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YET PEOPLE KEEP ON TRYING

THE old, old question, "Can virtue be taught?", first asked by Socrates or Plato, is with us yet. In that day, concern for the *polis*, for the community, brought the question to the fore, and since this concern was at the foundation of Greek ethics, it seemed foolish to the Greeks not to try. Plato, despite his skepticism, spent his life in the attempt to teach virtue, and whatever we may think the answer to the question may be, it seems a fact that those who saturate themselves with Platonic philosophy either are or become virtuous individuals.

An even stronger skeptic, Lao tse, who lived in China two hundred years earlier, contended that the endeavor to "teach" virtue was likely to have a reverse effect. Virtue there is, the old Chinese philosopher maintained, but if you would have it spread then trust in its spontaneity. He warned the reformers of his time:

> When the great Tao falls into disuse, benevolence and righteousness come into vogue. When shrewdness and sagacity appear, great hypocrisy prevails. It is when the bonds of kinship are out of joint that filial piety and paternal affection begin. It is when the State is in a ferment of revolution that loyal patriots arise.
>
> Cast off your holiness, rid yourself of sagacity, and the people will benefit a hundredfold. Discard benevolence and abolish righteousness, and the people will return to filial piety and paternal love. Renounce your scheming and abandon gain, and thieves and robbers will disappear.

Commenting, Holmes Welch says in *The Parting of the Way* (Beacon, 1957):

> Thus, Lao Tzu reverses the causal relationship which most of us would read into such events. It was not that people began preaching about "loyal ministers" because ministers were no longer loyal: rather, ministers were no longer loyal because of the preaching, i.e., because society was trying to *make* them loyal.
>
> The wise ruler does not try to *make* his people anything. He "carries a wordless teaching" because he knows that "he who proves by argument is not good." Some of us may recall reading about the occasion when President [John Quincy] Adams took his grandson Henry to school. Henry was six years old, and had decided that to avoid going to school he would have a tantrum. In the midst of it old Mr. Adams emerged from the library, took the boy's hand, and led him down the road right to his schoolroom desk. Curiously enough, Henry felt no resentment. This was because his grandfather "had shown no temper, no irritation, no personal feeling, and had made no display of force. Above all, he had held his tongue. During their long walk he had said nothing; he had uttered no syllable of revolting cant about the duty of obedience and the wickedness of resistance to law; he had shown no concern in the matter, hardly even a consciousness of the boy's existence." Lao Tzu would agree, I think, that on this occasion President Adams showed he understood the Tao of ruling.

A chorus of "Ayes" may confirm the wisdom of the old man, and agree that Henry learned something of importance from him—even a little virtue—on that occasion, yet most of us would like something "positive" for guidance in teaching virtue. How, for one thing, are we going to get more people to recognize the folly of war? *That* would be a virtue really worth spreading around. Many people see a hopeful beginning in the nuclear freeze movement, which continues to gain followers and advocates. It is a campaign, Tristram Coffin said in the Aug. 1 *Washington Spectator*, "that has swept across America, and the world, too, like a prairie fire."

> In a recent poll, 72% of Americans favored a nuclear freeze. More than 420 town meetings in New England alone have voted for a nuclear freeze, along with county governments from east to west. The largest political demonstration in our history, 750,000 protesters, gathered in New York City to appeal for a halt in the drift toward nuclear war. Church leaders of all denominations, doctors, scientists, retired military officers, artists, writers call for an end to the nuclear arms buildup, to the surprise of politicians caught in the web of their own upmanship.

Is virtue being taught in this way? Or should we ask if an interest in survival is a form of virtue? Such questions promise little fruit. Yet a certain

virtue, the habit of thinking and working for the general welfare, could grow out of such efforts and participation. Even so, as thoroughgoing pacifists are likely to point out, a nuclear freeze would be a long way from actual disarmament. The War Resisters' International "Declaration on Disarmament" begins with this paragraph:

> There is no aspect of the arms race which needs to be discussed except how to bring it to an end. The dangers we all face are widely known and abundantly documented. Even if there were a total freeze on all further production of conventional and nuclear weapons, the arms race would remain out of control on two counts. First, without a single new bomb, the nuclear powers have many times the capacity to end civilization. Second, even the most routine maintenance of the existing military structures is a criminal diversion of resources from the needs for food, medicine, and housing which urgently affect tens of millions of human beings.

This may be entirely true, yet what, after all, is the goal? If people who are aroused by the arguments for a freeze are able to demonstrate that they can alter or modify national decision, a certain momentum has been generated—toward the restoration of individual responsibility. Isn't that, in principle, what is needed, what many of us are after? Yet the comment of the WRI Declaration is needed, too.

