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SAMPLES OF SOMETHING BETTER

IN Simone Weil's essay on the *Iliad* (first printed in English by Dwight Macdonald in *Politics* for November, 1945, and now available as a pamphlet from Pendle Hill, at $1.50), she begins by saying that the "true hero, the true subject, the center of the *Iliad* is force." Force is defined as "that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a *thing."* Early in her text the writer muses about the role of violence in human life (she wrote during the first years of the second world war):

> Perhaps all men, by the very act of being born, are destined to suffer violence; yet this is a truth to which circumstance shuts men's eyes. The strong are, as a matter of fact, never absolutely strong, nor are the weak absolutely weak, but neither are aware of this. They have in common a refusal to believe that they both belong to the same species: the weak see no relation between themselves and the strong and vice versa. The man who is the possessor of force seems to walk through a non-resistant medium; in the human substance that surrounds him nothing has the power to interpose, between the impulse and the act, the tiny interval that is reflection. Where there is no room for reflection, there is none either for justice or prudence. Hence we see men in arms behaving harshly and madly. We see their sword bury itself in the breast of a disarmed enemy who is in the very act of pleading at their knees. We see them triumph over a dying man by describing to him the outrages his corpse will endure. We see Achilles cut the throats of twelve Trojan boys on the funeral pyre of Patroclus as naturally as we cut flowers for a grave. These men, wielding power, have no suspicion of the fact that the consequences of their deeds will at length come home to them—they too will bow the neck in their turn. If you can make an old man fall silent, tremble, obey, with a single word of your own, why should it occur to you that the curses of this old man, who is after all a priest, will have their own importance in the gods' eyes? Why should you refrain from taking Achilles' girl away from him if you know that neither he nor she can do anything but obey you? Achilles rejoices over the sight of the Greeks fleeing in misery and confusion. What could possibly suggest to him that this rout, which will last exactly as long as he wants it to and end when his mood indicates it, that this very rout will be the cause of his friend's death, and, for that matter, of his own? Thus it happens that those who have force on loan from fate count on it too much and are destroyed.

In this brief passage we see what Simone Weil is learning from the *Iliad.* She declares that there is a moral order in the affairs of men, that force begets force which, in time, is turned against its users. The *Iliad,* a work of art, is the purest of mirrors of this principle. The poem, for her, reflects reality as accurately and precisely as Newton's laws of motion. She continues:

> But at the time their own destruction seems impossible to them. For they do not see their relations with other human beings as a kind of balance between unequal amounts of force. Since other people do not impose on their movements that halt, that interval of hesitation, wherein lies all our consideration for our brothers in humanity, they conclude that destiny has given complete license to them, and none at all to their inferiors. And at this point they exceed the measure of the force that is actually at their disposal. Inevitably they exceed it, since they are not aware that it is limited. And now we see them committed irretrievably to chance; suddenly things cease to obey them. Sometimes chance is kind to them, sometimes cruel. But in any case there they are, exposed, open to misfortune; gone is the armor of power that formerly protected their naked souls; nothing, no shield, stands between them and tears.

This, with or without classical language, is what men of both practical and moral awareness are pointing out today. The modern nuclear powers, both or all of them, are in the hands of chance. Things "cease to obey them." Their refined calculations have become caricatures of forethought. The wild factors are far more numerous than the ones they think or hope can be controlled. Simone Weil concludes her passage of reflection:

This retribution, which has a geometrical rigor, which operates automatically to penalize the abuse of force, was the main subject of Greek thought. It is the soul of the epic. Under the name of Nemesis, it functions as the mainspring of Aeschylus's tragedies. To the Pythagoreans, to Socrates and Plato, it was the jumping-off point of speculation upon the nature of man and the universe. Wherever Hellenism has penetrated, we find the idea of it familiar. In Oriental countries which are steeped in Buddhism, it is perhaps this Greek idea that has lived on under the name of Kharma. The Occident, however, has lost it, and no longer even has a word to express it in any of its languages: conceptions of limit, measure, equilibrium, which ought to determine the conduct of life are, in the West, restricted to a servile function in the vocabulary of technics. We are only geometricians of matter; the Greeks were, first of all, geometricians in their apprenticeship to virtue.

If we live in a world which makes any human sense, Simone Weil is right in taking the soul of the *Iliad* seriously. While it only spelled out what she perhaps inwardly felt, many others in the course of history have adopted the idea of moral law and tried to guide their lives by it. But history, it seems clear, has not been made by these individuals. They are too few, and their voices are listened to by too few. And the Greeks, speaking of them collectively, were failed apprentices to virtue. But what if the present is another time around in the instruction in moral law from the events of history? Are there now more people who "feel inwardly" what Simone Weil felt? Perhaps some more, but not enough.

