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THE EXAMINED LIFE

ONE of the effects of the gradual spread of the new Humanistic psychology is the restoration of a sense of reality for moral philosophy. What is moral philosophy? It is the disciplined investigation of right and wrong in human behavior. As philosophy, it is an impartial investigation, drawing its materials from what is given in the two great regions of human experience—the region of the world around us and everything in it, and the region of self-awareness, which includes what we feel and think about ourselves.

It is generally agreed that the founder of moral philosophy, in the West, was Socrates. No doubt it has more ancient origins, but we owe to Plato the clear formulation of moral issues in the conceptual language that we use and understand. The revival of moral philosophy, therefore, means a resumption of Platonic inquiry or dialogue.

How does Humanistic psychology help this revival? There are doubtless many other influences which combine with Humanistic psychology in accomplishing a renewal of classical moral questions and attitudes, but they are difficult to isolate with the clarity that becomes possible for the leading conceptions of the psychologists. One way of generalizing about such influences would be to say that many of them begin as vague protests against the reductive and dehumanizing effects of a culture which devotes only its shallowest after-thoughts to moral questions, while its major intellectual energies are engaged with quite other tensions—those resulting from the claim that the "real" issues for human beings lie in the practical solution of technical problems. Quite plainly, this preoccupation with technique grows out of the enormous prestige attached to technical accomplishment in our society. People whose daily lives are meshed in dozens of ways with the miraculous achievements of technique could hardly fail to believe in the limitless promise of technical solutions, nor could they object, in view of this faith, to the increasing requirements of further applications of technical skill.

All this is more or less obvious. What is not obvious is why so impressive a method of objective problem-solving should prove insensible to human pain. It is the practical inability of technique to get *at* the causes of human pain that is raising doubts about the very foundations of the modern technological credo and opening the way, therefore, to a, revival of moral philosophy. Doubts, however, are different from affirmations. Doubts are easily related to dark suspicions and other emotional reactions, and these lead to undeliberated partisanships. So, while neglected pain and repeated disappointment make a negative contribution to the reawakening interest in moral philosophy, they also hedge the event with jungle growths of inchoate longing. Thus moral ideas abort, from time to time, in acts of simple desperation. It is in this setting, which has none of the simplicity of the Athenian agora, that the drama of regenerating moral resolve is now unfolding.

What is the describable part played by Humanistic psychology?

Let us note one important fact about the Humanistic psychologists. Their primary inspiration came from the work of psychologists as healers, as those who minister to human pain. Their positive affirmations, which now have a coherent form about which generalizations can be made, developed slowly over a period of about fifty years in response to the psychic and emotional ills of human beings. And while the early language of psychotherapy laid great stress on "technique," in keeping with those times, a

great transformation in the basic conceptions of the human being resulted from its practice, through the years. (Many of the processes of this transformation are described in Ira Progoff's book, *The Death and Rebirth of Psychology,* Julian Press, 1956.) What actually happened could be described as a change from thinking about man as object to thinking about him as a subject. From being a constellation of effects, he became an identity capable of initiating *causes.* Nothing else, the therapists found, would really work. The patient, as Erich Fromm says, must take the therapeutic *leap.* There is also a practical side to the question, since the therapist is powerless to change the vast and complicated scene which is the patient's environment. Sheer necessity obliges the healer to base his hopes on helping the patient to learn how to change what he can of his environment himself, and to become able to recognize the therapeutic values existing in whatever environment may be his at any time. The Reality therapy of William Glasser is very clear on these questions.

More specifically, the Humanistic psychologists have restored to currency and use the essential vocabulary of moral philosophy, involving those whom they influence in the identity-affirming mood of self-examination and self-recognition. Since the individual, in this scheme of things, is called upon to act, the agencies of action and choice obtain new life in the language of psychology. "Self" is now a core word, having been widely used with a fresh sense of discovery during the past ten years or so. The states of which the self, as self, becomes aware are being searched out and studied with a tenderness that deepens the content of old and familiar words like "communion" and "wonder." A kind of tunnelling back into the high human values in great literature has become possible through vitalizing discussion of the human person (see the writings of Carl Rogers) and of the delicacies and nuances of being which become exquisitely real in close human relations. Then there are the conceptions of heroic potentiality found in the writings of Abraham Maslow, already widely influential, bringing confirmation from psychological theory to the secret longings and feelings of capacity of countless people out in the world.

An unprecedented nourishment of long-suppressed private thought about the meaning of aspiration and the qualities of moral greatness is taking place through all these activities of the Humanistic psychologists, and the reflection of their ideas among teachers, educators, and serious readers, everywhere, is a significant omen of the times. It is not too much to say that a genuine renaissance of the human spirit is being accomplished by these means—or that it has, at least, plainly begun.

