Barry Childers explains why.

Carroll Richardson, a retired professor (32302 Alipaz, No. 100, San Juan Capistrano, Calif. 92675) has written a strong letter to a legislator. One paragraph says:

> The primary consideration here is the survival of the four billion residents of the planet earth. From this point of view, such relatively minor concerns as "parity with the Russians" and "limited nuclear capacity" must be seen as the nightmare fantasies of apparently self-seeking military planners. *There is simply no basis in reality for continuing the nuclear arms race among the national powers today.*

Then, from the Nuclear Information & Resource Service (1536 Sixteenth St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036), we have Betsy Taylor's January *Report on the European Nuclear Disarmament Movements,* a document filled with encouraging facts.

Finally, a retired Californian, Harold Waterhouse, noting the spreading opinion among Americans that the USSR and the US should agree "not to build any more nuclear weapons," goes on to say:

> Ever since 1976 the Soviets have been suggesting—and we ignoring—the idea of a nuclear weapons freeze. It's about time we tested their sincerity with a concrete proposal of our own. Such a proposal is currently being urged in what is nationally called the Freeze movement, and in California is incorporated as Californians for a Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze. The object locally is to get a Freeze initiative on the November 1982 statewide ballot.

The initiative calls for a halt on "the testing, production and further deployment of all nuclear weapons, missiles and delivery systems." Sufficient signatures have been obtained to assure being on the ballot, but many more are desirable to show the strength of public opinion. Contact Californians for a Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze, 7250 Franklin Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. 90046.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
INDIAN RUNNERS

LATE in the spring of 1680, in northern New Mexico, a Pueblo Indian, Po'pay, gave instructions to a group of runners. They each received deerskins with pictographs embodying the plan for an Indian revolt against the Spanish invaders who had occupied and dominated their southwestern country for nearly a hundred years. The runners were to go to some seventy Pueblos, including Hopi villages over 300 miles away. Each Pueblo on their itinerary was to be given a knotted cord, one knot to be untied each day. When the cords were clear the Indians would rise up against the Spanish, "burn the temples, break up the bells."

In *Indian Running* (Capra Press, Santa Barbara, Calif., 1981, $9.95), Peter Nabokov tells the story of this successful revolt and gives an account of its tercentenary celebration in another run over the same course in 1980. The participants were Indians of today, perhaps as fleet as their ancestors. Interspersed with the report of the 1980 run is material on great Indian runners of the recent past—Jim Thorpe among them—and ruminative observations on what running means to Indians. Telling about the 1680 run and revolt, Peter Nabokov says:

> Since the Spanish had permanently settled among them in the 1590s and built their chain of missions, the Indians of these city-states had seen their lifeways disrupted and their religion defiled. Twenty years before the conspiracy was hatched at Taos, a Franciscan priest boasted of burning 1600 of their sacred kachina masks. Five years before speaking to the runners, Po'pay was among forty-seven religious men who were publicly flogged in the Santa Fe plaza. . . .
>
> As for the use of knotted cords, the Inca developed a complicated method for recording and counting through the use of colored and knotted strings called *quipus*. . . . Po'pay claimed to have gotten the idea from three masked figures who told him to "make a string of yucca, tying a number of knots, as a token of the days they had to wait until they should break out." . . .
>
> No native monuments were built to honor Po'pay or his peoples' consequent victory. Surprisingly, there is scanty mention of the major war in Indian oral tradition. Perhaps the charred shells of Catholic churches were enough, the twenty-one dead priests, the ashes of church documents, and the 380 Spaniards and Mexican Indians also killed. Superimposed on the ruins of Santa Fe's plaza, a newly-built kiva, the Indian chamber reserved for sacred activities, did symbolize the restoration of Pueblo Indian sovereignty. Over the next dozen years no Spaniards were to be found in this land. Although Don Diego de Vargas led the reconquest of the territory in 1692, Spanish control of the Indians was crippled forever. The church and the kiva have coexisted to this day. The revolt remains a victory.

That's all there is about the big "war" and its bloodshed. The rest of the book is about running. The tercentenary run ended at the Hopi Cultural Center on Aug. 10. . . . "runner Bruce Hamana describes how being Hopi now means something new to the boys who came from Taos [where the run began] all the way home."

> He chokes back tears and explains how those words in Taos, "This is more than a race. . . . It goes beyond athletics. . . . We're doing this for the people," have become real for them.
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> Beneath the hot sun old and young now shuffle quietly along an endless reception line. Each runner is blessed: hands shaken lightly and then lifted towards the mouths of the greeters. The runners seem shy and grave at the attention.
>
> Although we have shared something with these young men over the past week, and they have nodded at us warmly today, we feel out of place. . . . In a way we have barged in on the first family reunion in 300 years.