Yet those who have had such feelings, and given expression to them with persuasive understanding, are the authors of very nearly all that is memorable and good in culture and civilization. We began with an essay by Simone Weil on a work by Homer. A similar essay, of equal excellence, is by Harold Goddard, *Blake's Fourfold Vision* (also a Pendle Hill pamphlet, available from Pendle Hill Publications, Wallingford, Pa. 19065). Goddard is able to convey to his readers the intensity of Blake's vision. The poet *lived* in the world of moral law. Goddard tells of something that happened, to or in Blake, when he was eight or nine years old.

He came home and told his parents that he had seen a tree full of angels. His father was about to give him a thrashing for lying when his mother interceded and saved him. That is one of the earliest glimpses we have of him. One of the last is in the words of a woman neighbor who was by his bedside when he expired. She went home and declared, "I have been at the death, not of a man, but of a blessed angel."

Goddard is launched. He has nothing to say about what the boy really "saw," but takes it as a reality which Blake demonstrated throughout his life.

"A tree full of angels." "A blessed angel." What Blake saw as a child, he became as a man. *He became what he saw.* We all do, he held. He became it not immediately, and not without many an unangelic moment on the way, but in the end. "He whose face gives no light, shall never become a star," is one of his fine sayings. His face did give light. And though it has taken a century, Blake is now recognized as a star of the first magnitude. The world is full of plans and programs and proposals for something better, but what we need, to strengthen our faith, is an actual sample of something better. "No longer talk at all about the kind of man that a good man ought to be," says Marcus Aurelius, "but be that man." "Where are the great and wise men," asks Jung, "who do not merely talk about the meaning of life and the world, but really possess it?" Blake was one of these rare men. Obscure, almost unrecognized, often close to poverty, he went quietly ahead consecrating himself wholly to his work as poet and creative designer and engraver, upheld by the faith that he was speaking "to future generations by a Sublime Allegory."

In Blake's life and work Goddard finds an ideal scheme of human development—a scheme which applies to both individuals and cultures. But actual samples, so far, are found only in individuals. The claim that they are "exceptional" is the excuse given for not adopting them as examples for everyone. Why is it, then, that in our moments of spiritual starvation, we turn to the Blakes, the Shelleys, the great visionaries of the past? Why do we make such writers our

immortals? What keeps them alive for us if not a forevision of the truth?

We are moored to our bodies and need them for contact with experience, with the world's variety, but we *live* in our minds. Our being is the stuff of thought and feeling, an affair of privacy and self-construction, yet also of ranging resonances. The glory of the fine writer is that he makes this evident to others. If he is great he may become an archetype, or a compiler of archetypes. He is one to whom we turn spontaneously, as to the myth-makers, for instruction in humanity, in soul-making, as Keats would say. Goddard gives the Blakean scheme:

Blake's life and writings fall naturally into the phases of Innocence, Experience, Revolution or Rebellion, and Vision.

> All lives begin in innocence and pass, often at a criminally early age, into experience, which means disillusionment, and then into rebellion, which is an attempt to deny the disparity between our dreams and the hard facts. Reality—so-called—is too much for us. We sink back into acceptance of things as they are. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," says Thoreau. "What is called resignation is confirmed desperation." We repress our instincts, and along with them the darling wishes of our hearts, and they revenge themselves on us later in life in discontent, illness, nervous breakdown, insanity and suicide. Or else we express our instincts, we rebel, with more immediate and greater or less disaster, like the late lamented "younger generation." Some rebel for a little while; a few rebel all their lives and become, according to temperament, conviction and circumstances: warriors, dictators, reformers, politicians, satirists or criminals. Swift was such a man. Byron was another. Napoleon was a third. Only a handful, after facing experience and trying rebellion, transcend them by discovering a secret, a *tertium quid,* a third way, entering into an illumination that is an acceptance of life without defeat by it, or rather a triumph over life without a denial of it.

This is Goddard's theory of human evolution, and not only his. This paragraph seems an ideal outline of the meanings implicit in all really great work on the nature of man—from Pico to Maslow. How shall we know they are *right*? But that is the mystery itself, the secret that each one must discover—that humans are self-evolved, that well-meaning instruction cannot substitute for individual growth and awakening. Are there laws or rules for this? There must be, but the first rule is that they must be independently found out. Literature—great scriptures, epics, aphoristic wisdom—can give us only echoes. Yet they are *wonderful* echoes.