The fundamental categories of the moral struggle in human life are now established—in a new language, to be sure, but established—by the cardinal ideas of Humanistic psychology. This language is of a reformed and enlarged Naturalism rather than an adaptation of psychology to the morality of religion. While there is a sense in which Humanistic psychology is not inhospitable to ideas which are ultimately religious, these ideas can become operative in humanistic psychology only by submitting to purification of all partisan or sectarian affiliations. There is a sense in which the free religious spirit finds no objection to merging with a science that will not deny, although it may hesitate to affirm, transcendent possibilities in human experience. While modern psychologists are seldom willing to traffic in metaphysical structures and are embarrassed by assumptions connected with full-blown systems of objective idealism, they are filled with existential respect for the reality of *subjective* transcendence. One of Dr. Maslow's most suggestive papers is concerned with the capacity of humans to transcend the confinements of environment (see *Toward a Psychology of Being,* p. 168, Van Nostrand paperback), and his extensive discussion in many places of the peak experience, once called by the more limiting name of religious experience, opens

the way to a fresh approach to metaphysics. Such metaphysical thinking, however, would be grounded, not upon intellectual abstractions (although these have an indispensable use), but upon inward perception of a graded subjective reality. The point, here, is that metaphysics tends to go astray when it becomes only logical theory, losing connection with feeling as the "reality" principle, and once this happens it can be subjected to all sorts of wishful rationalizations and, finally, theological manipulations. The subjective naturalism of the Humanistic psychologists is thus a new, experiential prolegomena to any future metaphysics.

But there is also a sense in which Humanistic psychology might be regarded as the modest renewal of a great religious tradition. Its activity has been a quest for knowledge about human beings7 which makes it science, but its primary motive has been the relief of suffering. This was the motive of the Buddha. The search undertaken by Gautama for the cause of human woe involved a trial of all the known techniques of his time—none of which he found adequate and the climax of his investigation came as a triumph of introspection. How else can we describe his ordeal beneath the Bo tree? Introspection is the fundamental resource and proving ground of Humanistic psychology. And there are more than a few analogues between the findings of the Buddha and the recent conclusions of certain Humanistic psychologists—in particular, Trigant Burrow, Leslie H. Farber, and Rollo May. There are even resemblances between the cultural backgrounds in which the Buddha and the Humanistic psychologists have labored. Buddha contended against the towering metaphysical technology erected by Brahmin intellectuals, while the psychologists we speak of are confronted by the self-ignoring assumptions of modern technical structures.

Let us look more closely at the reanimation of moral philosophy, in consequence of these trends. Gratifying evidence of a real audience for the pursuit of moral philosophy is found in the publication (by the *New Yorker* for Feb. 25) of an article by Hannah Arendt titled "Reflections: Politics and Truth." Miss Arendt's discussion moves on the premises of moral philosophy. It turns on the Socratic proposition, "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong." Miss Arendt bases her inquiry on this proposition because "this sentence has become the beginning of Western ethical thought, and has remained the only ethical proposition that can be derived directly from the specifically philosophical experience." Her article is long and complex in its development, and should be read in the original. Here we shall make use of only one or two points, the first of which is that Socrates has great difficulty in winning even his closest friends and admirers to this proposition. Thrasymachus is wholly unimpressed, while Glaucon and Adeimantus tell Socrates that his argument is far from convincing. A little later, Miss Arendt makes it clear that the difficulty experienced by Socrates in persuading his hearers of this proposition—that suffering wrong is preferable to doing it—can be explained only by recognizing that its strength comes from the internal dialogue a man holds with himself. If there is no such dialogue, the proposition has little meaning or force. A man who becomes aware of himself begins to feel the awful obligation of "living with himself," but without the awareness there is no felt obligation. Hence the Socratic maxim, the unexamined life is not worth living. Miss Arendt contrasts this view with that of the hearers of Socrates:

> . . . since thought is the dialogue carried on between me and myself, I must be careful to keep the integrity of this partner intact, for otherwise I shall surely lose the capacity for thought altogether.
>
> To the philosopher—or rather, to man insofar as he is a thinking being—this ethical proposition about doing and suffering wrong is no less compelling than mathematical truth. But to man insofar as he is citizen, an acting being concerned with the world and the public welfare rather than with his own well-being—including, for instance, his "immortal soul" whose "health" should have precedence over the

needs of a perishable body—the Socratic statement is not true at all.