Thirty-two years ago a young Italian architect, Danilo Dolci, began working with the peasants of western Sicily for the restoration of individual responsibility. In this region children were actually dying of hunger. The people suffered passively or became brigands. In an article in the Winter (1982) *Newsletter* of the Resource Center for Nonviolence, Scott Kennedy related:

> As Dolci and his co-workers began exploring alternatives to fatalistic resignation or futile brigandage, they came to realize that it is very important for people to have the experience of succeeding—and that a prerequisite for "success" is a clear understanding of the various problems they face. . . . Over a period of years, then, Dolci and his associates persisted in asking, How can things be changed? "At the beginning I asked questions because I was ignorant. Slowly a method developed which became constantly more accurate. We knew that we were ignorant and we needed to be able to count on everyone who was less ignorant than we were."
>
> After hundreds of meetings with individuals and with small groups of 13 to 30 persons, Dolci's method of popular self-analysis began to bear fruit. For example, one of the major problems of the area was aridity, the farmers were without water for six months of the year. Regularly during periods of drought they held processions with song and prayer, but this didn't always produce results! Through "popular self-analysis," however, the idea of building a dam slowly emerged. First a few aqueducts were built to collect water. This gave the people an experience of success—something sorely lacking in their lives. Next, hundreds of meetings were held to discuss further difficulties: what water was available was controlled by the Mafia, who charged highly inflated prices for it. So, eventually, the idea of a large dam developed. . . . Following the tenets of Danilo Dolci's collective organizing style in early 1956, one thousand workers, peasants and fishermen decided to fast on Trappeto's beach. They had decided to use whatever nonviolent methods were at their disposal to force the Italian government to build a dam in the Jato Valley. . . .
>
> Danilo writes: "The police came in caravans from Palermo. They were armed, with tear gas. The Captains were red as beets. Acting as if they had been betrayed by us, they blurted that it was illegal to fast in public, illegal for many people to congregate on a beach.

Next, under Dolci's leadership, they made a "strike-in-reverse." Hundreds of Sicilians invented work without pay.

> The unemployed and under-employed went without authorization to the outskirts of Partinico to repair an impassable country road. Their goals were to demonstrate the urgent need to create jobs, and to assert their constitutional right to work.
>
> "We agreed that if the police intervened, we'd sit down on the ground and stay peaceful. Our conception emerged after long discussions among the peasants. The crux of the matter was this: why should we sit down, seven, eight months a year, hands in our pockets, while we could do work like repairing public roads?"

So they worked on the road, and Dolci and six others were arrested as "agitators," tried in Rome, and convicted, but as a result the world learned of

Dolci's efforts and many distinguished people rallied to his support. Then—

> After six more years of nonviolent pressure and organizing, during which Danilo and his companions had set up the Center of Research and Initiatives (1959) as a catalyst for grassroots action, the state agreed to build the Jato Dam.
>
> Sicily's natural, agricultural, and human resources are finally being utilized more democratically, to meet the people's needs. Progressive and ecologically sound farming techniques evince respect for peasant wisdom and increase productivity. The water of the Jato Dam is distributed by a peasant organization, . . . The people's standard of living has improved dramatically. But, most important, the dam has provided leverage for structural change. Grass roots democracy now represents a valid alternative to the age-old system of parasitism and intimidation.

A young American social scientist, John Gaventa, has done a book, *Power and Powerlessness* (University of Illinois Press), in an effort to understand why American coal miners in Appalachia do not protest the loss of their rights as citizens. The book is quoted by a reviewer (Charles E. Linblom):

> Of a visit with a coal miner, Gaventa writes: "I had read the theories of democracy, about how victims of injustice in an 'open system' are free to take action upon their concerns, about how conflicts emerge and are resolved. . . ." But when Gaventa explained to the miner how he might move against a long-standing inequity, he "showed no particular interest." And it was not that he was apathetic or ignorant. Something else was at work.

In the reviewer's summary, that "something" is that the miners

> *learn* to be politically passive. They learn that political change is difficult to achieve and often dangerous to attempt. They learn that others stand ready to block their efforts to secure gains when they venture beyond voting and other non-threatening forms of participation. And they learn to be ignorant. They read, hear, and are taught political misinformation; other information is often hidden or only circulated inconspicuously. . . . An overriding lesson that Gaventa's Appalachians learned is that every venture into political activism will be countered by well-financed opponents who, at the end of the struggle, will once again prevail.

Who supervises the curriculum of defeat and passivity?

