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THE HUMANITIES AS A MORAL FORCE

[This article by Jacob Needleman, professor of philosophy at San Francisco State University, appeared in the October/November issue of the *California School Board* journal (Vol. 40, No. 7) and is reprinted here by permission.]

IN recent years, the crisis in American education has been perceived in two fundamental ways. A great many critics, observing the apparent decline in the intellectual training of young people, have urged a movement "back to basics" in order to strengthen fundamental academic skills. Other observers have with comparable urgency argued for a form of "character education," deploring the level of moral development in young people, their uncertainty and confusion about values and the meaning of life itself. All critics, however, agree in their anxiety about the preparation contemporary young people receive for life, as evidenced by the problem of drugs, cults, psychiatric disorders and crime.

Twenty years of teaching philosophy at the college level and nearly as many years studying the religious ferment of American youth, have convinced me that critics of modern education, almost without exception, have neglected an essential factor in their analyses: the role of universal, philosophical ideas in the intellectual, moral and psychological development of a normal human being.

This neglect of the role of ideas in human development may be traced back to the origins of modern psychology itself, which directed its attention almost exclusively to the emotional and sexual aspects of psychodynamics and which treated ideas as, in general, a by-product, a result or even an epiphenomenon of what it took to be the more basic affective and instinctual components of the human structure. On a broader scale, explanation of human behavior and programs for the betterment of the human condition, such as those of Marxism, gave equally little importance to ideas as such. Concepts of liberty, fulfillment and happiness all centered around the satisfaction of the material, i.e., physical and emotional needs of man.

In sum, for the past half century at least, it has been considered the mark of hard-headed realism to think of human needs solely in terms of a fairly well-defined and narrow band of bodily and emotional aspects. No doubt this point of view reflected a perception of the powerlessness of intellectual training, as it was being pursued in the schools and universities, and moral training, as it was being pursued by the established religious institutions of our culture, to bring mankind closer to happiness or a life of meaning. But whatever the ultimate causes, ideas have not been considered essential to growth and human fulfillment.

I agreed to participate in the California School Boards Association project of investigating the status of the humanities in the California public schools because my experience with college-age students had convinced me that certain kinds of ideas correspond to a structural need in the human being. To put it in simple terms: there is an aspect of human nature, as organic and innate as anything postulated by modern psychology, that can be nourished only by the sort of "food" provided by universal ideas about man and his place in the cosmic scheme. Such ideas, when approached with the proper guidance, support a specific activity of the human mind which might be characterized as "the need to ponder and question the meaning of human life and one's part in it." In the contemporary era, the lifting of emotional and sexual repression, salutary as it has been, has been accompanied by a hidden repression of another kind which has consequences perhaps even more harmful than the

earlier repression of sexuality and emotion. The new repression is directed at man's relationship to philosophical questioning.

One result of this repression, though of course it has many other causes as well, has been the turning of increasing numbers of young people to new religious movements, political ideologies and gurus of varying degree of authenticity. Our system of education and social milieu has been turning out a nation of "philosophical illiterates," easy prey for teaching and teachers ideologies and ideas, that come to them "from the street."

This is not to pass blanket judgment on the new religions that now abound in our society; it is only to illustrate the existence in young people of a deep need that has gone unsatisfied in our culture. This unsatisfied and unrecognized need expresses itself in a particular sort of restlessness and vulnerability to ideas of all kinds dealing with ultimate questions. The turning to the drug experience may also, to some extent, be traced back to our failures as a society to provide young people with channels for pondering ultimate questions.

I take it as the principal aim of what is called the study of the "humanities" to reverse this trend in the education of young people. By the term "humanities" I mean more than simply the study of literature, the arts, philosophy and cultural history. I mean an attitude toward learning itself that can also be communicated in other fields, not excluding mathematics and the hard sciences. It is a question of distinguishing between two radically different types of intellectual effort: one that drives for practical applications, conceptual resolutions and the amassing of information; and another that moves toward some entirely different goals for which we no longer have an adequate terminology, but which involves an aspect of human nature that grows only through seeking out the meaning of life itself.

The phrase "the meaning of life" is no joke to young people. There is a highly sensitive, delicate, but ineradicable yearning associated with this question. It is, however, easily bruised and suppressed by so-called "tough-mindedness" or by equally destructive "psychologizing" (as though the meaning of life had more to do with "getting along" than with why man is on earth at all). This yearning has been severely repressed in our culture and this repression is, as I have stated, even more pathogenic than the suppression of sexual energy which the early psychoanalysts identified as the chief cause of human neurosis. There is a metaphysical neurosis that is more destructive than psychological neurosis, and more basic.