The practical man, immersed in the affairs of the world, and engrossed in bettering himself in terms which the world understands, will not only show no personal interest in this proposition, but may, if pressed, try to stamp it out as dangerous doctrine. Aristotle, who was a practical man's counselor, warned against listening to philosophers on political issues. As Miss Arendt reminds us, Aristotle said that "men . . . so unconcerned with what is good for themselves" cannot very well be trusted with what is good for others, and least of all with the "common good"—the "down-to-earth interests of the community."

Now what Socrates lacked at the beginning—and which the *Republic* was intended to supply—was a developed view of the community or society that might enable the ideas of philosophers to be taken seriously by all men. This was, at least ostensibly, the great speculative venture to which Plato devoted his life. But whether speculative or more deeply informed, it was a venture which endlessly shaped the wondering and the social visioning and even experimentation of those who lived after.

Plato might of course have written more as a religious teacher than a speculative philosopher. Some few, such as the Neoplatonists and that wonderful true believer of the eighteenth century, Thomas Taylor, have thought he did, earning thereby both the neglect and the contempt of scholars. But this will have to remain an unexplored possibility, here, it being simply admitted that Plato's framing of the human enterprise in cosmology and eschatology was not done with the dogmas of an unequivocal Spiritual Revealer. Plato's ladder to high designs is intimated, not blueprinted. His scheme of human development led to no Platonic priesthood and provides no catechetical instructions by which the merely obedient and conforming may find their way. Plato constructed no creed, although all the time he seems to be making hints. In any event, to become a serious Platonist requires some daring. And from his attack on the *mimesis* of the poets, we know that Plato had all the objections of a serious educator and philosopher to systems of belief which comfort by being closed.

But if we are chartless from being followers of Plato, we are not without encouragement. The Socratic proposition—which results from man talking to himself, inquiring of himself, and then declaring himself—keeps on being affirmed. It seems a spontaneous fruit of the examined life, of the life both impartially and compassionately devoted to the reduction of human ignorance and pain, and it keeps on finding voice. This is a voice, moreover, to which even hypocritical and ignoble men pay tribute by safely partial echoes and imitations. But most of all it is a voice which is heard and understood by those who, by whatever means, have begun to grow within themselves a field of awareness of the issues of moral philosophy.

Is there any order, any discernible generality, in the manifestation of these wonderful human phenomena, to which we might draw special attention and then take greater heart? Has the Socratic inquiry, since it belongs not only to old Socrates, but to all men, any frequency or concert, or any periodicity? To ask the question is to look about in a hungering, bewildered way.

But it is also a dangerous question. A lonely and unique Socrates seems somehow a safer Socrates to admire than a Historical Tendency. We don't want Socrates to be thought of as a Sure Thing. We'd like him to be many instead of one, but want to preserve his wonderful unpredictability, if not his random occurrence. We don't want him *explained away*. And we know that Socrates will never be the end-product of any assembly line that can be laid out by planners with an eye to salvation through scientific management. We need to be careful about this.

But neither should such questions be entirely ignored. If there is a patterning in high expressions of the human spirit, some knowledge

of this effect might be more valuable than other matters to which we now give great attention. Men have thought about this, as for example Gottfried Lessing in *The Education of Mankind.* And a few years ago, a modern historian, Frederick J. Teggart, proposed (in *Rome and China,* University of California Press) a research project which occurred to him as a pleasant contrast to his just-completed study of the wars of Rome:

> As an example of a wholly different type, I may point to the great religious movements associated with the names of Zoroaster in Persia, Laotzu and Confucius in China, Mahavira (founder of Jainism) and Gautama Buddha in India, the prophets Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, Thales in Ionia, and Pythagoras in southern Italy. All these great personages belong to the sixth century B.C., and their appearance certainly constitutes a class of events. Yet, though the correspondence of these events has frequently been observed, no serious effort has ever been made, so far as I have been able to discover, to treat the appearances of these great teachers—within a brief compass of time—as a problem which called for systematic investigation. But without this knowledge how are we to envisage or comprehend the workings of the human spirit? The history of human achievement, indeed, displays variations of advance and subsidence. How are the outstanding advances of men at different times and places to be accounted for?

Some day, perhaps, a social science informed by Humanistic psychology will get around to attempting answers to these and similar questions.