The discovery of the true character of human evolution is the first and most important part of the process. Blake went from innocence to experience, and then to revolt:

> It was not just the factory system, the Mills of Satan as he calls it, that Blake wrote of so penetratingly, but war, ecclesiasticism, the tyrannies of family life, wrong conceptions of love and marriage. On all these he anticipates astoundingly the criticism of our time. Hard-headed critics who scorn Blake as a harmless idiot and dreamer should remember this. But while his diagnosis is identical with ours, his prescription is totally different. Don't you think the remedy of a man who foresaw the course of diseases so clairvoyantly is entitled to attention?

Well, yes, but only a few will listen to such counsels.

Goddard might reply that if the few able to hear what Blake had to say made his feelings and understanding a part of their own lives, they might learn a language with wider appeal. They would help to give such wisdom living currency, embody it in everyday speech. Goddard, for one, did exactly that.

> Blake's phase of open rebellion was brief. Like most lovers of liberty he welcomed the American Revolution as a turning point in history. He sympathized with early phases of the French Revolution, wore a red cap and consorted with radicals like Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Tom Paine. Paine owed his escape from the English authorities and probably his life to Blake's intuition and quick action. But the September massacres disillusioned him as they did Wordsworth, showing him that there are animal as well as spiritual instincts in man. After a period of groping in darkness Blake emerged into his final phase, becoming a pioneer in a

thickly-forested primeval region compared to which the socio-political world is open country. I mean the region of the soul. . . .

> The psychologist Adler has declared of Dostoevsky that he transcends the whole science of psychology, his knowledge of the soul is so immediate and deep. Well, if there has been anyone since Dante, and I am not forgetting Shakespeare, who has known more about the soul than Dostoevsky it is William Blake. Among modern occidentals Blake was the Columbus of the soul. His Atlantic was Time itself, his Indies, Eternity.

Does that mean that we all ought to study Blake "religiously," mastering his obscure symbolism, puzzling over those awkward made-up names? Perhaps, but only perhaps. There are various ways of reading, and we might better learn first from Goddard's example. Again, the first lesson is that the burden of proof is not out there but within us. Wisdom taken from out there is *always* ambiguous. Otherwise we should all be sages by now.

On the great myths, Goddard says:

> God's account is that Lucifer fell and formed a Hell in the Abyss of what he stole from Heaven. But the Devil's account is that Messiah fell and formed a Heaven of what he stole from the Abyss. In Milton Satan is a divine criminal who is flung out of Heaven for his pride, establishes a kingdom of evil and tempts Eve, and through her Adam, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But in the Greek myth, Prometheus is a sort of divine Robin Hood who steals fire from Heaven and at the price of being crucified by Zeus bestows the gift of the gods on suffering humanity. Plainly these are opposite versions of the same story. It is the greatness of Blake that he accepts both and reconciles them.

The secret of life lies in the octaves of its imagery. Blake knew this, Goddard, too. Goddard offers an allegory from nature—beginning with the seed of a lotus buried deep beneath the surface of the water. Miraculously, the sun is able to reach down and start its growing.

> But the sun does not start the pebble growing. Plainly it is *both*—not an action but an interaction—something within the seed and at the same time something millions of miles above the seed. Is there a tiny invisible sun inside the seed with a strange affinity between it and the great sun? Or does the seed somehow retain a memory that it was a water-lily, which the sun awakens into what we can only call aspiration? Who can tell? All we know is that the seed germinates, as we say. Down, down go the roots, up, up, up climbs the stem through the dark cold water until, as it nears the surface, it feels within itself (I omit the leaves to abbreviate) a bursting bulb-like something of white and gold. And then it puts its head in a new element and one glorious morning it opens in a veritable sunburst of purity and fragrance and realizes (with a gasp of astonishment, I can't help believing) that the world which it thought was just within itself is an actual one, out there, around, beyond, above.

Suppose, just suppose, that Goddard (as some before him) has given us a true analogue of human evolution, development, *flowering*. Suppose that this sort of wondering and thinking is what we should really be engaged in, and that only the heavy weight of history and habit stands in the way. But Goddard, some will say, gives us only an imaginative abstraction.

Only an imaginative abstraction! It is also an igniting fire, and what, humanly speaking, could be more real? Goddard says:

> But now suppose our seed in the mud at the bottom of the pond had been an eighteenth-century rationalist seed unwilling to act without complete logical demonstration, or a nineteenth-century seed with belief solely in the facts of its material environment. What would have happened? There would have been no water-lily.

Goddard is arguing for an informed faith—faith in the creative power of the imagination, faith in ourselves, in minds that may need schooling, but have the power to remake the world. Blake called that power Art.

> "Empire against Art." Into those three words Blake condenses his social and political philosophy. Force cannot be overcome by reason. Force can be overcome only by a higher order of force. Imagination is that force. And Blake believed from the bottom of his heart that if a nation of warriors were confronted by a nation of imaginative men the

> weapons of the former would fall uplifted from their hands.

