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A GERMINAL SOLUTION

THERE may be some excuse for the modern habit of calling every rapid change in the human environment a "revolution," but this usage blurs the term's primary meaning in Western thought. A revolution is something that men make with deliberation, foresight, and action. It is not something they endure. What is a revolution without revolutionists? If, then, there is even a portent of revolution in the world today, it must be sought in the minds of men who are in some degree aware of the anti-human aspect of external changes we are enduring, and who are making plans that point to a historical initiative. Such persons are of two sorts. Some of them are looking at the situation of man-in-the-world—that is, social man in the field of nature as modified by technology—and are making diagnoses and offering proposals. Others are looking at man as an individual—the individual who tries to cope with the world and with himself.

An article in *Renewal* for September will help to introduce the thinking of planners who are concerned with the plight of man-in-the-world. The article is about C. A. Doxiadis, a designer of cities and a builder of urban components. He lives in Athens, in sight of the Acropolis. The *Renewal* writer, Stephen C. Rose, sees him as one of those who are convinced that "a predictable future is breaking in on us as reality that must be dealt with without delay." Summarizing the thought of Doxiadis, Mr. Rose writes:

> We must develop a systematic approach, we must reproduce the vanishing human scale (an aide says later that Doxiadis finds human scale today in Venice with its carless canals, on certain Greek islands, and in some monasteries). We must see the urban sphere as dynopolis, with every element in a continual state of change. In the dynopolis, the planning process must move at a speed higher than the forces of potential strangulation and dehumanization. In transportation for example, the present trend is to let population growth determine transportation growth in a reflex-action pattern. Thus the very policy of transportation (the expressway, the primacy of the automobile) adopted today may foreclose creative alternatives tomorrow.

The article continues, detailing Doxiadis' conception of the humanly scaled community—identified as the "cell" of the *Ecumenopolis,* or city of the world—which has a population of less than 50,000, no automobiles except on the periphery, and provision for twinning expansion at a distance that will not make for congestion. At the center of the cell are "those institutions that the community most values," the outer shell being its industry, with the radius from nucleus to rim defining the residential area. For immediate action Doxiadis proposes the building of new cities at substantial distances (say, 150 miles) from existing areas of concentration, to ease the population pressure in places like Chicago. The practical argument is that "courageous invention of completely new centers is more economical over a twenty-year period than the incessant effort to accommodate present urbanized regions to even greater influxes of industry and population." As one inspired by Teilhard de Chardin's conception of further human evolution, Doxiadis says:

> The Ecumenopolis cannot succeed as a settlement unless we understand that we must now have one united world. Modern technology will lead to disaster if peace is not secured. However, this is not enough, wars cannot be avoided and freedom cannot be guaranteed unless all the teachings, both of religious and political systems, about the equality of men find their proper practical expression. . . . This cannot happen if we are going to continue having developed and underdeveloped nations or groups, or if we are going to have basic differences between city and countryside, or between groups or areas within the cities themselves.

While city life and city institutions, Doxiadis believes, are the sources of civilization, the rapid, unplanned growth of cities in recent years is now out of control. This will result in both internal and external problems:

> In the central zone we'll have problems of over-congestion, too many cars, too many slums, no operation of society because of the high density of unsimilar, undigested elements not connected with one another.
>
> In the outlying areas, under the impact of such great population increase, society does not operate for different reasons. Here there is no community feeling, no proper transportation network, water supply system, etc. We have a category of cave-dwellers created in the central slums and a category of nomads settling in the outskirts. Both categories do not have a normal, human, happy life. If we let present trends continue, which means letting pressures build up and increase enormously, there is no hope at all. The human city is going to turn into an inhuman city and mankind is doomed in it in terms of all human values.

Elaborating, Doxiadis points out that in the modern city people must breathe contaminated air and are subject to continual bombardment of noise; at the same time their sight is stopped in many directions, with little opportunity for an open view. Subjected to such conditions, man's senses contract. Further—

> Under the pressures of this habitat, his mind is flooded with all sorts of information continuously. In the streets he sees thousands of people, thousands of cars. In his house he has the telephone ringing, the television set going, he has all the newspapers and the print that flows in. He receives, but he hasn't the ability to carry out the more important function of processing. Man must use his brain and not overload it. He cannot use his brain in a congested city.