In Sicily, early in his struggle, Dolci sought to persuade the peasants to plan irrigation of their land with a powerful pump. The obstacle to this idea was something the people had "learned." As James McNeish, Dolci's biographer, tells it:

> Year after year the priest had been holding a special service, *"ad petendam pluviam"* (to pray for rain) and all the people knelt to pray *"ad petendam pluviam,"* murmuring Latin words they did not understand, to solve a problem which a forty-horsepower pump could have solved in two and a half minutes.
>
> Men *could* intervene to change things, he [Dolci] told the peasants.

For centuries they had been growing grain and beans on arid plainland in unvarying rotation. "Look," he said, "an acre of land growing grain seeds needs only twelve working days a year. But if it's irrigated and produces vegetables it can stand perhaps as many as two hundred and fifty days a year. Don't you see?"

> The peasants did not see. Irrigation and "things like that" belonged to the *signori*. Water belonged among the saints. "Water is another God," they said.
>
> The priest did not see either. Dolci made application for the right to use the water. The local authorities were not interested.

Dolci called a meeting of the peasants and told them there would not be any work. More children, they replied, would die of hunger. Dolci began his first fast to the death. "If I," he said, "by living, cannot awaken people's love, then by dying I will arouse their remorse." But he did not die because at the beginning of the second week of his fast the Italian Prime Minister agreed to care for the needy and to subsidize an irrigation project.

The instructors in passivity for the coal miners were more up-to-date. Gaventa's reviewer asks:

> Who are the teachers? Who exercises the power that teaches ordinary citizens to subside into political quiescence? In Gaventa's case, it was the executives of the coal companies in the valley he studied. The local government officials who cooperated with the coal company executives played a part, too. So did the top leadership and associated cadres of local

> leaders in the United Mine Workers. And state and federal officials are implicated as well. . . . Political passivity, Gaventa argues, is not an effect of ignorance and apathy. It is a consequence of power exercised in such a way as to teach people to withdraw from politics. Gaventa makes the case in detail for Appalachia, but he formulates his analysis to apply wherever passivity is to be found in society—which means, everywhere.

At another level, passivity has another explanation. In *Nothing Can Be Done, Everything Is Possible* (Brick House Publishing, *1982*, $9.95), Byron Kennard, who was "the National Chair of *Earth Day 1980* and Vice Chair of *Sun Day* 1978," shows that something more than passivity is involved. He says:

> One of the first lessons I learned as a community organizer is that most people are afraid to openly express their critical, dissenting opinions. They are content to grumble and submit. In time I came to appreciate their reluctance and to see the wisdom of it. Ordinary people are not cowards nor are they fools. They keep quiet because it is the smartest thing to do. They know full well that authority is a menace always about to strike. Moreover, they know that schemes for their liberation are almost certain to fail, or at best will merely exchange new masters for old.
>
> Consider their dilemma. With one hand, ordinary people have to resist oppressive authority while, with the other, they have to fight off schemes for their improvement and uplift by well-meaning reformers. To aid in their protection, they have learned to evade calls to action issued by zealous do-gooders. Intellectual reformers are always certain they know what to do about social problems, but ordinary people do not share this certainty . . . It must be said that the track record of ordinary people in resisting passionate calls to action looks pretty good alongside the trash-heap of novel schemes from yesteryear. . . .
>
> Besides, you don't really want to call the big system into question. Bad as it is, the system still delivers bread to the table. The bread may be mass-produced a thousand miles away and flown to your table at great and growing expense. It may be tasteless spongy stuff devoid of nutrients and loaded with chemical preservatives, but still it is bread. . . . If everyone began to air his or her complaints, the entire system might begin to topple. If you let too many cats out of the bag at once, where will it end? . . . The fear that things will go too far if we take off the lid is matched by a concern about the exact opposite. This concern is that, no matter what you do, it will have no effect. You can't fight city hall. Why waste your time? Ordinary people live on more intimate terms with futility than do intellectual reformers. Intellectuals play a game that occasionally provides at least the illusion of accomplishment or even of victory. If nothing else, they can always score points off each other and call their game the search for truth. This puts the sense of satisfaction felt by intellectuals at some distance from the sense of futility experienced by ordinary people. . . .
>
> Ordinary people do not greet every crisis that comes along as an opportunity for self-glorification. . . . Ordinary people are innately conservative. Properly understood, this conservatism is a way of protecting ourselves from ourselves. This protective mechanism should be appreciated for what it is by advocates of social change. If they despise and deride it, they may wind up feeling like a community organizer I once knew who complained to me that "the people" had let him down. I told him I was unaware that "the people" had ever promised to hold him up.

Yet Byron Kennard keeps at it, and his book is a fine answer to the question of why.