Letter from
WEST AFRICA

II

IN Bobo Dioulasso, second city of Upper Volta, we spent two days visiting the sprawling Organization for Coordination and Cooperation of the Fight against the Great Endemic Diseases (O.C.C.G.E.). The fascinating work of this agency, begun in 1939, is carried on by an expert staff of forty Frenchmen, assisted by 100 African technical assistants, and 165 African laborers, messengers and servants. No single African has or is expected to progress beyond the technical ranks: "There is no hope," said the Director to us. "Africans are not interested in research." But the same man somewhat ruefully admitted that the organization now has two bosses: the financing and directing sponsors in Paris, and a new Governing Council with political authority, composed of the Ministers of Health of the eight African states members. It is an uneasy relationship. The Council last year appointed an African as Deputy Director, but he has not yet put in an appearance, and is not expected.

An illustration of the complexities of this sort of work is shown in the activities of two sections of the Organization. One works to eliminate a little-known but devastating ailment known as onchocerchosis, part of whose life-cycle depends upon a black fly whose larvae exist only in swiftly running water. It has resulted in the total desertion of perhaps 30 per cent of the best arable lands of the area and in the blindness of the population of entire villages. The people have simply moved onto the rocky plateaus, back from the deadly stream areas. Life there is hard, but possible. A good many dams are now being built in the region, creating lakes of various sizes. The uninhabited valleys are gone, filled up, but so is the black fly, now limited to the small areas of swift water below the dams. However, the section of O.C.C.G.E. which works on bilharzia now notes a catastrophic increase in this disease, which spreads from a small snail that breeds in still water!

Another dramatic illustration comes from the attempt to eradicate malaria, which to date has generally failed in West Africa. But even success may be defeated by the complexity of Africa's problems. No one would question the benefits of the eradication of malaria. But a second look is in order. One of the O.C.C.G.E. experts worked on the brilliant campaign which eliminated malaria from Reunion Island. This forced attention to malaria's three major effects: it kills babies in the first year or so of life, it reduces human fertility, and it reduces resistance to other diseases. Eradication of malaria on Reunion Island has doubled the population in an astonishingly short term of years, hopelessly outrunning any possible combination of present or future resources. One form of misery has been replaced by others. Whereas with endemic malaria the population stabilized at a figure supportable at a low level by island resources, the eradication program completely upset this balance.

In Ouagadougou, capital of Upper Volta, a largely mud-built city of 100,000 persons, one sees drastic contrasts. Here, in contrast to five years ago, the bicycle is king. I walked through the part of the central market square devoted to bicycle merchants and counted a total of 900 bicycles on display. The crying poverty of the place is painfully evident, but in the 100-degree, merciless, dry sunshine there is an air of activity quite different from the lassitude of the damp coastal regions. One thinks that if these people had anything to work with, they would accomplish something. My air-conditioned room in Ouaga's only modern hotel costs $14.20 per night, while in the market a few blocks away half-naked local women sit all day in the dust in hopes of selling a stock of peanuts, rice, or various peppers or herbs which in total could not weigh more than a pound or two. Flies, smells, and dust are everywhere. In their study of epidemic cerebro-spinal meningitis the O.C.C.G.E. specialists say they have discovered a relationship between the constant dust, and nasal irritation and cracked lips. But how do you control dust in Africa?

In each of four countries we have seen at least one example of the application of local intelligence, devotion, and hard work. One hopes, with a sort of desperation, that the combination of these qualities with continued and carefully selected outside assistance will finally overcome such massive and complicated problems.

ROVING CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW
STORY AND SONG

THERE can be no harm, in these days of anarchist disdain for man-made law, in recovering a little warm-hearted respect for the human attempt to do justice in the courts. This, at any rate, is likely to happen to the reader of Robert Traver's latest novel, *Laughing Whitefish* (Dell paperback), which is as good a story as his *Anatomy of a Murder*, and somewhat richer in "social" implications.

There are two ways to look at the law and the effects of a legal education. One is that the confinement of the mind in legal conventions has the effect of displacing spontaneous moral perception, of institutionalizing thought about right and wrong, and of making very unlikely any recognition of the fact that, no matter how threatening the disorders implied, the anarchists have fifty-one per cent of the truth. The other view, which inspires respect, grows out of admiration of men whose education and career in law gave them tools of brilliant precision in the exercise of moral intelligence.

This second view of the law is the basis of Mr. Traver's book, which tells how a young lawyer makes the forty-nine per cent of the truth neglected by anarchists obtain justice for a young Indian girl. The girl's father, now dead, had a claim against a mining enterprise, dating from an agreement years before on his share of the mine in payment for locating the mineral deposit for the original owners. The lawyer sues to recover that share for the girl from what is now a very rich company, but her inheritance of the claim is clouded by the polygamous customs of the Indians and other informalities of tribal practice normally frowned upon by white jurists. The case is finally won for the girl, because the young lawyer discovered for his appeal brief that *treaty* law was in this instance supreme. The treaty law applying declared that "the Chippewa Indians may continue to exercise, observe and carry on all tribal practices, customs and usages common to the tribe without let or hindrance from the United States or any state or territory in which they may dwell. . . ."