We have said nothing of "the Humanities" here. We dared not risk the verbal reductionism of a classifying term.

Blake would not have permitted it. Yet we can't help classifying. The pedestrian, after all, needs to walk. The generalization is at once our searchlight and the deeper darkness it creates.

Goddard says toward the end of his essay:

> I believe William Blake was one of the wisest men who ever lived. I believe in him for what he thought, for what he saw, for what he wrote and designed, and for what he was. But I believe in him also because of the other men who confirm him. When the greatest of the ages agree, if the agreement is not the truth, what is the truth? Take Dante for instance. When he exchanges Virgil for Beatrice as guide he is dismissing Reason in favor of Imagination. His Paradise is simply Blake's fourfold vision expressed with a sustained perfection to which Blake could not pretend. Or Shakespeare. He went through a longer period of rebellion and tragedy than Blake. He, too, in his Hamlet stage, found life "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," but he emerged in the end with an identical doctrine in *King Lear* and *The Tempest.* In *The Tempest,* as I read it, Prospero is the intellect or reason, and Ariel is the imagination. While Ariel is the slave of Prospero, we have material wonders: the raising and stilling of tempests, magic banquets, weapons arrested in the air by unseen hands. But when Ariel is set free and Prospero becomes *his* servant, the spiritual miracles of forgiveness and reconciliation begin.

Goddard discovers in Blake the positive aspect of the law found by Simone Weil in the *Iliad.,* the explicit and implicit teaching of Karma, or Nemesis. For Goddard it is the power of re-creation.

REVIEW

PETER DRUCKER'S CAREER

MANY readers probably think of Peter Drucker as an expert in business management, and he certainly is that. But if you read his *Adventures of a Bystander* (Harper & Row, 1979) you begin to think of him as almost a modern Leonardo da Vinci of ideas. There is no way we can review this book as it deserves. Being something of a personal Odyssey, it has too much variety. The idea, then, will be to get across its insight, the writer's balance, his unself-righteous decency, and the vivid relevance of his anecdotes. While Drucker has a calm sense of his own capacities, you accept it because it seems justified. He says of one of his earlier books:

> *Concept of the Corporation* is often credited with starting the worldwide vogue for "decentralization" or, as the Japanese and Europeans call it, "divisionalization." The first company to reorganize itself on a decentralized basis was Ford, where *Concept of the Corporation* became the official text. When young Henry Ford took over from his senile grandfather, he studied my book, which had just come out, and then began to bring in executives from GM—starting with Ernest Breech as chairman and, for several years, chief executive officer—in order to revive a company that had been going downhill for thirty years and was at death's door. "Decentralization" on the GM model rapidly became the stock-in-trade of the American management consulting firms as they branched out worldwide in the fifties.

Concept of the Corporation grew out of a study Drucker made of General Motors—they asked him to do it. His accounts of the top executives of the firm, starting with the ancient Alfred Sloan, with a lot on Charles E. Wilson, make fascinating reading. They are no longer myths but men, rather decent men, doing in their own way what they believe in, at the hands of Drucker. This is how he approaches the subject of Wilson:

> Of all my work on management and "the anatomy of industrial order," I consider my ideas for the self-governing plant community and for the responsible worker to be both the most important and the most original. . . . Naively, I fully expected my recommendations of a responsible self-governing "plant community" to be the most convincing part of my GM conclusions. But C.E. Wilson was the only one among top management people in any country ever to pay attention to them. Insofar as we in the United States have made progress toward income security for employees and toward a self-governing plant-community, we owe it largely to Wilson's receptivity to "heretical" ideas.

GM, Wilson told him, had considered the idea of a guaranteed annual wage back in 1935. "We gave up. We could not work out a meaningful guarantee that wouldn't bankrupt any business, even GM. You have convinced me we need to try again." He also told him about a scheme called "Supplementary Unemployment benefits."

When, Drucker asked him, are you going to put it into effect? (this was in 1947.)

> "*I* am never going to put it into effect," he replied. "I grudgingly yield to a union demand for it when I have to." I thought I understood: "You mean your associates in GM management wouldn't go along with it unless they had to?" "No," said Wilson, "my associates will accept my lead in labor relations; they have learned to trust me ever since I was proven right in the sit-down strikes. But the union leaders won't go along unless it's a 'demand' we resist and they 'win.'
>
> "Have you ever been a union member?" he went on. I shook my head. "Well, I was," he said, "and a union leader too, and I grew up in a union leader's home. My father came over from Wales as a tool-maker and organized a toolmakers' local in Pittsburgh. We were all Socialists and Eugene Debs was my hero—he still is. I was almost thrown out of college for agitating for him in the 1912 election; and because I was a dangerous radical, I couldn't find work as an engineer after graduation but had to work as a pattern-maker myself, and became the business agent for the pattern-makers' local. I'm still a member."