Well, virtue is various, and teaching it still a mystery, and should perhaps remain so. The man of virtue lives under continual hazard of losing it, as Ortega maintained. Yet the search for virtue must and will go on. One obliquely promising report comes from a writer wondering what to do next. He said in a letter:

> It seems that the problems of society today are all underlaid by an unfolding tragedy so massive that it effectively defies comprehension; and most of our efforts to deal with the various tips of this iceberg are, in their ultimate reliance on the accusation and the demand, an integral part of the unfolding tragedy. I find myself inarticulate and dumb in the face of what I feel to be true about our times, and my efforts to address the situation usually deteriorate in the end to more accusations and demands, even though I know that this just throws another stick on the building pyre.

Reading this, Lao tse might smile his little smile.

REVIEW
A GOOD GANDHI BOOK

ONE reason for reading books about Gandhi is to recognize the impact of the idea of non-violence as a precipitating force. It is easy enough to point out that the modern world is far from "ready" to give up war and armed conflict. Gandhi of course knew this, but was determined to make a beginning to plant the idea in the minds of the people of the time, and to demonstrate, on whatever scale was possible, how it would work. From one point of view, non-violence is still a dream, yet it has become a catchword and an ideal for movements around the world, and numerous books have been published on the accomplishments of non-violence. None of these things would have happened if Gandhi had listened to critics who said that non-violence is impracticable for human beings at their present stage of development. Asked what would be the policy of the Indian nation after liberation from British rule, he said that in all likelihood India would employ military force, since there were martial races in the country with traditions to uphold. Yet he hoped, he added, that India's decisions would be influenced or leavened by the ideal of non-violence.

A recent book by Dorothy Hogg, *Memories for Tomorrow* (Regency Press, 1981), is useful for seeing the effects of Gandhi's dream and practice. A surprising number in India were converted to his view, while an equally surprising number of leaders, although they did not adopt it, spoke of non-violence with a respect bordering on awe. When Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1914, he traveled around the country for a year, to obtain first-hand knowledge of the depressed condition of the common people, then declared non-violence to be the only solution. Speaking of this moment of India's history, Jawaharlal Nehru said in his *Discovery of India:*

> And then Gandhi came. . . . He was like a powerful current of fresh air . . . like a beam of light . . . like a whirlwind that upset many things but most of all the workings of men's minds. . . . Much that he did we only partially accepted, or sometimes did not accept at all. But all this was secondary. The essence of his teaching was Fearlessness and Truth, and action allied to these—always keeping the welfare of the masses in mind.

Dorothy Hogg met Gandhi in 1934, going to India as secretary to Muriel Lester, an English pacifist and member of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. She saw much of him on a later visit beginning in 1939. Her book, however, provides a general outline of Gandhi's career, with material drawn from Gandhi's autobiography and other sources. She gives greatest attention to the troubled years of the war, during which the Indian National Congress intensified the demand for India's independence. Two other themes have importance—Gandhi's campaign against "untouchability" and his insistence on the priority of Constructive Work in the villages. Untouchables are casteless Indians, called pariahs and subjected to systematic exclusion from the common social life. Of their lot the author says:

> Most Untouchables live in degradation through force of circumstances. They drink, eat carrion, break all the laws of Hindu hygiene. They neither clean their teeth nor comb their matted hair; they are unwashed and dirty in their habits. Small wonder that a people so despised and downtrodden should have lost their self-respect. It would be difficult for the most orthodox Hindu to carry out his cleansing operations, his prescribed daily bath and the washing of his clothes, if he lived surrounded by as many taboos as they. There are vast stretches in India where water is scarce, and even in a plain of many rivers such as Bengal, there is a shortage of drinking water. When access to wells is denied, there is nothing left but the foul liquid from weed-filled tanks. Flood water is available when rivers are high, but this is contaminated by open sewers and decaying refuse of all kinds. When rivers are low and dried up, there is no alternative for them but to drink water covered in scum and shared with frogs, mosquitoes and cattle.
>
> Women from Untouchable quarters often walk many miles to a village where some kind-hearted Hindus are known to exist. They leave their earthware water-carriers near a well, not on its sacred platform—and wait nearby until somebody's better

nature prevails and a few buckets are poured into the pots.

From the first Gandhi opposed this blot on India's history. "Untouchability," he said, "is not a sanction of religion. It is a device of Satan."

> Untouchables, he said, must henceforth be called "Children of God"—"Harijans"—and the spirit of touch-me-not must be banished from the hearts of all Hindus. . . . He went further, claiming that the misdeeds of Indians themselves were analogous to the very sins of which they accused the British Government. . . . He wrote in his paper, *Young India:* "Has not a just Nemesis overtaken us for the crime of Untouchability? Have we not reaped as we have sown? . . . We have segregated the pariah, and we in turn are segregated in the British colonies. Indeed there is no charge that the pariah can fling in our faces that we do not fling in the faces of Englishmen."