The "we" of this passage is Peter Nabokov of the Museum of the American Indian and Karl Kernberger, who photographed the run. Both Kernberger's and some very old pictures of Indian runners complete this study of the people who really know how to run, and have reasons for doing it.

Halfway through the third of an eleven-volume translation of the great East Indian epic, the *Mahabharata,* Bill Buck, a young American, decided that the story ought to be told in readable fashion for Americans like himself. He went to work, studying Sanskrit, examining all the available translations, reading aloud his own version as he wrote it because he knew that the original had been sung. To a friend he said:

> "I have changed my *Mahabharata* from the original in a few little ways besides length. I got a good story out of it, but what will a professor think of its use or its scholarly fidelity? Still, if you read it you know the *Mahabharata*.

One professor, B. A. van Nooten, who teaches Sanskrit at the University of California (in Berkeley), had this to say:

> It is remarkable that a Westerner has been able to uncover the nuggets of this Indian work with such sensitivity. . . . There are other English versions of the *Mahabharata,* some shorter, some longer. But apart from William Buck's rendition, none have been able to capture the blend of religion and the martial spirit that pervades the original epic. It succeeds eminently in illustrating how seemingly grand and magnificent human endeavors turn out to be astoundingly insignificant in the persepective of eternity.

Buck's *Mahabharata* is one tenth the length of the original. His work was entirely a labor of love. In 1955 he discovered an elaborate nineteenth-century edition of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in a Nevada state library, and fell in love with it. This led to his reading of the larger work, of which the *Gita* forms a part. His affection for the *Gita* was no doubt his reason for omitting it in his rendition, since the *Gita* already has exquisite translations and should not be condensed. The book has lovely illustrations by Shirley Triest.

Buck went on to do a similar version of the *Ramayana,* the story of Rama's recovery of his kidnapped bride, Sita—often compared to Homer's *Iliad*—of which the Sanskritist, van Nooten, says:

> William Buck's adaptation is an extraordinary accomplishment. He was neither a scholar nor a well-known author, and though he retells the Rama story with many variations of detail, he has succeeded in capturing the most important characteristics of the *Ramayana:* the simple religious tone that pervades the Indian original. We find in this rendering of the work the same awe of divine creation, the same wonder and unquestioning belief in the interrelation of natural and supernatural events that have appealed to millions of people who in the past two thousand years have listened to the recitation and re-enactment of the Rama story. In the minds of many people who hear the *Ramayana* a mystery is being presented, and slowly, erratically, parts of the mystery unfold. If we are fortunate, we get occasional glimpses of a higher, purer reality that holds out hope for those enmeshed in the sorry state of mundane existence. Again and again this revelation causes us to read and rethink the epic in order to experience again this joy of discovery. The struggle between good and evil is in our behalf and Rama is our hero.

In years past we have reviewed both these books by William Buck—who died at thirty-seven, soon after he completed them—in their first editions. They are now both available in paperback at $7.95. The publisher is the University of California Press.

FRONTIERS

Odd Thoughts on Waging Peace

IN recent months the movement against war (which has numerous divisions) has become notably articulate through various media, not only in the pacifist press. The ground for this increased anti-war activity has been well put by Michael Randle, Coordinator of the Alternative Defence Commission (University of Bradford, West Yorkshire, England). In a paper, "Defence Without the Bomb," he began:

> Nuclear warfare is qualitatively different from warfare in its historic sense. In the past warfare, as opposed to other forms of homicide, was primarily a contest between rival armies. Civilians suffered and died, sometimes in large numbers, but they were not by definition legitimate targets of attack. A distinction between war and massacre was still possible.
>
> Today in the case of nuclear conflict this is no longer so. In such a war, or in a military strategy based on nuclear weapons, civilians have become the main target. We need a new term to describe this form of totalitarian violence to distinguish it from warfare in its historic sense. War may conceivably be justified in given instances for one of the parties involved; nuclear massacre, or preparations for it, cannot be so. This is a moral argument, but it is impossible to talk seriously about an activity that involves killing human beings without confronting the moral issue. Debates about defense which ignore this dimension, or shift it apologetically into the background, may become highly complex and technical, but are bound to remain essentially trivial.
>
> It was a perception of this moral distinction between war and massacre that provided the main impetus for the popular anti-bomb movement of the 60s, a movement that is now experiencing a resurgence as political and technological developments have converged to increase likelihood that nuclear war will occur. The importance of this movement, even before it achieves its goal of nuclear disarmament, is that it modifies the political context in which leaders take their decisions, and therefore makes the world that degree or two less dangerous.