If to this generalized description of urban life and its suburban attenuation, we add the various impacts described by Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media*, and other bewildering forms of rapid change, we begin to get some idea of the multiple factors contributing to the sense of actual dissolution of the environment experienced by the young, many of whom have experienced very little else. They know the buzzing, bawling present and have little feeling of continuity with the past. Roots and stability are not a familiar part of their lives, and they have not even nostalgia to comfort them. (This may possibly explain to some extent the observations of teachers who speak of the difference in the students of today. They do not seem to learn in the way that previous generations learned; they absorb, intuit, and feel their direction. There is more immediacy in their lives, with fewer connections. Their "rationalism," if we can call it that, sometimes seems a kind of quickened ethical perception, moving from moral savors to attitudes, instead of from facts to propositions and logical conclusions. They behave like refugees from a world that does not seem worth understanding, and which it is difficult to see why anyone made.)

So, if you attempt some small survey of the dreams of planners—of men who, in various ways, try to fill us with deepening awareness of what is wrong with the world, and who have a great deal to say about how it *must* be changed—you begin to wonder how all this can possibly get done. It cannot be done *to* people, over their heads, without their will, and in the present it seems unimaginable that it will ever get done *by* them. Yet an extraordinary initiative is demanded of them. It is as though they are expected by some miracle to rise up, acquire stupendous vision, and *act* with all the potencies that have been subtracted from them during, say, the last hundred years.

The inescapable reality before us is that we do not have a problem of "masses," but a problem of individuals, even though only as seen in the profile of large-scale anti-human circumstances do we admit that the problem is *real*. Which is to say that our greatest mistake lies in defining our problems in a way that makes them practically inaccessible to solution.

This brings us to Buckminster Fuller, who is probably the most impassioned advocate of planning alive today, and who, unlike other men with concrete proposals to make, does not seek out official bodies or various publics, but carries his word to individuals—in this case the students of the architectural schools of the world. One of Fuller's rules is "Never seek publicity," a curious principle for a man who is out to re-form the world! This can only be because he is persuaded that innovations of the sort he has in mind can come into being only through the intensified inspiration of individuals. He is intent upon a vast cross fertilization of individual

minds, and one may suspect that the kind of planning that could come out of all this wild have the absolutely essential virtue of *respect* for the individual—not as a slogan or a political principle, but as a grown-in mode of organic development. In *Document 3* of the *World Design Science Decade—1965-1975* series, Mr. Fuller observes:

> Initiative springs only from within the individual. Initiative can neither be created nor delegated. It can only be vacated. Initiative can only be taken by the individual on his own self-conviction of the necessity to overcome his conditioned reflexing which has accustomed him therefore always to yield authority to the wisdom of others. Initiative is only innate and highly perishable.

Fuller's conception of planning involves a ten-year program which begins with nuclear comprehension of what must be done, based upon an inventory of world resources, human trends, and needs. The four "documents" now in print have been published by the World Resources Inventory, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Ill. For all the stress in *Document 3*, titled "The Design Initiative," on Fuller's own achievements, these publications have a strong impersonal enthusiasm and seldom fail to supply the reader with a world perspective. It is a central point in all of Fuller's writings that human intelligence is the anti-entropic force in the universe, that the development of modern technology can bring natural access to abundance through the ephemeralization of the means—accomplishing the transfer of drudgery and back-breaking toil to the machine, with concurrent simplification (Fuller might say "naturalization") of the machine through ephemeralization to the point where the use of technology becomes as "organic" to man's life-purposes as all other operations of nature. In a virtually mystical passage along this line, Fuller says:

> World society has throughout its millions of years on earth made its judgments upon visible, tangible, sensorially demonstrable criteria. We may safely say that the world is keeping its eye on the unimportant visible 1 per cent of the historical transformation while missing the 99 per cent of over-all, unseen changes. Forms are inherently *visible* and forms can no longer "follow functions" because the significant functions are invisible. That era of essentially visible "modernism" is over. The architecture of superficial "functionalism" is meaningless and dead. What usually we speak of as our everyday world is a stage set with visible props which are easily manipulated by ignorant people to exploit the ignorance of others. The unreliable, uninformative and often deliberately misinformative scenery of that stage is soon to be radically altered due to the inexorable trendings in the sub- or ultra-visible alterations of man's relationship to universe.