Gandhi's Constructive Program was aimed at the regeneration of India's 700,000 villages where the bulk of the people live. It included improved sanitation, agriculture, craft work, and education. While Gandhi became famous through his civil disobedience campaigns, his heart lay in the reconstruction of the villages as the only way to restore self-respect and moral and practical independence to the Indian people. His lifework cannot be understood without recognition of the importance for him of the Constructive Programme. Dorothy Hogg writes:

> When the constructive programme was first launched in 1921, Gandhi explained that he was not asking town-dwellers to transfer to the villages, but he *was* asking them to "render to the villagers what is due them"—food, clothes, shelter. Nor, as is commonly supposed, was he asking for the clock of progress to be put back. But he was asking for it to be regulated. The machine, for instance, had outpaced man's own development, and was largely responsible for the poverty, idleness and apathy in Indian villages. He did not ask that it should be entirely abandoned, but that it should be made to serve man and contribute to the common welfare. In 1934 he emphasized his meaning:
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> "I have no partiality for return to the primitive methods of grinding and husking for the sake of them. I suggest the return because there is no other way of giving employment to millions of villagers in idleness. In my opinion, village uplift work is impossible unless we solve the pressing economic distress." (*Harijan,* Nov. 30, 1934.)

Again, in 1935:

> "If we could have electricity in every village home, I should not mind the villagers plying their implements and tools with electricity. (*Harijan,* June 22, 1935.)
>
> "Machinery to be well used has to help and ease human effort. The present use of machinery tends more and more to concentrate wealth in the hands of the few in total disregard of millions of men and women whose bread is snatched out of their mouths. . . . It is against this constitution of things that I am fighting with all my might." (*Harijan,* Sept. 14, 1935.)

More and more, today, we are able to recognize the plain common sense of Gandhi's view of industrialization, as here defined. He saw clearly what, some sixty years later, E. F. Schumacher pointed out in the general effects of large-scale industry, but especially in the Third World. The simple argument of justice for the rural millions of the earth should be sufficient, but the same argument, extended, applies to the over-crowded urban areas in nearly all major cities.

Soon after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Sir Stafford Cripps brought from London some qualified proposals for the self-government of India. The Indians, including Gandhi, found them unsatisfactory.

> "India's fault," said Britain. "Gandhi's fault," soon shouted the world at large. For was it not he who first turned down those proposals? This was true. But why? . . .
>
> Summoning all his courage, Gandhi made his startling announcement that the time had come for the British to leave India. . . . The slogan went out, "Quit India"—but not in enmity. . . .
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> The world did not understand. Why should it? Who in 1942 had time or patience to disentangle the enigmatic statements of a tiresome old visionary? An avalanche of hatred and cruel misrepresentation soon descended on him. But was it fair? . . . Did the world know the situation as he did? Could the officials at Whitehall understand his people as he

> did? Could even the rulers at Delhi? Cut off from the masses of India by all the pomp of Empire, dependent on reports of minor officials and C.I.D. men against whom the hearts of the people were closed, could they gauge as accurately as the little old man of India the fast-gathering resentment fanned under Axis propaganda, hunger and penury? How could the British people, thousands of miles away and over-burdened by war, be expected to visualize the ugly sores of which official reports do not speak? Were they haunted, as Gandhi had always been, by the spectacle of skeleton-like peasants in the thousands of neglected villages? How should they know of suffering humanity huddled together like animals in the overcrowded tenements of Bombay? Who should blame them if they had failed to grasp the fact that in spite of her much-lauded contributions to India in history books, Britain was not loved but deeply mistrusted in India?

To his dying day in 1948, Gandhi remained a man of non-violence and truth. For him, these two principles were one, and have become one for many others since.

COMMENTARY
NOBILITY OR HUBRIS?

SOME readers may discern what seems a weakness or omission in this week's lead article. Its subject is the quest for and the teaching of virtue, but the examples given relate to the struggle for economic justice. Isn't this more or less a natural reflex of deprived people, and should it be termed "virtuous"?

Well, not all those who struggle for justice are beneficiaries. Some of the leaders submerged their own interests in the cause they were working for, revealing a quiet nobility of character. One thinks, for example of Eugene Debs in America, and Keir Hardie in England. The struggle for justice often makes an environment in which virtue flowers, especially among those who become aware that victory will not be possible within the span of their own lives.

When it comes to biography, an area of literature where the study of virtue seems more direct, there is the difficulty that virtuous men and women don't talk about virtue, least of all their own. A condition of being virtuous seems to be not thinking about it very much.

Yet inquiry into the nature and ways of virtue has its value. At the conclusion of this week's Frontiers it is said: "The modern world has no moral theory worth talking about." What, then, would be an example of a moral theory that is worth talking about?