By showing that Laughing Whitefish's rights descended to her in full conformity to Indian custom, the lawyer won. His nineteenth-century rhetoric, of which Mr. Traver is master, in the final appeal, is too good to omit:

> . . . the cold truth is that if the defendant here gave the Chippewa Indians a *hundred* Jackson mines it wouldn't repay them even a small fraction for all that we whites have stolen from them during the past centuries. We have left behind us an unbroken wave of broken promises, broken hearts and broken people. Henry Thoreau spoke poetic if not literal truth when he wrote: "The Indian has vanished as completely as if trodden into the earth. . . ." To this I may more bluntly if less poetically add that what has happened to the American Indian is one of the most disgraceful blots on our history; it is our eternal shame. . . .
>
> We boldly took his choicest land, we crowded him into smaller and smaller areas, we shot his game, caught his fish felled his forests, fouled his waters, stole his women; we brought him strange gods to worship and fiery water to drink; we debauched and corrupted him and bestowed upon him our choicest imported diseases. The cold truth is we have all but destroyed the American Indian here. . . .
>
> It seems passing strange that we whites in our vast power and arrogance cannot now leave the vanishing remnants of these children of nature with the few things they have left. . . . Can we not relent, for once halt the torment? Must we finally disinherit them from their past and rob them of *everything*? Can we not, in the name of the God we pray to, now let them alone in peace to live out their lives according to their ancient customs, to worship the gods of their choice, to marry as they will, to bring forth their children, and finally to die?
>
> An obscure Chippewa Indian once showed some eager restless white men the first iron ore ever discovered in the vast Lake Superior area. The white men promised him a pittance for his efforts, but even that promise they will not keep, even that pittance they will not pay, though they made and are making fortunes from what he trustingly did for them that distant day. So we are a generation later still fighting for that pittance, and mighty and resourceful are our

> adversaries. Can we, who for centuries have treated the Indians as dogs, only now treat them as equals when they dare seek relief from injustice in our courts? This, gentlemen, is the gnawing question you must answer, a question gravely moral as it is legal. . . .
>
> I am the first to concede that whatever you may decide will be but a passing footnote in the long history of jurisprudence, that the pittance we are jousting over is but a minor backstairs pilfering in the grand larceny of a continent. . . . the destiny of that pittance is now in your hands. Do with it what you will. . . .

Whatever the anarchists say, we think that Thoreau would have liked that rhetoric, and approved its use.

Journey Toward Poetry by Jean Burden (October House, New York, $6.50) has some of the qualities of an adventure story. It tells of Mrs. Burden's struggle to become a poet, of her work as an editor of a poetry page, and of her experiences in teaching a poetry workshop in a California college. As a whole, the book is an extended insight into the disciplines required for working with one's own subjectivity. For example:

> To a poet, subject is object in a way a psychologist never even approximates. In other words, his own emotional world, vague, turbulent, confused as it always is, becomes the raw material out of which he creates order, meaning, and, sometimes, even a realization. One has to move back from an emotion before one can write *about* it or *from* it. Or, as MacLeish once said, "The test of a poem is not its power to create emotion but to withstand emotion." And not just pure emotion, but the mixed-up, ambivalent froth of feeling that is our usual state.

In a chapter titled "A Way of Knowing," Mrs. Burden examines how poetry "knows":

> First, it is a way of knowing the so-called objective world the world of "things." No naturalist for example, is any keener in observation than a poet. But the essential difference between the two is that while both are fascinated by the inner and outer nature of things, the naturalist will examine his subject in terms of facts; the poet will see his subject in terms of analogy as well. Take the description of a bat: "Any of an order (Chiroptera) of placental mammals with forelimbs modified to form wings. They are the only mammals capable of true flight." Now listen to what D. H. Lawrence wrote:
>
> A twitch, a twitter, an elastic shudder in flight
> And serrated wings against the sky,
> Like a glove, a black glove, thrown up at the light
> And falling back.

Again, on the kind of knowing the poet practices:

> A poet . . . is a revealer of secrets, an uncoverer of darkness, a skinner of surfaces. And because he sees the world as though it were the first dawn of creation, he participates in some degree in the creation. The poet can be a kind of god, producing a new world with each poem by the wand of his pen. All art, I think, is a refusal to consent to the world as a static condition, as it is. And yet, paradoxically, it comes first through accepting the world as it is, and then transfiguring it. . . . In short, I believe there is no dichotomy between the creative imagination and reality. Quite the contrary, I think that man is constantly trying to bring down into the world of time the essences of what he dimly but intuitively feels is timeless. One of the ways in which he tries is through poetry.