(Later, when he was in the Pentagon, and the Supplementary Unemployment Benefits plan was adopted— as a great union victory—Wilson phoned Drucker and reminded him of his prediction.) Drucker asked him, "If you

understand unions so well, why doesn't GM have better union relations?" The "gamesmanship" answer he got seems a minor revelation.

> "We have the union relations I designed," said Wilson "and they are right for our industry and our union. They suit both of us." When I looked skeptical, he added, "The test of labor relations isn't rhetoric. The test is results. We lose fewer days to strikes than any other major company in this country or in any other unionized country. We have greater continuity of union leadership. And both the union and we get the things the country, the company, and the union need: high discipline, high productivity, high wages, and high employment security. A union is a political organization and needs adversary relations and victorious battles. And a company is an economic organization and needs productivity and discipline. At GM we get both—and to get both we need the union relations we have."

In justice to Charles E. Wilson we quote one more anecdote. The occasion was when President Eisenhower, just elected, asked Wilson to come to Washington as Secretary of Defense. Wilson consulted with Sloan.

> "Of course you have to accept, Mr. Wilson," Sloan said; one cannot turn down the President of the United States. But you'd better be prepared to be stabbed in the back— the man has no principles." Soon thereafter, Wilson found himself in need of Eisenhower's support. Wilson never said, "What is good for General Motors is good for the country." It would have been totally out of character for him. He said,

> "What is good for the country is good for General Motors" which, while naive, is something different indeed. When he was misquoted he was deeply hurt, and asked Eisenhower to make a public statement. Eisenhower ignored the request. "I am not surprised," said Sloan.

Drucker has lots of opinions, and they seem for the most part good, but he is no ideologist. He judges people by what they say and what they do, not by their status, low or high, in the social and economic structure.

Drucker worked for a while for Henry Luce, of *Time, Life, Fortune,* but knew enough not to get in close. Luce conducted his properties with Chinese intrigue.

> By having people work for him in each enterprise around their official boss; by working around the people who had the titles and directly with subordinates of theirs; by seeing editors, writers, or correspondents more or less behind their superior's back—though often quite openly—Luce made sure that no editor or publisher of his would ever be in control. He almost never interfered and he practically never issued an order; but he could always roil the waters, upset, keep the infighting going, and he did. . . . This explains why his magazines were so faction-ridden, beset by infighting, feuding and mistrust. It explains why so many of his editors took to drink and why *Time* marriages were notoriously brittle. . . . I also came to realize that Luce was not Machiavellian. He was something more interesting; he was Chinese. I don't think Henry Luce ever thought out his way of handling people. He applied what has been the age-old Chinese way of running any organization, from the Han Emperor of olden times on. Mao Tse-tung ran his government and party exactly the way Henry Luce ran his magazines: by creating factions; by working around the people who had the title, office, and responsibility; by encouraging juniors to come to him but enjoining them not to tell their bosses; and by keeping alive feuds, mutual distrusts, and opposing cliques. This was probably the only way in which Henry Luce could imagine running anything—he may not even have realized that there are other ways.

Well, we have given too much attention to Drucker on management and not enough to other aspects of his life and career—such as, for example, his recollections of an extraordinary grandmother, of Sigmund Freud, who used to come to dinner at his Vienna home, of the Polanyi brothers, of Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan. Of his grandmother, he tells about the time when she noticed that the prostitute, Miss Lizzy, who had her stand at a nearby street corner, was getting hoarse. She always wished her good evening in passing on the way home.

> Grandmother crawled up the five flights to her apartment—this was postwar Vienna and elevators rarely functioned—rummaged in her medicine cabinet for cough drops, then painfully crawled down again to give them to Miss Lizzie. "But Grandmother," remonstrated one of her stuffier

> nieces, "it's improper for a lady to talk to a woman like her." "Nonsense," Grandmother said, "to be courteous is never improper. I am not even a man; what that's improper could she want with a stupid old woman like me?" "But Grandmother, to bring her cough drops!" "You," Grandmother said, "always worry about the horrible venereal diseases the men get from these girls. I can't do anything about that. But I can at least prevent her from giving a young man a sore throat."

Another story:

> The last time I saw Grandmother, already in the early 1930s, a big pimply youth with a large swastika on his lapel boarded the streetcar in which I was taking Grandmother to spend Christmas with us. Grandmother got up from her seat, inched up to him, poked him sharply in the ribs with her umbrella and said, "I don't care what your politics are; I might even share some of them. But you look like an intelligent, educated young man. Don't you know this thing"—and she pointed to the swastika—"might give offense to some people? It isn't good manners to offend anyone's religion, just as it isn't good manners to make fun of acne. You wouldn't want to be called a pimply lout, would you?" I held my breath. By that time, swastikas were no laughing matter; and young men who wore them on the street were trained to kick an old woman's teeth in without compunction. But the lout meekly took his swastika off, put it in his pocket, and when he left the streetcar a few stops later, doffed his cap to Grandmother.