Some twenty-one years ago, at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions (in Santa Barbara, Calif., founded by Robert M. Hutchins), one of the Fellows, Scott Buchanan, proposed for discussion Eleven Propositions. The first three, taken together, seem the foundation of a moral theory—very nearly any ennobling moral theory. They are:

I. Each human being is responsible for evil anywhere in the universe.

II. Each citizen is responsible for injustice anywhere in the community.

III. All men by nature will that justice be done.

Obviously, these are ideal conceptions. They spring from an idea of the human world as it ought to be, not as it is.

Yet that is the precise condition of a *moral* theory—that it should consider what ought to be in comparison with what is. So, we may say that without an ideal there can be no moral theory. Involved, then, is the question of self-knowledge, since Prof. Buchanan's propositions plainly imply assumptions about the nature and role of mankind. He says in effect that humans are by nature promethean spirits, intrinsically endowed with responsibility for both the good and the evil in the world. Taking our experience into account, a further implication is that included in the idea of responsibility is the idea of its neglect. Morality without choices is not morality. Buchanan's opening discussion of the first proposition is illuminating (taken from *So Reason Can Rule*, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982):

> Although this proposition has deep roots in Western and Oriental thought, it had three eminent authors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Gandhi. When I quoted it in a lecture to a college student body some years ago, the president of the college came to me after the lecture and asked me if I did not think that it was a dangerous statement to make to the young. He was thinking of its power to lead the young idealist to attempt impossible tasks and romantic feats that could lead only to tragic consequences. He found it full of hubris. As a follower of William James, he was of course right; it is not a pragmatic proposition. But there are deeper doubts. Is one responsible for evils that one does not know, for evils that one has not knowingly caused, for evils that one cannot right?

Buchanan turns to Greek tragedy for light. Sophocles' *Oedipus* asks the same agonizing question. Why must the king suffer for crimes against men and gods, when he was only doing "what came naturally"—obeying the conventions of his time? He did not knowingly offend.

The implication of Greek drama is that becoming fully human involves accepting this responsibility:

> The dramatists fix and elaborate one situation after another, typically and pre-eminently in the stories of Orestes and Oedipus, in which the virtuous and rational man seeks his highest good unwaveringly until he discovers in the resulting sea of troubles the unknown, unintended, irresolvable evils for which he must recognize and acknowledge his responsibility. The Greek tragedy never ends in the absolution of the hero from this responsibility. In fact, his recognition of the inescapable constitutes his salvation, such as it is, and if he survives he carries it as his burden of wisdom. . . . The doctrine may be a cruel and dangerous one to teach young people, or indeed any people, but the Greeks seem to be uncommonly and grandly mature by comparison with ourselves.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE PREPARED MIND

CREATIVITY in humans—which was blasphemy to suggest in the sixteenth century—continues to be a literary preoccupation. There are moments—frequent and lengthening—when we wish the topic could be outlawed for a while, in order to give some other words of forgotten value a chance to regain currency. But why does "creativity" attract so much attention? Perhaps because the supposedly "creative" person achieves an envied popularity and seems on the way to making plenty of money simply by giving off sparks from his store of originality. At any rate, the quest for creativity is pursued by many more people than the ones who try to be civilized or simply kind.

It must be admitted, however, that investigations of creativity have their uses, debunking the subject being one of them. For example, in a book published twelve years ago (*The Creative Experience*, edited by Rosner and Abt, 1970), Wilder Penfield, the Canadian neuro-surgeon, suggested that creative activity is likely only for people who have "prepared minds." He had found that by placing an electrode on a certain area of the brain of a patient, he could stimulate particular memories. A man would start crying if he touched one point in the cortex and a girl, similarly stimulated, relived a brief portion of her earlier life. Reflecting, Dr. Penfield said:

> The first time I did that it was thrilling, but that's not creative really. I think it happens as far as I am concerned more when I write and rewrite, and restate the evidence and the information in trying to prepare it for publication. Then, very often once I get my thoughts truly expressed, I see things I never suspected before. Although each one of them brings a thrill. That's a far more creative thing than stumbling on accidental discoveries. . . . I think the important thing is for a man to have in the back of his mind certain ideas and I imagine it's having the kind of plan in the back of one's mind that leads people to feel sometimes that they have made sudden discoveries. Well, I should think the prepared mind is just in the habit of having a lot of unanswered questions at the back of one's mind and then answers present themselves. . . . Then you have a framework, and you don't make the answers synthetically, it may be some little thing that fits into it that makes you realize something you should have seen long ago.