One gains, here, some perception of what the journey of poetry itself may be toward, and of the ideal services performed by all the arts, when the artist is one in whom human longing is joined with awareness of the symmetries of the quest, and seeks to find and celebrate them along the way.

COMMENTARY
A WISTFUL JOURNALIST

ONE thing that comes through clearly in Harrison Salisbury's *Saturday Review* (April 8) article, "Is There a Way Out of the Vietnam War?", is the incredibly complicated maze of ideological and national attitudes which must be penetrated by anyone who tries to think about ending the war by "traditional" means. Mr. Salisbury is the *New York Times* reporter who recently visited Hanoi. His evaluation of the issues and "stakes" in the war, as they are seen in Washington, Hanoi, and South Vietnam, is probably more accurate than that of most other observers. He tries to show how negotiations for peace might succeed, on the basis that an independent North Vietnam is essential to the balance of power in Southeast Asia—which the United States should seek to preserve.

There seems a lot of sense in what he says. He concludes with a paragraph on his reactions to the view, attributed to some American military spokesmen, that if China could be drawn into the war, there would then be an excuse to attack with nuclear weapons:

> Perhaps those generals were right who believed that the only way to deal with China was to atomize it. But I thought there must be another way. China was the world's most talented nation, the reservoir of more human skills than any other existent, a people of infinite capabilities, possessor of the world's longest history and most complex culture, inventor of so many of the great technologies of the human era. Was it true that we could not find a way to live with China? I did not believe so. Surely America's heritage, Yankee ingenuity, and the democratic imagination of our great people could devise a better course.

This is the final judgment of a well-intentioned and well-informed man, and it is essentially wistful. It displays, we may say, the net result of trying to filter some moral intelligence through dozens of clogging layers of political "realism" and "feasibility"—each layer having its own narrow claims, its elaborate rationalizations, and its sectarian pleadings.

So it is hardly remarkable that the expressions of the moral intelligence of a vast and growing number of other people take the form of simple declarations: *This war is wrong!* What good is a moral intelligence that submits to erosions and dissipations so extensive that, in the end, not much is left but wistfulness and regret?

The Harrison Salisburys will doubtless continue to do their job, and some appreciation is owed to them for their persistence and professional integrity. Meanwhile, others will do their job, too, which is to demand that more direct means be found for making peace.

What many or most of these others are saying is that the medium is the message in a sense not intended by Marshall McLuhan. They are saying that military force has become the medium of American foreign policy, and that it is neither right nor will it work. The people who say this will not chop logic about the calculus of "risk manipulation" and theories of "deterrence." They are moved by feelings of the sort which made Emile Zola cry out, *Erase the Infamy*, and William Lloyd Garrison declare that he would be *heard.*

These cries are historical forces, too. It seems certain that they will increase, and not only in the United States. Meanwhile, Mr. Salisbury's article provides a background for recognizing them as a trans-political necessity of the times.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE RULE OF RETICENCE

THE art of teaching the young sometimes seems to consist mainly in the practice of reticence—that is, in giving them time, and in avoiding matters which are beyond their capacity to understand. The recapture of the child's point of view—sometimes called "innocence"—is no technique, but an achievement in identification which comes more easily to some than to others, and involves a sense of reality for horizons not yet blurred by grown-up sophistication.

What adult has not been overtaken by feelings of a vast inarticulateness when suddenly in the presence of a small, intense child? And what a relief if the child takes the initiative and shapes the dialogue!

Children often etch their own sharp awareness of their world, and then what they say seems more the reaching of a wonderful height than the exposure of a "juvenile" limit. The teacher who understands children has a way of flowing naturally in such a relationship, of being at home in children's exploratory ventures. Such a person finds it natural to be continually learning from the child and enjoying, anew, the play of his enthusiasms and ever-fresh discoveries. The adult who does this is never "play-acting," and so is accepted as a genuine companion and friend.

What actually happens between the two?

The child's responses to his experiences, so long as they are really his own, seem immediate and timeless—existential, in our present vocabulary. For an adult to react in this way to experience usually requires either that he be very wise or that the experience be so intense, or so shattering, that it strips him of theoretical or interpretive references. The teacher who is sharing in the experience of a child may have both kinds of response at once, as when the silent pain of a youngster victimized by massively cruel social forces brings a flooding compassion, yet, at the same time, starts going in the teacher a train of wondering about a remedy for all such situations which seem so inaccessible to individual action.