When I began visiting the schools assigned to me by the School Boards Association, it was quite clear to me that the point was not to investigate only those courses and programs where the humanities were "officially" being offered. I wanted to see everything and anything that was being taught. My hunch was that this need to ponder ultimate questions of value and meaning was breaking through everywhere, in every field, among every kind of student and teacher. I was not surprised, therefore, to find the humanities, in the sense in which I am using the term, not only in English literature classes, but in physics courses, in composition classes and even in a home economics class.

Administrators were sometimes puzzled when I asked to visit science classes and on one occasion our bemused host laughingly challenged me to find anything relating to the humanities in the geometry class. Half an hour later, talking with a group of chemistry students, I asked them what they found of special interest in their studies. One lively young man cited his geometry class, the very one that was supposed to have no relationship to the humanities. When I asked him specifically what it was that interested him so much about geometry, he cited the first two meetings of the class where his instructors had discussed the question, "What is truth?"

I have already mentioned home economics. What I heard there was an exceptionally serious

discussion about family relationships based on the question of the nature of real authority as opposed to authoritarianism. This in turn led to questions of the nature of freedom and its intimate connection to responsibility and, ultimately, to the question of the meaning of "duty."

A physics teacher told me how often and eagerly his students discussed with him such questions as the relevance of the law of entropy to the whole problem of the meaning of reality—if everything is running down to maximum randomness, what is the ultimate purpose of existence? Or, contemplating the theoretical model of the structure of the atom, the question arises of man's place in the entire scheme of things—is our solar system itself a sort of "atom" in a vast, ordered whole? Is mankind so small in the scheme of things?

It takes little effort to see in such questions the ancient and perennial philosophic wondering of mankind. And it is my contention that this sort of questioning is attempting to break through in every sphere of modern life. Some people take this as a sign that we are losing our grip on the values that have constituted our society from its inception. In part, that is true. But I take the breaking through of this sort of questioning to be a sign of a movement toward regenerating our values. I take such questioning to be an incipient moral force in our culture. But it needs to be supported.

My point is that the humanities, in this sense, are being taught everywhere, only it is not called that and it is not respected as such. Often, these kinds of issues appear only on the periphery of a class dealing with material that is ostensibly more basic and important. Yet often enough it is on that periphery that the kind of inquiry begins which truly distinguishes the human being in relation to his authentic moral and spiritual possibilities. I say "begins," because this sort of teaching and learning about questions of meaning and purpose tends to stop too soon in order to make room for the "real material" that needs to be taught—the skills, the information, the concepts of science, the rules of grammar and syntax. Or, if it does not stop, it often gets mixed with other kinds of discussions and issues and neither the teacher nor the student retains clarity about the distinct importance of dealing with questions of meaning.. It may not be necessary to move such material from the periphery to the center—probably questions of ultimate importance to human life are best treated apart from the grade-performance demand that goes with the basic material of high school study. But I am convinced that what is necessary is to recognize the importance of this sort of learning to the whole of a developing person's life, so that it does not occur only by luck or chance. Something very important to our whole future as a society is at stake here.

Let me briefly discuss my own recent experience teaching a course in philosophy to juniors and seniors at a high school in San Francisco. It was something I had been wanting to try for many years and when the opportunity arose, through the support of a small philanthropic foundation, I seized it. I am now convinced that the problems of education at all levels require that more of us who teach mainly at the college level undergo the experience of working with younger students.

Very early on in the course, I was able to communicate to my students that it was safe for them to ask ultimate questions. They eventually came to see the act of philosophical pondering as a fully "grown-up" thing to do.

At the same time, the ideas that were being presented—such as Plato's theory of the Forms, St. Augustine's distinction between time and eternity, the Buddhist doctrine of the Self—were presented without much simplification. From the outset, therefore, students were faced with the juxtaposition of their own intimate questions about the meaning of life and a set of ideas of great power and difficulty.

At first it was a struggle to keep the "question-making" aspect of the class from becoming a sort of personal rap-session. The presence of difficult and serious metaphysical ideas, however, had the ultimate effect of drawing the students' attention to the philosophical aspects of personal problems. Many were astonished to see that what they took to be personal problems were actually related to great issues that have been written about by great thinkers of all times.