Dr. Penfield's comment on what happens during sleep is of interest:

> Very often, when I knock off, go to a movie or read aloud with Mrs. Penfield or something like that and get my mind completely away from something I've been working on, when I come back to it, it's all plain. And I think that when people say that their brain goes on working during sleep and solves problems, that is probably a false interpretation. The brain doesn't do any working on problems during sleep.

Yet after a good night's sleep, he points out, with a recollection of the problem, "you see it suddenly simplified. Your discovery is there, but it wasn't worked on during the night." He thinks the brain is fresh and better able to put things together. But so often this early morning inspiration seems to come without any "thinking" at all! Since, elsewhere, Dr. Penfield suggests that the mind is a principle or element independent of the brain, perhaps the mind (in its own place) does the work during sleep. This seems at least a possibility.

A remark by Arthur Koestler (novelist and author of a book on creativity) deserves repetition:

> When you write a novel or when you write an essay, or when you write a treatise or prepare a lecture, you can't tell yourself, "I am now creating." You are just doing a job. And the moment you tell yourself, "Now here you are sitting and creating"—well, then you can give up.

It was a passage in George Nelson's *Design* (Watson-Guptill Publications, 1979) that led us back to this 1970 volume, only find that he, too, was a contributor! But in his own book he tells about his early days as an industrial designer. For his office he wanted a spherical lamp made in

Sweden, but was put off by the price—$125. He says:

> It's hard to remember what $125 meant in the late forties. You could buy a brand new Ford convertible for $640, complete with rumble seat and white wall tires. This automobile, with motor, lights, gas tank, and wheels, was only five times the cost of this one lamp. I was furious and was stalking angrily down the stairs when suddenly an image popped into my mind which seemed to have nothing to do with anything. It was a picture in the *New York Times* some weeks before which showed Liberty ships being mothballed by having the decks covered with netting and then being sprayed with a self-webbing plastic. . . . We rushed back to the office and made a roughly spherical wire frame; we called various places until we located the manufacturer of the spiderwebby spray. By the next night we had a plastic-covered lamp, and when you put a light in it, it glowed, and did not cost $125. But note . . . the irrational jump from dissatisfaction with a product that was overpriced to remembering an item in a newspaper that seemingly had nothing to do with it.

George Nelson, too, adopts a version of the "prepared brain" theory.

> In all the experiences I have been describing, what we get is an invariable pattern. It is not mine; it's everybody's. First you collect and analyze information, then the apparently nonrational part of the brain goes through a mysterious search for bits of information that have no meaning to the logical part of the brain, and then—if you're lucky—these irrelevant items come together and something happens.
>
> For the process to work, for the creative act, the logical, analytical part of the brain has got to be put out of action. This goes against normal behavior. Because in our kind of technical industrial world, we've been brain-washed from birth to believe that everything can be discovered by observing, measuring, analyzing, and thinking, but it simply isn't so. The entire history of scientific discovery, mathematical discovery, bears this out. We cannot *think* our way into creative behavior.

What is it, then? George Nelson's reply seems as clear as anything we've come across in a single answer.

> What the creative act really means is the unfolding of the human psyche in the sudden realization that one has taken a lot of disconnected pieces and *found*, not *done*, a way of putting them together. This is when the solitary individual finds he is connected with a reality he never dreamed of, with a feeling of internal power without limit, and the knowledge that he is truly and fully alive for one miraculous instant.
>
> All these feelings or insights are of extremely short duration. The analogy I think of is a strobe light, twenty-five thousandths of a second—but you get enough light out of it to make a photograph. Peaks are of very short duration, possibly because none of us could live through a longer exposure.
>
> But this leads to a curious speculation. You might think of your working life—forty or fifty years—as a sum total of maybe six minutes and fourteen seconds of peak experience. That is really all there is. What this brings up is the possibility that we may have to learn to think about the meaning of time in other ways.
>
> To understand these moments whose effects can last a lifetime, one goes back to the creative act and asks, "What is it, really?" Well, it's frustration and search, it's research, it's inspiration, it's explosion, and all the rest of it. *But at its base it has to be an act of love.*

To explain what he means by this, George Nelson recalls a time with Frank Lloyd Wright.

> I watched Wright design a building once . . . five hours of the most incredible concentration I've ever seen, and at the end of it, he sort of woke up and looked around—I was sitting in a corner hoping I wouldn't be thrown out—and said, "Come here, George. I want to show you something." "I was supposed to get this church done two years ago, but I really didn't have the right feeling about it. Today I got it and look—here's the church and here's the little loggia that goes to the minister's house." And he said, "You know, George, it's a very modest house, the church doesn't have much money, but it is a noble dwelling!" This was the difference between Wright and any other architect I've met. He was loving that dwelling because it was noble.