But the "theories" of real teachers never get far away from a basic existential balance. Deep feeling may have expression at times; Dr. Spock's views on the war in Vietnam might be an illustration; yet people who understand and are at home with children seldom give vent to incendiary anger—a kind of emotion of absolutely no use in relation to children. The habit of relating to others in the existential mode results in behavior that can be understood without dependence on "theory" or the use of abstraction. This is the distinction made by Jung between the natural sympathy felt by the nurse and the intellectual abstraction of the specialist who is preoccupied with disease entities and the patterns made by infection.

But a teacher has sometimes to think of the relation between the child's immediate response in feeling and the potential interest in theory that will awaken, sooner or later, in every child. There is doubtless a fine line or point, a moment of union between thought and feeling in every growing human being, and the teacher will look for this point—which itself has a natural motion toward maturity—as a clue to how to help the youngster preserve an appropriate balance between feeling and idea.

Awaiting such clues, the teacher will practice reticences. He will not rush to explain to the child theories of causation which are still precocious for him. Some sixth sense dictates silence instead of eager verbalization. "Correct answers" are of small importance and too easily clog the delicate operations of assimilation of meaning.

This habit of waiting, of watchful reticence, takes on another aspect when we think of the problems which confront adults—of our great abundance of abstractly neat, theoretical solutions, in contrast to the increasing disorder and suffering in the world.

The bad results of too much emphasis on theoretical order and certainty was illustrated, years ago, by an educator in science, with a story about a distinguished botanist. In his classes, the botanist took great pains to make his students recognize the occasional uncertainties of plant classification. He would often point to borderline cases for which botany had found no rule. This had a curious effect on one of his students, who was heard to remark in the hall after one of these classes that the professor "didn't know his stuff"!

Another kind of reticence was illustrated by Gandhi. Gandhi spoke with absolute faith of what he believed could be accomplished through the disciplined use of nonviolence. But such achievements, he also felt, would be wholly dependent upon a kind of existential growth which was difficult to define in terms of theory. So he put aside the elaborate development in theory of application of nonviolence to complex and remote situations, addressing himself to the practical problems into which he had been drawn by the course of his life.

His critics almost invariably singled out the most ruthlessly violent and cruel confrontations in history and demanded that he explain how nonviolence would work *there*. For Gandhi such questions, although he had to answer them, were the least useful to his purposes. They were abstract, inaccessible to existential awareness. That is the trouble with theory, as contrasted with the immediacy of actual experience. The negation of non-violence seemed easy by proposing a trial of this principle in situations where the increments of growth on which its use depended were not in evidence. Obliging Gandhi to discuss such problems at length could hardly fail to give an apparently negative cast to what was said.

The point of importance is that if Gandhi had been merely a theorist, *nothing* would have been accomplished by non-violence. He acted in relationships in which he had been able to find a juncture between existential awareness and the content of non-violent theory. He sought to advance that juncture, regarding it as essential to whatever could be accomplished by this means.

A father who is an accomplished artist learned a lesson of this sort from his son. In an endeavor to inspire the boy to draw, he showed him all the wonderful things that could be done with a pencil. It was too much. The son was never able to feel that he, also, could draw well—not in the presence of all this perfection. While the lesson of reticence was eventually learned by the father, in this case it came too late.

Our culture, alas, subsists in all too many ways on people's faith in the proclaimed "certainties" of others—and these others, when overtaken by doubts, honestly fear to expose their growing uncertainties because of the chaos they suppose would result. They do not dare to revert openly to a level where their theories could have support from authentic existential feelings about what ought to be done next.

The trap of theory in excess of understanding—how difficult it is to recognize when we leave the realm of childhood and consider the affairs of men!

And how hard it is to profit by those rare instances of public expression of doubt by public men, in regard to how little they—or anyone—can really know.

We are all victims of a grave failure in the practice of reticence—a reticence that would be no more than simple honesty and a respect for the struggling intelligence of all men in the face of problems which may, for all we know, be in some measure—perhaps in very large measure the consequence of centuries of insecure pretense.

FRONTIERS

Mailbag

A LETTER to the editor of a single-sheet mimeographed publication we've been receiving begins:

> I like your little paper. What a relief to read something that's not protesting anything!

The name of this paper is *The Early American,* further identified as the bi-monthly of The Society for the Preservation of Early American Standards. The subscription rate is 25 cents a year, or four years for a dollar. The address is RD 2, Oxford, New York. What the publisher seems to be after is the recapture of the subjective attitudes of American pioneers through experiencing the rigors of their life. Practical hints for people who go back to the land include a way to ease stump removal by cutting the roots instead of the trunk to fell a tree (when it comes down it uproots itself); and precise instructions for making shingles with the froe—a tool which any blacksmith can forge out of an old spring leaf from a car or a truck.