My aim was to instill in them a sense of participation in a larger scale of reality merely by the act of questioning at a certain level of humanly relevant abstraction. What is needed, I believe, in our whole culture is a renewed respect for abstract reasoning—not in the sense of abstract logic or mathematics, but in the sense that there are questions and ideas which abstract or separate out the perennial search of the human being for meaning, and which reflect the structural aspects of human nature which can be called "the love of wisdom."

Initially, I took many wrong directions along these lines. It took me quite a while to understand that the respect for philosophical questioning requires a long time to take hold. Each day it had to be re-established practically from zero. There were times when my effort to free students from the "problem-solving" mentality resulted only in a sort of amused passivity on their part. How to communicate the rigor of great ideas and great questions without at the same time provoking the psychological tension associated with fear of not succeeding according to external, social standards? How to communicate the voluntary nature of the search for understanding without at the same time encouraging laziness or self-indulgent subjectivity?

Eventually, I learned to measure their relationship to ideas on the basis of intangible factors such as posture, courtesy, tones of voice, silences—as well as on the basis of more obvious factors of individual work done on reading assignments. The love of wisdom does not always manifest itself through the instrumentality of the verbal intellect.

I wanted these young people to become haunted by philosophy—in the sense of being attracted more and more often to the feeling for great ideas and universal questions. I am not speaking here about merely thinking, intellectually, about abstruse issues. This kind of intellectualization has shown itself to be morally powerless in human life and was justly derogated by modern psychology. On the other hand, the feeling for ideas and universal questions does, in my opinion, have potentially immense moral power in an individual's life. When I say I wanted my students to be haunted by philosophy, I am referring to the engendering and support of this feeling for ideas.

Encouraging excessive intellectualization is damaging, this is understood. But the question is how to avoid this danger without at the same time discouraging the feeling for truth that lies at its foundation? The feeling for truth is, in short, a principal moral power in human nature. Avoiding intellectualization by swinging over to preoccupation with emotional expression does little or nothing toward the authentic development of moral power in human nature. Neither amateur psychotherapy nor dry academicism contributes much toward the moral and spiritual growth of the human being.

A third approach is needed corresponding to this "third thing" in human nature—the feeling for truth, the love of wisdom, Plato's eros, which has not been seen in modern times as a distinct and organically essential element in human nature. Egoistic impulses toward violence, fear, hatred and greed cannot be dissolved by the merely intellectual absorption of concepts, no matter how great, simply because the cerebral intellect is powerless to influence the emotions. Therefore, a human being cannot become truly moral merely by amassing knowledge or acquiring intellectual sophistication. A bridge is needed between the convictions of the intellect and the impulses of the

body and the emotions. This bridge, in my judgment, is the feeling for truth, which can be nourished by ideas that engender a certain quality of self-interrogation, of which the feeling of wonder is the most familiar example in our general experience.

Space does not permit me to describe my work with these students in detail. I can only say that this experiment in teaching philosophy in high school has proved to me both the possibility and the necessity of opening such issues to young people. And all my observations traveling to different schools for the School Boards Association has strengthened my conviction as I have observed other teachers spontaneously engaging in such an activity merely out of their own and the students' interests.

I am convinced that proposals by educators to introduce "value clarification" or "character education" in the schools cannot go far without this component. In my judgment, the sense of wonder is the real, effective seed of moral perception and action. This sense of wonder needs to be nourished and developed because for most young people it, and it alone, represents the impulse toward truth and value that comes from within the depths of the individual himself. Attempts to encourage intellectual analysis of moral questions will fail if this delicate love of truth is not the main factor addressed in young people. Attempts to inculcate moral or religious values will also fail if it is done in a way that seeks to impose values and beliefs on developing minds; this can only be a sort of "higher brainwashing," which will eventually result in another round of youthful rebellion and confusion.