FRONTIERS

An Insane System

DEFINING frontiers is an activity which points to things—conditions, relationships, ways of thinking—that ought to be changed. Each week in the mail MANAS receives cogent accounts of new frontiers calling for thought and action. Sometimes the appeal is for individual change, but mostly collective action is indicated. Sometimes one broad conception seems to include a number of needed and beneficial changes, as for example the idea of decentralization. Why is decentralization a good thing? It is good because it extends the range of possible human decisions by individuals. It means living under conditions which are determined and controlled by people for themselves. (Control, of course, means control consonant with the laws of nature, which involves another area of uncertainty and dispute.)

In a recent paper (ICCR Brief, issued by the *Corporate Examiner*), Joan Gussow, a nutritionist, gives an example of how centralized (remote) control may have a devastating effect on an entire region. In 1967, after Japan eased the tariff on bananas, the Filipinos began to grow them for export. Ten years later 88 percent of the bananas purchased by Japan came from the Philippines. Meanwhile large transnational companies (United Brands, Del Monte and Castle & Cooke) gained control of the marketing. Mrs. Gussow quotes from a report by Randolf David of the University of the Philippines:

> The company unilaterally sets the purchase price of the growers' fruit, but its officials claim that when the market is good, they simply raise the price. . . . Price increases, however, became infrequent as the Japanese market showed signs of saturation. . . . Yet the price of material inputs labor [and] irrigation, . . . kept on growing. In addition, after ten years of continuous planting of the same crop . . . massive infusion of soil nutrients [was required].

Eventually, the Philippine banana growers were faced with a crisis of over-production, so that the transnationals wanted bananas for sale to Japan during only four months of the year (when prices were good). This meant that "banana plants of a certain age have to be chopped down regularly so that no fruit is harvested during the lean months." Meanwhile the farmers, who used to grow food staples such as rice, corn, and vegetables, must buy them from the market. One corporate grower has been trying to sell a plantation of more than a thousand hectares, but the prospective buyer wants the land free of tenants (in order to grow palm oil—"the new sensational cash crop"). David concludes:

> The owners have not been able to make a sale because of the stubborness and determination of about eighty-five tenant families . . . who have been planting rice and corn in some portion of the plantation [and] have refused to leave their farms and their homes. . . . Today these Filipino families symbolize, for all similarly situated peasants in the Third World, the righteously indignant assertion of the right to grow food and the right to live, against the insanity of a system which grows food that people cannot eat, pays them to chop down plants on which they have invested their labor and imposes on them a mode of life which has stripped them of their autonomy and humanity.

Here, Mrs. Gussow comments, the demand of an affluent culture for bananas causes hunger for others. There are many versions of such transactions

> Meat . . . is even more resource intensive and can create even more serious problems. For Americans or Europeans, exercising their right to freely buy varying amounts of meat for themselves and their cats and dogs, may mean that somewhere other people will remain without sufficient food. This is because the "resources that were previously used to produce the maize, the beans, or the rice consumed by the local population are now being devoted to the production of grains to feed the animals that will supply the Americans and Europeans with the meat that they and their pets appreciate so deeply. The McDonaldization of the world is modifying consumption habits and generating enormous changes in production and land structures in Mexico and other Latin American countries, favoring large-scale ranging and processing operations, destroying the social fabric of existing peasant economies." (Jacobo Schatan, *The Right to Food vs. Freedom of Choice*.)

The question of responsibility comes to the front:

> Does the Japanese purchaser of bananas understand the cost to Philippine farmers of getting that fruit to her table? Given the choice between having a fast-food hamburger and enhancing the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the rural poor in a developing country, which choice would an American consumer make? . . .
>
> In light of the fact that consumers can hardly deal with the information they are not getting, it is probably naive to argue that the solution is to provide consumers with information about the distant effects of their food purchases.

What then to do?

Kenneth Boulding has said that only the government has the obligation to "look at the total system" and to make decisions about changes, but when we reflect that governments are expected to serve the self-interest of the people they govern, it does not seem reasonable to rely on them for economic justice. Mrs. Gussow clearly formulates the problem in her last sentence: "What is really wrong with our food supply is that it deceives us about its true price in human lives, in top soil, in water resources, in the sustainability of the very way of life it reflects."

One could argue that decentralization would afford an answer because the people of small, relatively autonomous communities have at least a chance to see the results of what they do. It would at least be *possible* for them to have a holistic view of their lives. In other words, there could be moral as well as practical science for guidance in everyday life. Science, after all, means making decisions by evidence. Without the evidence, decisions will depend on the tension between moral theory and desire or self-interest. The modern world has no moral theory worth talking about, which is to say that self-interest will continue to rule. Meanwhile, we are fortunate in having writers like Joan Gussow who keep on showing how badly both decentralization and moral theory are needed.