And so should we all. Drucker's grandmother, as he says, had "respect for work and workmanship, and concern by the person for the person, the values that make a community . . . precisely the values the twentieth century lacks and needs." This is a mood which, on and beneath the surface, runs throughout Drucker's book.

COMMENTARY
GUIDE IN SELF-QUESTIONING

THERE may be those who, after considering the suggestions in this week's lead article, will say, "Well, the lofty ideas of Simone Weil and William Blake are possibly true, but how can I know? Not being a 'mystic,' I don't have their certainty."

But what may appear to such objectors as a becoming modesty—coupled with pragmatic hard-headedness— might also be a neglect of a range of undeniable subjective realities. The recognizable and sometimes articulate mystic starts where all of us start—with simple intuitions common to all: Conscience, spontaneous love of justice, and deep feeling of respect for exemplars of moral courage and integrity. Where do these qualities come from, if not from the potentialities of human development?

What, after all, do we know of the inner structure of character? Why should there not be a complex anatomy of soul? And why, in a world or universe in which a general evolutionary principle is at work—from a recognition of which come all our ideas of meaning—should there not be a historic interval when, for the human species, the impulse to growth moves into subjective regions of being? Then, as in other aspects of human development, the presence among us of pioneers would not be remarkable, but simply nature's way of gathering momentum that will in time affect the entire race.

But how can we check our "intuitions," distinguish them from impulsive extravagance, and avoid the conceits of egotism? This is the voice of reason.

But that same reason is itself the instrument of growth to heights where reason is transcended. For reason is a marvelous faculty capable of self-criticism, a criticism already somewhat practiced in the sciences, and now and then in religion, although we have the term "heretic" for use by those who fear the heights of imaginative reconstructions of human meaning. Metaphysics is the discipline to be applied to such self-questioning.

Some reading in the *Enneads* of Plotinus might be in order. But Plotinus is difficult, and what of the "masses" who are not equal to such studies? Well, if those who are would begin, we might soon have a civilization in which self-discovery would become a valued goal.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
TEACHER AT WORK

IT is time—high time—to recall some of the ideas provided by A. S. Neill in *Summerhill* (New York: Hart, 1960). Early in the book Neill tells about a boy who went to Summerhill and later found a job in an engineering factory. One day the managing director sent for him:

> "You are the lad from Summerhill," he said. "I'm curious to know how such an education appears to you now that you are mixing with lads from the old schools. Suppose you had to choose again, would you go to Eton or Summerhill?"
>
> "Oh, Summerhill, of course," replied Jack.
>
> "But what does it offer that the other schools don't offer?"
>
> Jack scratched his head. "I dunno," he said slowly; "I think it gives you a feeling of complete self-confidence."
>
> "Yes," said the manager dryly, "I noticed it when you came into the room."
>
> "Lord," laughed Jack, "I'm sorry if I gave you that impression."
>
> "I liked it," said the director. "Most men when I call them into the office fidget about and look uncomfortable. You came in as my equal. By the way, what department did you say you would like to transfer to?"

Neill's use of this incident says a lot. Not only does it show his primary concern with what Maslow called "intrinsic learning"—learning how to live one's life—but it also shows what might be called the authentic "radical" outlook achieved by Neill. The engineering factory was probably putting together some parts for Blake's Satanic Mills, but Neill was nonetheless willing to use the manager as an example of practical intelligence and integrity. Men without these qualities will never discover that the mills *are* satanic and wonder how to make them less so. In education Neill concentrated on these qualities. Commenting, he said:

> Jack failed in his university exams because he hated book learning. But his lack of knowledge about *Lamb's Essays* or the French language did not handicap him in life. He is now a successful engineer.
>
> All the same, there is a lot of learning in Summerhill. Perhaps a group of our twelve-year-olds could not compete with a class of equal age in handwriting or spelling or fractions. But in an examination requiring originality, our lot would beat the others hollow.
>
> We have no class examinations in the school, but sometimes I set an exam for fun. The following questions appeared in one such paper:
>
> Where are the following:—Madrid, Thursday Island, yesterday, love, democracy, hate, my pocket screwdriver (alas, there was no helpful answer to that one).
>
> Give meanings for the following: (the number shows how many are expected for each)—Hand (3) . . . only two got the third right—the standard measure for a horse. Brass (4) . . . metal, cheek, top army officers, department of an orchestra. Translate Hamlet's To-be-or-not-to-be speech into Summerhillese.