Mr. Fuller has another way of conveying his view of how to use technology—as a kind of conscious "organic" assimilation by man of the intelligence-extended powers of nature:

> By my calculations there is mathematical probability that progressive mastery by man of the physical coordinates of nature and their progressive sublimation by man as separate categories, and subordination to total abstract concepts, may indeed be trending historically to permit the integral being of the child to remain unfractionated throughout the total life span. For instance, we are unaware of our own tongues until we bite them. When in health and "good form" the total myriad component functions of our physical organic being are entirely subordinated to subconscious coordinate functioning, commanded by the integrity of the individual life. When life has departed, the full physical inventory remains—useless, reminiscent, but that is all. That is the way I see things. I am convinced that creativity is *a priori* to the integrity of the universe and that life is regenerative and conformity meaningless.

This may be recognized as an intuitive-rational way of thinking about man and nature, with technology seen as a special kind of harmonic relation between man and nature, enormously productive, just as the body itself is enormously productive; and this approach is to be distinguished from the rational-manipulative, the local, *ad hoc* use of technology, which externalizes and particularizes instead of internalizing and universalizing. Fuller is convinced that technology can be an expression of man-in-nature, instead of man exploiting nature.

We may have some trouble reconciling ourselves to any such possibility. But what should be considered, when weighing the matter, is the more than obvious need for a kind of thinking and acting which transcends the dilemmas of our present situation. It would be natural for such a proposal to

seem unlikely, on first inspection. What is involved may represent nothing less than a new evolutionary plateau for humans. Fuller says as much.

In recent years the humanistic psychologists have written suggestively about the inevitable fission in the subject-object identity of man—the splitting of his original holistic awareness into perception of self and other—into "I" and "they" or "it," into me-in-here and that-out-mere. We apparently need this differentiation to become aware of ourselves, yet a recovery of our primordial unity is the means of our restoration as whole human beings. As Frank Barron observes in *The Study of Lives:*

> The common feature in such experiences is the feeling of unity with the entire universe, utter merging of self in the infinite, a relinquishing of the experiencing of boundedness and separateness of subject from object. . . . To express this in the terms of our modern psychology, it appears that creative individuals have a remarkable affinity for what in most of us is unconscious or preconscious. . . . The concepts of discipline, responsibility, and committed, enduring attention are all too often left out of account in descriptions of the creative process, simply because what so often first impresses us in the personality of the creative artist is unconventionality, independence of judgment, impulsiveness, a skipping wit, and a tendency to take lightly what we are wont to take seriously.

A somewhat parallel passage in *Document 3,* by John McHale, Fuller's colleague in research, is pertinent here:

> An essential quality of Fuller's philosophical orientation is that he views man's entire relationship to universe as inseparable from man himself. Universe and man are not individually operating "entities" but complementary and interactive aspects of a whole process. He defines "universe" as "the aggregate of all men's consciously apprehended and communicated experience." As total universe is perhaps the largest possible concept which man may attempt to comprehend, this premise enables one to come to terms with such a concept through the statement of how we may describe and measure it. Operationally such a premise enables us to deal with universe in definable and conceptual ways.

A concluding passage by Mr. McHale gives an over-view of the sort of planning envisioned for the World Design Science Decade:

> From this time forward, with full development of industrialization as a prime feature of his accumulated experience man's evolution is no longer dependent only on locally fortuitous environmental factors, natural selection or biological mutation. The capacity to modify his own forward evolutionary pattern comes increasingly within his own power. Our present world crisis hinges directly upon this issue—the realization of man's historical role and the cooperative ecological relationship and interdependence of the entire human family. . . . The requisite designed application of our world industrial potential to this problem is not implicit within the present trend of our major social and political directions. It patently requires the assumption of a new social initiative and leadership. This is the purpose of the World Design Science Decade 1965-75, through which the world students, initially in architecture and environmental planning will forcefully demonstrate their capacity to deal comprehensively with the redesign of the world's major tool facilities and networks.