Randle goes on to discuss alternatives to nuclear defense of Britain. He is thoroughly aware of the difficulties besetting any policy save that of "drift," yet, naturally enough, regards working for an alternative far more desirable than resignation to a nuclear-based strategy for the defense of England.

These "difficulties" are the subject of an essay, "The Myths of Alternative Defence," by Hajo Karbach, of Gottingen, Germany (in the September 1981 WRI *Newsletter*). He says, for example—

> I am convinced that the economic, political and military elites (of each and every state) will bring all the forces at their disposal into play in order to defend their interests and to prevent the disarming of the last means they have of exercising their power—i.e. the armed forces. In a state which is functioning normally and still has its armed forces intact, the attempt to carry out "reconversion" to civilian defence or even just to a "defensive" system of defence, will, if it implies a change in the military status quo, come up against the bitter resistance of the government and must, in the long run, give rise to the fear that the country's own armed forces or those of their allies will be deployed against it.

This writer raises an interesting question: How should the Czech people have prepared themselves for maintaining resistance to the 1968 Soviet invasion of their country, after their governmental leadership collapsed? "What conditions would have been needed, and what methods might society have used to maintain resistance even without the government?"

The call for "peace education" is urgent and frequent. In a letter to the January *Friends Journal* a Quaker lady asks for more support from Friends for the U.N. University for Peace. This calls to mind the remark of an Indian scholar that "a sure, smooth, and 'non-violent' way to kill the spirit of Gandhian thinking is to introduce it into university syllabi. If I am serious about Gandhian thinking I would save it from the deadly hands of our universities."

A comment by Arthur Harvey (Weare, New Hampshire) in a recent paper on non-violence is more specific. He refers to "the mistaken policy

of most peace education—to speak to the public at its level rather than ours."

> In practice this means that a campaign will be built against a weapon system such as the B-I bomber, for example. Various points are made—the B-I is too expensive, will soon be obsolete, is a threshold weapon, etc. But the central pacifist point—that the weapon will kill millions of innocents—is incidental to the campaign. A series of such campaigns habituates pacifist leaders to speak to what they think to be politically feasible, but certainly not to the deepest pacifist insights.

Devi Prasad, an Indian artist, writing on "Education for Peace," objects to basing propaganda against war on fear—as many do, these days, giving examples of the horrible results of nuclear bombing. He points out that fear is only a temporary motivation and by nature unreliable. To illustrate, he describes from his own experience a family—two small children, their parents, and the grandfather—who were marooned in their home by a flood that would soon engulf them (in Bengal in 1943).

> We tried to persuade them to come with us to a safe place. The picture of that moment has been engraved so deeply in my mind so that I can never forget it. There was death standing right in front of them and by their side there were people to help—asking, persuading, even pushing them to escape. Yet the family, especially the couple, young and strong in looks, and an old man, . . . the children who were too young to know what was happening, stood completely stunned with no wish left to move. . . . We had to actually drag them away; which was easy enough because they had no resistance left.

Musing on this material (and other items we lack space to report), we recalled a self-help meeting of former mental patients and nervous individuals in which the participants examined themselves for clues that would help them to retain balance and self-determination. Fear, they had learned, was their worst enemy—fear, and the anger, tension, and instability which come with it. In a sense, they seemed more fortunate than "normal" people. Health and calm, for them, meant alert attention to the slightest symptom of disturbed feelings. They learned to give up blaming others for their trouble. Being "justifiably" angry—with its train of disabling psychological consequences—was too big a price to pay for being "right"! They kept themselves mentally balanced by observing certain basic rules—refusing to respond emotionally to injustice (imagined or real), thinking of other people and their needs instead of their own (when something upsetting occurred), and never making up excuses for doing something they know better than to do.

These people, in other words, had transformed themselves into sensitive barometers of emotional disturbance in order to keep from suffering the extreme pain of mental illness. They were succeeding by helping themselves and each other to recognize that the provocations to emotionalism are *trivial* compared to getting sick again. They had learned from experience. They knew the price of succumbing to impulse and they had taken a stand.

This kind of watchfulness in relation to the provocations leading to war—and preparation for war—seems exactly what it will take to make a world where war does not occur.