The questions were fun, with the by-product of stimulus to the imagination. What about orderly "learning"?

Don't the children need that too? Less than we suppose, Neill might say. If they want it enough they'll get it. A number of youngsters proved that to him.

> My staff and I have a hearty hatred of all examinations. To us, the university exams are anathema. But we cannot refuse to teach children the required subjects. Obviously, as long as the exams are in existence, they are our master. Hence, the Summerhill staff is always qualified to teach to the set standard.
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> Not that many children want to take these exams; only those going to the university do so. And such children do not seem to find it especially hard to tackle these exams. They generally begin to work for them seriously at the age of fourteen, and they do the work in about three years. Of course they don't always pass at the first try. The more important fact is that they try again.

At Summerhill the options were in the right order— but all there.

In last week's "Children" Peter Abbs told about using a horsechestnut to get the imaginations of his student-teachers going. Examples, not technical abstractions about "creativity," are the best way to develop this approach. We take from Henry Miller an obviously unfair but provocative interchange between Miller and one of his wives:

> I have noticed repeatedly how frightening to parents is the thought of educating a child according to their own private notions. As I write I recall a momentous scene connected with this subject which passed between the mother of my first child and myself. It was in the kitchen of our home, and it followed upon some heated words of mine about the futility of sending the child to school. Thoroughly engrossed, I had gotten up from the table and was pacing back and forth in the little room. Suddenly I heard her ask, almost frantically—"*But where would you begin?* How?" So deep in thought was I that the full import of her words came to me *bien en retard.* Pacing back and forth, head down, I found myself up against the hall door just as her words penetrated my consciousness. And at that very moment my eyes came to rest on a small knot in the panel of the door. How could I begin? Where? *"Why there!* Anywhere!" I bellowed. And pointing to the knot in the wood I launched into a brilliant, devastating monologue that literally swept her off her feet. I must have carried on for a full half hour, hardly knowing what I was saying, but swept along by a torrent of ideas long pent up. What gave it paprika, so to speak, was the exasperation and disgust which welled up with the recollection of my experiences in school. I began with that little knot of wood, how it came about, what it meant, and thence found myself treading, or rushing, through a veritable labyrinth of knowledge, instinct, wisdom, intuition and experience. Everything is so divinely connected, so beautifully interrelated—how could one possibly be at a loss to undertake the education of a child? Whatever we touch, see, smell or hear, from whatever point we begin, we are on velvet. It is like pushing buttons that open up magical doors. It works by itself, creates its own traction and momentum. There is no need to "prepare" the child for his lesson: the lesson itself is a kind of enchantment. The child longs to know; he literally hungers and thirsts. And so does the adult, if we could but dissipate the hypnotic thrall which subjugates him.

There was something about Miller, Neill too, that you don't find in very many human beings. What gave them their "feeling of complete self-confidence"? And what justified it?

Peter Abbs' students did rather wonderful things with the horsechestnuts. And if you turn to a writer who has been doing that sort of thing all his life, you see the rich fruit of such practice. In *The Undiscovered Country* (Norton, 1981) John Hay considers watching and studying birds:

> We have left mythical naming behind us, as well as the oral naming that comes through necessity and long acquaintance. Perhaps, as a result, even the most familiar birds, and doubtless the flowers too, keep their enigmatic and elusive character, like those bright warblers that seem to appear out of nowhere in the spring. They are the exceptionalists, flitting and twittering through the shadow of the trees, quickly seeking, restless little dynamos, in shades of yellow, black, pale blue, plum, and orange-red; and they have the quality of being able to turn the landscape into something more than it was. They materialize as things of the spirit, coming to the right place at the right time, so as to identify it themselves, out of deeper sources than human reason is able to command. All things are born again through ice and fire.

Word magic? Partly, but it is also a strong sense of what Miller spoke of as "so divinely connected, so beautifully related."

FRONTIERS
Some Comparisons

A PUBLICITY sheet from Schocken Books has a quotation from a forthcoming volume to appear in December, Julek Heller's *Knights,* providing a brief account of the incidental problems of war in the Middle—or was it the Dark?—Ages. The fighting men of those days, as the Connecticut Yankee showed, were not entirely bright, and they endured or embraced conventions of dress which made military engagements hazardous right from the start. The author describes the complications of their headgear:

> Knights would always wait until the last possible moment before donning their helmets. Once the helmet was on, it was very difficult for the knight to wear. He would also find it hard to talk or give commands. He could not wipe away perspiration and, if a blow knocked his helmet askew, he would be unable to see. On more than one occasion a knight knocked from his horse while still wearing his helmet is said to have drowned in a couple of inches of water.