What, we may ask, stands in the way of a realization of this sort? Not, as is so often complained, the institutional frameworks and gross patterns of behavior. These we always have with us, and are a condition of life. The manifest bottleneck of all change lies in the confinements of individual thinking, in habits of mind, in ideas of the self and the world, and in restricting conceptions of power, responsibility, and human good. These are the critical factors of human decision and there can be no constructive, deliberated change without the transformation coming first in these areas. What is essential, then, in respect to individual human beings? The answer is obvious enough. There must be conscious effort to establish complex understanding of individual potentiality, increasing reliance on individual initiative, and conscious recognition that human progress and self-realization can be achieved by no other means. There is no way past this bottleneck—no shortcuts, no external planning miracles or tricky manipulation of people for "their own good." Self-knowledge is not action, but it is the only birth-place of the kind of action we need. As J. F. T. Bugental has said in a recent paper

(*Progress in Clinical Psychology*, Grune & Stratton, 1966):

> Man studying man is man studying himself. Each of us is only incompletely separate from each other person. To make of another person an object (for study) is to deny his essential humanity and to cut ourselves off from him. "Man resists objectification," said Paul Tillich, "and if that resistance is broken, man himself is broken." Saying it differently, we can come to *know about* man's body, his actions, his chemical composition, and so on by treating him as an object. We can only know man *himself* by recognizing him as a subject.

Here the individual pole of the human problem is defined. The human capacity to envision, to act self-reliantly and independently, depends upon thinking of oneself in this way. A balanced, harmonious relationship with the world of objects is possible only for men who begin to know themselves as subjects, and who, for all the relativities, approximations, and differentiated ways of looking at the spectacle of man-in-nature, are able to negotiate its endless diversity by sensing in themselves a primeval common denominator.

In the present vocabulary of the humanistic psychologists, the vital term of this negotiation is self-actualization—the raising to a higher power of the capacity for individual growth potential in all men. We can hardly tell what might be done by human beings animated by this view of themselves until it spreads to the point of becoming a cultural *esprit de corps.*

No man can undertake a life of high commitment without thinking of himself as capable of doing it. The overarching motives of self-actualizing people, as identified in the studies of A. H. Maslow, result in what has been behaviorally defined as "an embodiment or incarnation of the ultimate values of truth, goodness, beauty, justice, oneness, order, comprehensiveness, perfection, etc." Dr. Maslow continues (*Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Fall, 1966):

> . . . these motivators . . . are identified with by the person, interiorized, introjected, taken into the self. Indeed, they *become* the self, for they become defining-characteristics of it. But this obliterates the wall between self and other, inner and outer, selfish and unselfish. For if I am identified with truth or beauty or justice, then it is outside of me as well as inside of me. Thus, the highest meanings of the world outside become part of the self, and, also, the highest self and its highest aspirations or yearnings or meanings are now seen as truly parts of the world, just as impersonal as they are personal. . . .
>
> We come very close to a Spinozistic position here, since discovering and loving one's task in life, one's life-work, is much like uncovering one s physiological or constitutional destiny or fate. This is so because we find what we are able to do best for constitutional and temperamental reasons of capacity of skill, of endowment. This process of discovering our vocation is certainly part of the process of discovering our identity, the most real self. In the best instance, one's self and one's work discover each other, fall in love with each other. Then of course we *love* our fate and blissfully embrace it, so to speak. Even the term "motivation" is not quite right for describing this level of functioning. It might be better to talk of "love for" rather than "need for," of "yearning toward" or "aspiring to" rather than "motivated by." Surrendering now becomes no different from willing. Certainly we need a new vocabulary here.