The sense of wonder grows not so much by the addition of information or theories, but by the awakening of questioning in the light of great ideas. Information about the world is necessary, but principally as material for pondering. Information and basic skills needed for functioning vocationally in the world must also be taught and taught well, but this aspect of education needs first to be separated to some extent from the aim of nourishing the seed of moral perception in the growing human being. If the education in our schools does not offer both of these things in full measure, the future of our children and our whole society will surely be as is described in the Book of Proverbs: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

JACOB NEEDLEMAN

REVIEW

NO "MASS PHENOMENON"

IN an article in the November 1981 *Gandhi Marg,* titled "The Individual and Society in Gandhian Ethics," the writer, T. N. Ganapathy, begins:

> Gandhi's quest for the principles of human action led him to the discovery that truth is the source of dharma [duty] and as such the foundation of life, individual and social. Hence no human action, according to him, could be autonomous of religion and morality. He writes: "In my experiments, what is metaphysical is ethical; religion is ethics. Ethical behavior in the light of the goal of realization is religion." Truth is the source of ethical or good behavior. Only then could there be a universal code for man and society. Gandhi writes that "whatever else the ethical life may mean it cannot be ethical if it is not based on truth."
>
> Gandhi put truth into polar antithesis to expediency, individual or social. Truth is a matter of faith in man, nondeception, goodwill, the aesthetic quality of integrity and righteousness. It is the outright rejection of escapism. It was because Gandhi felt truth to be the first law of moral life that he undertook a fast against the action of the Nehru Government in 1947, in withholding payment of rupees fifty-five crores to Pakistan. Even the interests of India, he explicitly said, he would subordinate to Truth.

Toward the end of his discussion, Mr. Ganapathy says:

> The whole of Gandhian social ethics is oriented toward the fact of injustice . . . Gandhi's method of checking injustice at the level of society is nonviolent resistance of satyagraha. Without entering into a discussion of the meaning of terms, we can note that the aim of satyagraha is not merely to protest, to dissent, but to change social practices and laws by changing human hearts.
>
> Satyagraha is an intentional method and hence its basic attitude toward the opponent is nonviolence. As a nonviolent attitude, it is never based on cowardice, nor associated with feeling of hatred, ill-will and dislike. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer. It means putting one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. In short, it means a brave fight and not a mere passive resistance.

We have quoted this article somewhat at length in order to lay a basis for consideration of its final point. The writer concludes:

> The difficulty in mass Satayagraha campaigns is to ensure discipline and avoid violence toward the authorities or other opponents. More than once such movement had to be abandoned by Gandhi owing to outbreak of violence. Gandhi once remarked: "The Swaraj [self-rule] I have witnessed during the last two days has stunk in my nostrils." All these go to show that satyagraha is capable of being resorted to only by a person of the highest character with the spirit of nonviolence. This, then, is the problem: A Gandhi is an exception, not a mass phenomenon.

There is certainly truth in this judgment. A Gandhi is a great rarity in human history. Didn't he know that? Of course he knew it—that is, he knew that ordering social change by means of non-violent action would take a long time, and could never be "perfect," as he said. Yet, on the other hand, he firmly believed that all humans have the same high potentialities and he urged this possibility on his followers, and also on his critics.

In consequence, however, there is little room in the Gandhian movement for moral impatience. One may feel impatience with oneself, but not with others. Freedom is as important as nonviolence—or even more important—since the satagrahi becomes one by independent choice. At issue is the question of the nature of man—of all human beings—and also the question of the manifest differences among human beings. Why are there so few heroes? Or, turning the matter around, Why are there any heroes?

We leave these questions open since they constitute areas of investigation. Western inquiry has almost wholly neglected. Until Maslow, no Western psychology that we know of has even asked them, and he devoted his attention to the fact of heroic qualities in human beings, rather than to an explanation of their rarity. Yet a rational approach to Gandhi's vision and objectives surely calls for thinking about this.

Meanwhile, there is point in recognizing that Gandhi has not been entirely alone in his

leadership. It is already evident to some that men like Gandhi, like Tolstoy and some others, have actually released a power in the world—*a moral* power which is capable of affecting history. It is a power difficult to acquire, difficult to apply, yet real. In evidence we offer a book issued by Orbis in 1977, *The Struggle for Humanity,* by Marjorie Hope and James Young. These writers tell about the achievements of nonviolent movements since Gandhi's time. They begin in their introduction by admitting that "a nonviolent approach to a radical transformation of our society seems 'idealistic'."