What can be said in defense of people who accept such arrangements? Not much, perhaps, except to compare them with the present way of getting ready and fighting a war. The Knights, at least, fought their own battles. The lower orders, lucky fellows, were only spectators. The knights didn't require common folk to wear that ridiculous gear. Sweat from the heat of battle, while uncomfortable, was nothing like the incinerating glow and fire storm of a nuclear explosion. A knightly visitor from Arthur's court could point out numerous advantages of his mode of combat, from the short or long term point of view, and Twain, if he were among us, would have plenty of exercise for his wits by turning the comparison around. He might, for example, quote from George Kennan, for years the American Ambassador to Moscow, who said in 1981:

> We have gone on piling weapon upon weapon, missile upon missile, new levels of destructiveness upon old ones, helplessly, almost involuntarily, like victims of some sort of hypnotism, like men in a dream, like lemmings heading for the sea.
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> And the result is that today we have achieved—we and the Russians together—in the creation of these devices and their means of delivery, levels of redundancy of such grotesque dimensions as to defy rational understanding. What a confession of intellectual poverty it would be, what a bankruptcy of intelligent statemanship, if we had to admit that such blind, senseless acts of destruction were the best we could do!

A writer named Ken Keyes, Jr., in a little book called *The Hundredth Monkey* (Vision Books, St. Mary, Kentucky, $2.00), has put together a dozen or so of such quotations, any one of which ought to be enough to swing public opinion. From Dr. Helen Caldicott's book, *Nuclear Madness,* he takes the following:

> As a physician, I contend that nuclear technology threatens life on our planet with extinction. If present trends continue, the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the water we drink will soon be contaminated with enough radioactive pollutants to pose a potential health hazard far greater than any plague humanity has ever experienced. Unknowingly exposed to these radioactive poisons, some of us may be developing cancer right now. Others may be passing damaged genes, the basic chemical units which transmit hereditary characteristics, to future generations. And more of us will inevitably be affected unless we bring about a drastic reversal of our government's pronuclear policies.

Dr. Caldicott is describing the effects of weapons that do harm without even going off. The nuclear submarine workers at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, found that they were developing cancer at twice the expected incidence. Dr. Caldicott went there on invitation to speak to a meeting of these workers. Only four, Keyes says, showed up. "They told her that the Navy had threatened them with the loss of their jobs if they came to hear her talk." So there are problems in getting out the word and spreading it around.

Yet the warnings are getting stronger, often coming from unexpected places. A former deputy director of the C.I.A., Herbert Scoville, Jr., has said: "The unfortunate situation is that today we are moving—sliding down hill— toward the

probability or the likelihood that a nuclear conflict will actually break out—and that somebody will use one of these nuclear weapons in a conflict or perhaps even by accident." A former president, a presidential adviser, a former admiral, and of course nuclear scientists are quoted in the same vein. "The overwhelming priority to do away with nuclear arms," a Cincinnati preacher declared, "has not penetrated the collective consciousness or conscience of the general public. . . . Nuclear arms must not just be limited, they must be eliminated."

But how?

Keyes has a theory, a kind of allegory, which gives him hope. In 1952 some scientists conducted experiments with a tribe of monkeys on a Japanese island. They dropped sweet potatoes (raw) on the sand. The monkeys liked their taste but not with sand in them. Then one resourceful lady monkey discovered that she could wash the sand out in a nearby stream. She taught the other monkeys to do it. The young monkeys learned better than the old ones. But then, in the autumn of 1958, they *all* started doing it. The washing procedure had somehow got into the simian air and became the thing to do for every monkey on the island.

> But notice. The most surprising thing observed by these scientists was that the habit of washing sweet potatoes then spontaneously jumped over the sea—
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> Colonies of monkeys on other islands and the mainland troop of monkeys at Takasakiyama began washing their sweet potatoes. Thus, when a certain critical number achieves an awareness, this new awareness may be communicated from mind to mind. Although the exact number may vary, the Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon means when only a limited number of people know of a new way, it may remain the consciousness property of these people. But there is a point at which if only one more person tunes-in to a new awareness, a field is strengthened so that this awareness reaches almost everyone!

Be, Keyes urges, the hundredth monkey who expands individual awareness into a species-wide outlook. "You may furnish the added consciousness energy to create the shared awareness of the urgent necessity to rapidly achieve a nuclear-free world." The monkey story, he says, may be found in Lyall Watson's *Lifetide* (Bantam, 1980).

Did those scientists happen upon some previously hidden psycho-physical law of evolution—a beneficent twist unknown to Darwin and his successors? It might be stated: If enough people get good sense, they establish the good sense of the entire tribe. Even so, learning the method from monkeys seems a laggard way of acquiring good sense for the human species. Don't we have any models of our own?