The search for positive alternatives to the demoralization of conventional life is pursued by many in theory, and in practice by a few. Since there is sure to be a vastly differentiated pluralism in the solutions finally worked out by Americans, the reports of individuals, however unpretentious, are bound to have some value. The mood held in solution in the following account, by R. L. J. Fahey, editor of *The Early American,* may be of interest:

> As I write this from the farm, the winter is almost past and with it an experiment in living my first complete winter with only the minimum essentials. Last autumn I had considered leaving the farm and returning in the spring, but I was swayed by the thought that I could gain some valuable experience in what to expect in a future community's first winter.
>
> I must admit that within a few weeks of snow, cold, and wind, I was sorely tempted to change my mind. The mistakes made in building the fireplace became evident, making the cabin better fit to be a smokehouse than a library. Maintaining minimum standards of cleanliness became a full-time job—washing dishes, pots, clothing, and myself—along with cooking, melting snow for water when the spring gave out, and occasional mending. (Oh, for the joys of a wife!) And then there was the ever-dwindling or at times non-existent wood pile to be refurbished. *And*—not already!—another issue of *The Early American* to get out. Just to keep from backsliding became my ideal.
>
> The recollection of Lincoln's first winter on his family's wilderness homestead in 1816 helped buoy my morale, for he had it much worse. The family wintered in a three-sided pole shed with a log fire burning day and night on the open side. And their closest water supply was a mile away.
>
> Some things that seemed insignificant in the summer became all-important in the cold months. When I cleared a trail last summer I scattered the felled trees—if I had taken minutes to cut them in lengths and pile them, I would have saved hours this winter searching out dead wood beneath the snow. Leaving a side-of-the-hill root cellar incomplete, I was limited mostly to dry foods, although I found that fruit and vegetables kept well if submerged in the spring or wrapped in cloth overnight. After ice broke several glass containers, I learned to empty all liquids before going to bed.
>
> Even with the hardships of the first winter a modest progress has been made. There are some five cords of wood cut for next winter, the cabin is trimmed up, a deer hide tanned, some apple trees pruned, and a few tool handles whittled out.

A not entirely unrelated venture on the land is that of Arthur Harvey, publisher of *Greenleaf,* which he issues from Raymond, New Hampshire, from time to time. Harvey runs an apple-picking crew in the harvest season, sells by mail a useful selection of Gandhian books and literature, and has more or less instructive encounters on issues of principles with the local authorities.

A friendly critic writes to Harvey in the Nov. 20, 1966, *Greenleaf,* objecting to his concern about the Viet Nam war. Advocating an "isolationist" or "localist" outlook, this correspondent says: "In a way, as a pacifist, you are letting the situation control you, occupying

your mind, heart and body, where they could be released for greater good in positive creative action rather than in negative destructive *reaction."* Arthur Harvey rejoins:

> As an isolationist or localist, I advocate that each society stick to its own affairs and territory, and avoid using economic or military power on other societies. Since we live in a time when this principle is forgotten, it seems necessary to comment on such matters as the Viet Nam war. How else can I illustrate the folly of internationalism? It's true that part of my energy is applied to reaction instead of positive action, but that seems inevitable if a man is going to function within a society.
>
> No doubt the government creates the war game which I must play, but in this the government reflects the desires of the people, or rather the most aggressive among the people. Many personal motives combine to create the demand for war: profit, fear, adventure, idealism, leadership and blood thirst. The government reflects these motives. . . . So, in responding to the government's war game, I am also confronting individual Americans who desire war for these various reasons. I think we are now witnessing what is essentially *compulsive* war, which serves no coherent policy and in fact is alienating America's principal allies. Further, war actually fosters the growth of communism by destroying rural village culture and uniting people behind those who resist the invader most strongly. . . .
>
> The *Greenleaf* may give the idea that my life is filled with arrests, jails, and the like. These things are interesting and are easier to write about than daily life. They happen not from any plan of mine, but because the authorities dislike my philosophy and way of life. They are an occupational hazard to a pacifist like me. If I were imprisoned for ten years, that would be painful, but I don't believe it would need to throw my life out of balance. One can practice self-examination and reform, and service to others, in prison or outside.

Greenleaf appears "every few weeks" and is $1.15 a year in New England, $1.75 elsewhere (New Hampshire students, 75 cents). Address: Raymond, N.H.