> Is it not self-evident that might respects might? That war, conflict, and violence are intrinsic to human nature? Surely nonviolent revolutionists are spinners of the impossible dream.
>
> Yet once an "impossible" thing has been done, it is no longer impossible.
>
> In the past forty years, "impossible" nonviolent campaigns achieved victories that brought the beginnings of freedom to black Americans . . . toppled dictators in Guatemala and El Salvador . . . gave Mexican-American farm workers new rights and a new sense of dignity . . . led to the overthrow of South Vietnamese Premier Ngo Dinh Diem . . . enabled hundreds of poor Sicilians to overcome their fear and publicly defy the Mafia . . . opened the door to equality for American women . . . united the people of India Ghana, and Zambia in successful struggles for independence. These are only a few examples of effective nonviolent action.
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> Nonviolence has often achieved what violence apparently could not. There can be little doubt that Martin Luther King, Jr., was more effective than Eldridge Cleaver, Gandhi more successful than Subhas Chandra Bose, Kenneth Kaunda more effective than Simon Kapwepwe.

There is a theory of understanding history which says that if you want to grasp the meaning of an epoch, don't study the orthodox or conventional beliefs: study the rebels and heretics. Then you will see a little into the *movement* of history, getting enough of the prevailing beliefs as you go along. That applies to the present as well as the past. This book by Marjorie Hope and James Young provides a text for this sort of study. They tell about people one almost never hears about in reports by the mass media. For example, there is a chapter on the work of the late Lanza del Vasto, a Western disciple of Gandhi, in France, another on Danilo Dolci and what he is accomplishing in Sicily. Dom Helder Camara, the Roman Catholic bishop who labors in behalf of the poor in Brazil, where the media are forbidden to mention his name, has a chapter. And there is this account of Cesar Chavez, farm labor leader in California, who is wholly committed to nonviolence:

> Five feet six inches tall and spare in build, with lank black hair and melancholy but penetrating eyes, Cesar Chavez would hardly stand out at most social gatherings. He possesses none of the bluff heartiness of most professional labor organizers and, unlike labor bureaucrats, he wears work shirts, and scruffy shoes almost everywhere. In a first encounter he might appear impassive, hidden behind that reserve the Indian has built up over centuries as a defense against whites. Yet when he sits down to talk with a colleague or visitor, Chavez begins to reveal himself with a warm simplicity, and reserve comes across as a quiet concentration of his energy on matters of importance. One begins to understand why he asserts so much power over his co-workers: They feel that in an age of multiplying credibility gaps, he is incorruptible.
>
> Chavez and his family live in a small frame house in La Paz, California. Like other staff members and volunteers [of the United Farm Workers of America], he receives basic expenses and $5 a week. He has refused the opportunity for higher-paying positions on the principle that money and status would separate him from the people. Chavez's life has been a negation of the American dream of social and economic mobility. He has substituted another American dream: equal rights for all—including American farm workers, who have been excluded from the protection of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

This book is a current historical study of nonviolent leadership, showing that nonviolence may be applied at different levels. But can a head of state in our time practice nonviolence? Something of an answer is given in the chapter on Kenneth Kaunda, president of Zambia. He is, the writers say, "painfully conscious of the problem of power."

"All politics is power politics," he has declared in a tone of regret. At another point he has written: "Because the Zambian Constitution requires me to exercise great power, I engage in constant self-questioning and self-analysis to protect myself from the delusion that I am the one exception to the general rule that power corrupts those who use it."

Kaunda does not claim to practice pure nonviolence. He frankly states that some measure of violence is inherent in the power he must exercise in order to maintain authority. Zambia has been virtually surrounded by white regimes, hostile neighbors who have consistently used guerrilla warfare and other forms of violence to subvert the young black state.

Nevertheless, Kaunda has pursued a policy of what might be called "relative nonviolence": balancing the use of arbitrary force with the pursuit of negotiation, mediation, both at home and abroad.

What, we might ask, do these men who, like Gandhi, are "exceptions," not "mass phenomena," have in common? A brief answer was given by John Schaar in Ameri*can Review* (*No.* 19, January 1974):

One of the most important differences between great actors—think, say, of Gandhi, or Lenin, or Lincoln, or Malcolm X—and most of the rest of us is that they hold their views and ideas in a way we do not. They *are* their views. And most of us, when we think clearly, can acknowledge that we took, or received, most of what we call "our" views from others. We did not create them. . . . Great actors of course also take some of their views from others. Some they forge for themselves. But once the idea or vision is forged or assimilated, it is held in a certain way. The actor does not have or possess the idea, rather he is possessed by it. He lives his views. His life is his views, in a way and to a degree unusual among most of the rest of us. . . . That difference makes us uneasy, for we know that at bottom the great actor is demanding of us that we change our lives.

COMMENTARY
A GREAT RESTORATION

TO carry out the proposal of Jacob Needleman—to make "universal, philosophical ideas" regain their strength in present-day education, in order to meet "a structural need in the human being"—will involve much more than curricular reform. Prof. Needleman is quite aware of this, but since the intensification of his feeling about what is required grew from his work in a high school—he saw both the need and the hunger in the students—it is natural for him to begin by talking about our schools.

What he calls for is in fact a vast cultural renascence which is not possible without the collaboration of adults; this means, not a tinkering with syllabi, but the creation of an atmosphere in home and community that will restore respect for philosophical thinking. In his teaching experiment Prof. Needleman had to overcome, not merely adolescent resistance, but the nurtured habit of indifference, before he was able to stir to the surface philosophical ponderings that ought to be spontaneous and natural in all human beings, young and old.

The Humanities grow out of classical philosophy. The great among the ancients were concerned with issues our own age has carefully neglected. It is time to go back to them, no longer in an antiquarian spirit, but to make their thinking come alive. Ortega has put the project well:

> To sum up: History must abolish the dehumanized form in which it has offered us the philosophical doctrines. It must incorporate them again in the dynamic interplay of a man's life and let us witness their teleological functioning in it. What if all the inert and mummified ideas which the customary history of philosophy has presented to us arose and functioned again, resuming the part they played in the existence of those who wrestled with them? Would not all those patterns of thought light up with a universal *evidence* to gratify us, their historians who revived them, as they gratified the original thinkers and the students around them?

Then, there is a quotation from John Schaar on page 8 of this issue, which applies to us all.

Finally, we might begin to reread Plato as though, as John Burnet long ago put it, "Plato really meant what he said."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
PROJECTS IN SELF-DETERMINATION

IN *Green Revolution* for last December, introducing a list of books on home delivery and midwifery, an editor's note quotes one of the authors (Faith M. Hendrickson, writer of *Midwifery in* 100,000 *Easy Steps*) who believes that many women are "eager to learn what it takes to do for themselves where birth is concerned." Then, in a review of Joseph Chilton Pearce's *The Magic Child* (Bantam, 1977), Mildred Loomis, *Green Revolution* editor, notes that "All obstetrical wisdom stresses leaving the umbilical cord untouched as long as there is activity in it." The reason for this is the change or transition in the source of the infant's oxygen supply.

> Originally supplied through the mother's placenta and umbilical cord, it moves to the lungs. They require a few minutes to begin functioning. Then the heart shuts off a valve, shunting blood through the umbilical cord to the placenta, and directs the total blood supply through the lungs.
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> For this critical, pre-breathing period nature has provided the infant with a fail-safe mechanism because even a brief oxygen deprivation then permanently damages the brain. The brain consumes more oxygen than the rest of the body. The placenta contains 5% of the infant's blood and oxygen for this transition. About 6 inches of umbilical cord keeps the infant in touch with this supply for a while after delivery. This allows the infant to be clasped to the mother's breast without losing contact with the oxygen reserves. Because of its large brain at birth, its supply is crucial.

Mildred Loomis asks:

> In the U.S., why is childbirth so often treated as a disease, with technological-surgical delivery to "remedy" it at an average cost of $1,000 or more? In some places failure to submit to medical assistance can result in charges of criminal negligence for practicing medicine without a license. . . . Holland, where all childbirth is at home, has the lowest infant mortality rate in the Western world.

The multilevel psycho-physical bond between mother and child is called "an intuitive rapport beyond ordinary rational thinking and perceiving."

> It is *genetically* built into human beings. *The mother is built to respond to her infant at birth, and the infant is built to expect it.* Bonding, says Dr. Pearce, involves specific hormones, and breast feeding is a crucial factor in establishing it. In societies where bonding is general, infant-crying is rare. Uganda children, operating from a bonded matrix, are calm, happy, and enormously intelligent.
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> A breast-feeding infant focuses on, and recognizes the mother's face. This visual focusing is a reference point beneath the child's unfolding sensory system and learning. . . . Technological birthings and unloving child acceptance, says Dr. Pearce, are the roots of breakdown in inter-personal relations. They are the root of modern obsessive attachment (as substitutes for human bonding) to material things. A return to sanity and intelligence lies in the growing attention to, and revival of natural birthing, breast feeding and bonded child care.

Respect for natural life-processes seems at the root of these ideas. Another sort of growing respect for life was reported in a brief editorial in the March *Progressive.* Of the 6.6 million young men who became eligible for registration (which began in the summer of 1980), "some 800,000 have not registered," Selective Service says. In the conclusion of this news-note, the *Progressive* declares itself: "But if we want to head off the revival of conscription, there is no better way to do it than by forcing the Government to cope with massive numbers of non-registrants. If ever there was a cause that affirmed the principle of strength in numbers, this is it."

Of related interest is a story in the February *Peace Work* (a New England Peace Movement Newsletter, 2161 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02140) about a young Vermonter who, when the Iranians took the hostages at the U.S. Embassy and the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, was stirred by patriotism to enlist in the Army. He is James Bergeron, now subject to court-martial. His crime?

On Dec. 5 Bergeron attended a West German peace demonstration in uniform. According to his lawyer, he is the first serviceman since the Vietnam war era to challenge the army regulation forbidding demonstration in uniform.

What happened?

One day while walking through the Stuttgart University campus he saw a poster showing four U.S. soldiers dressed in chemical protection suits standing in front of three missiles. The poster announced a peace rally in Heilbronn, and Bergeron went—out of uniform, and (in mid-September) filed an application for conscientious objector status. When no action was taken after ten weeks (a typical, harassing delay faced by most soldiers who apply for CO), Bergeron decided to attend the next demonstration in uniform.

The March *Progressive* also has a story about Bergeron, which concludes:

At the 250,000-strong demonstration in Bonn, Bergeron saw German soldiers in uniform and wrote, "I too longed to demonstrate in uniform . . . but who knows what the next demonstration will find me wearing?" Soon after, he knew.

Once Bergeron was forced to confront his own contribution to militarism, he found he could not turn away from what he saw. The Army is not likely to let him get away with his act of conscience. As his trial proceeds, we have yet another lesson in the ways of the military, which claims to protect freedom while denying it in its own ranks.

The real issue, here, as so often, is the matter of reliance on, and adding to, the authority of the State. This brings us to still another *Progressive* article (in the March issue), this one in the form of a comment by John Holt on "saving the public schools." Holt finds himself unable to address this question with enthusiasm. He says:

In the first place, I can think of no meaningful sense in which the "public" schools are public. They are about as public as the Pentagon. In Chicago, the schools are controlled by a small board of businessmen. In many cities, including my own, the day-to-day operations of the schools are controlled by judges who are completely outside the political process. In no communities do the citizens and voters exercise any effective control over choice of teachers, curricula (which are more and more determined at the state level), methods or materials. Indeed, in thousands of communities effective local schools have been closed over the furious protests of the citizens.

The "public" schools are, in fact, a government monopoly, rather like our nuclear monopolies, and about equally sensitive and responsive to public input.

One more good paragraph:

Samuel Johnson said, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." We could equally say that it is the last refuge of the incompetent. Having failed dismally to do what they are supposed to do, the schools respond by wrapping themselves in the flag. What astonishes me is that people of the Left let them get away with this. When Charlie Wilson said "What's good for General Motors is good for the country," liberals were smart enough to give him the horselaugh. But when the $100 billion per year government school monopoly, crammed to bursting with featherbedding administrators, says the same thing, liberals nod in agreement. . . . If we put children, for a large part of their waking lives, into miniature fascist states, why should we expect that at the end of twelve years they will come out believing in human liberty?

Holt's remedy is given in his latest book, *Teach Your Own.*

FRONTIERS

The Real Frontier

"FRONTIERS" is a word to conjure with. Under this heading we can describe the numerous "desperation rows" around the world and repeat briefly what is said to be necessary to relieve conditions in those areas. This needs to be done, but in trying to do it we discover the enormous ignorance which surrounds the attempt. That, too, is something to report, and well-equipped critics are doing it.

But meanwhile the problems multiply, which suggests that the dimensions of our ignorance grow with our kind of knowledge. Early this year (in *This World* for Feb. 7), Orville Freeman, former Secretary of Agriculture, declared the likelihood that another epoch of famine will overtake large numbers of people in the world's poorest countries. "It is estimated," he said, "that 500 million people perished from malnutrition and starvation between 1972 and 1973. This could happen again at almost any time for, as matters now stand, reserve stocks are not adequate to met a shortfall in production."

Mr. Freeman points out that "development" in the poor countries has consequences that have not been anticipated. He reminds us that the increase in world population is seventy million people a year, which means that a lot more food will be needed. Then he says:

> What is not quite so obvious is that economic growth, higher incomes for more people, also adds up to enormous demand pressure. There seems an almost immutable law that, as people's incomes climb, their dietary desires grow and they diversify their eating habits. Intake of animal protein most notably expands, and it is this production which is so enormously expensive in terms of amount of grain consumed.

This seems normal. These people want what we have. But Mr. Freeman explains what it means to the total of world food supply:

> Per capita consumption of poultry has risen 24 per cent in the developing countries in the last five years. One person consumes about 180 kilograms of grain each year if eaten directly, but if he/she has a meat intensive diet, the grain demand more than quadruples to 750 kilograms.
>
> Such a diet on a worldwide basis is clearly not sustainable. As a matter of fact, if one extends the per capita acreage required to sustain the American diet (since 1976, our national consumption of beef has dropped 17 per cent to a per capita intake of 112.6 pounds) to the rest of the world, twice the world has available per capita today would be necessary. Actually, more grain is today fed to animals worldwide than is consumed by the 1.4 billion people living in low-income countries.
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> The proportion of grain for livestock has doubled from about 20 per cent of the world grain consumption in 1960-61 to more than 40 per cent last year, and is growing at twice the rate as grain consumption for food.

Mr. Freeman, evidently, is trying to get Americans to think in global terms. While American agriculture is famous for its "productivity," small producers around the world, he says, practicing intensive cultivation, do better per acre. They have "an enormous potential for increased productivity, topping even average U.S. yield." Indicated is another way of thinking about food production—the development of "solid family-size farmers," and this, he says, "is not a process that takes place overnight." Besides government support, "it requires in addition, the involvement and support of the entire rural community." And since the required changes "shake up traditional patterns," they are often fiercely resisted."

Yet it can be done. He describes a successful program of change in a village in India, "undertaken by farmers whose landholdings range from one-sixth of an acre to one acre."

Well, Orville Freeman has certainly defined a frontier. Yet the definition deepens to include basic attitudes—the "traditional patterns" he speaks of—when we turn to present-day pioneers in small-scale agriculture in America. Wes Jackson, for example, writing in a farmer's newsletter (*From Swords into Plowshares,*

August, 1981), considers the built-in waste of present-day agriculture. He describes what happens with commercially grown food:

> Once food leaves the field for distribution, oftentimes completely across the continent, it begins to bite heavily into the fossil fuel economy for transportation, processing, etc. When the extra or slightly wilted is run down the garbage disposal and chased with water to a sewage treatment plant and eventually into a river, then we can readily see that the American food system *promotes* the rush of useful atoms to the sea.
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> When we grow our own food there is more awareness of what has gone into production. The wrinkled potato is peeled and used. The tomato with a small rot will have the bad cut out and thrown over the fence to the chickens or dumped on the compost heap or thrown on the garden. It is not waste when the living world can use it again and again. The living world lives on waste. In one sense life exists because of waste. But from the garbage disposal to the treatment plant to the river and delta is a continuous chain of atoms which stand little chance of ever being used again in the human food system—a fundamentally different kind of waste. This is the waste due to alienation from the land.
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> Where there is alienation, stewardship has no chance. And it is stewardship we need, the best of stewardship. The best effort of our Soil Conservation Service won't do. We will need more.

By going from Mr. Freeman to Wes Jackson, we have turned the frontier into a matter of individual attitude—how we think about ourselves and the earth, as the foundation of all we do in our lives. This is the real frontier.

A good preparation for understanding what Jackson means by stewardship would be to read *Deserts on the March,* by Paul B. Sears, a 1930s classic recently revised by the author and published by the University of Oklahoma Press ($12.50). His first chapter is titled "Man, Maker of Wilderness." The whole world, this author says, "exists as a series of communities whose order and permanence shame all but the most successful of human enterprises." How does man make wilderness? He does it by upsetting "the balance under which wind and water were beneficent agents of construction, releasing them as twin demons that cave the soil from beneath his feet, to hasten the decay and burial of his handiwork." This book would also make plain the relevance and promise of Wes Jackson's project in the development of perennial grasses as food-producing grains for the future. Sears's chapter, "Leaves of Grass," is a paean to the ecological wonder of the American prairie.