No doubt. In consideration of the extreme character of our problems, we should *expect* to gain a new vocabulary before entertaining any real hope of solving them. Meanwhile what we may have, in this association of the thinking of Fuller and Maslow, is a theoretical (but also partly practical) resolution of the major contradiction in our lives. Both deal directly with the subject-object dichotomy and its delusive offspring. From the viewpoint of the *dimensions* of our problems, the solution offered must now be regarded as merely germinal. Our sole consolation is that germinal solutions of even total problems can at least be felt by individuals, and all solutions, whatever the conditions to be met, begin to work in just this way.

REVIEW
KINDS OF KNOWING

A CAREFUL reading of the work of Hannah Arendt is always rewarding, and one may wonder why until he recognizes the rich subjectivity in her point of view. The dilemmas of history and of politics influence us most effectively in terms of how we feel about them. This gives Miss Arendt's writing a certain immediacy, although there seems an "unfinished" quality about what she does. This is as it should be, in relation to the problems of politics, which are by nature unfinished tasks.

Another distinctive quality of Miss Arendt's writing is the unpredictability of the turns of her thought. You have the feeling of being unable to generalize very much from what she says—that if you try it, you may encounter a contradiction on the next page. Yet there is a clear continuity in her reasoning at a certain level of generality, although some difficulty in identifying the assumptions which make this possible. The subtitle of her book, *Between Past and Future* (Meridian paperback, $1.45), is "Six Exercises in Political Thought," and her essays are exactly that. For the reader who likes to make up exercises of his own, to find a more stimulating provocation would not be easy.

Dr. Arendt begins her Preface by considering the sense of futility which overtakes the revolutionist—in this case the underground fighter in the French Resistance—after victory is won. For these heroic Frenchmen, Liberation came as a psychological reverse:

> . . . they could only return to the old empty strife of conflicting ideologies which after the defeat of the common enemy once more occupied the political arena to split the former comrades-in-arms into innumerable cliques which were not even factions and to engage them in the endless polemics and intrigues of a paper war. . . They had lost their treasure.
>
> What was this treasure? As they themselves understood it, it seems to have consisted, as it were, of two interconnected parts: they had discovered that he who "joined the Resistance *found* himself," that he ceased to be "in quest of (himself) without mastery, in naked unsatisfaction," and that he no longer suspected himself of "insincerity," of being "a carping, suspicious actor of life," that he could afford "to go naked." In this nakedness, stripped of all masks—of those which society assigns to its members as well as those which the individual fabricates for himself in his psychological reactions against society—they had been visited for the first time in their lives by an apparition of freedom, not, to be sure, because they acted against tyranny and things worse than tyranny—this was true for every soldier in the Allied armies—but because they had become "challengers," had taken the initiative upon themselves and therefore, without knowing or even noticing it, had begun to create that public space between themselves where freedom could appear.

Well, we know what is meant here. The daring act of opening up this space for freedom and then moving around in it and increasing it—this was the treasure. And we must add that the Resistance fighters knew, or very soon found out, exactly what to do. What we habitually describe as an atavistic invasion from the barbarous past gave them, as they saw it, no choice, and so, by brutish simplification, and also, as it happened, by detrivialization of daily experience, they were able to act with all their hearts. By this means they turned the hideous circumstances of the Nazi invasion into a space where feelings of freedom could appear.

But then, with final triumph, all the trivialities returned. The sense of wholeness departed. Was it—is it—that nothing but bestial intrusion can give concrete definition to the evils in human life? Was the sense of freedom gained by the Resistance fighters also an atavistic gift, a fleeting savor of something only their ancestors could have known in more enduring reality?

In any event, how does one recognize in *present* conditions the evils which ought to evoke a similar response? It seems clear that if such potentialities of perception exist at all, they are locked in the unexplained, subjective deeps of the human beings of our time. We cannot identify antagonists that might call out this challenge and

initiative unless these "enemies" are first given far more objectivity than they have now. And this development, one might add, can hardly be anticipated as political. The shadowy "resistances" of the present are more easily recognized in their negative quality, and are spoken of deprecatingly as the refusal to be "engaged," or as "opting out." You cannot organize such tendencies for political action, while their positive counterparts, should there be any, remain politically invisible.

So there is exhortation and diatribe, but no facing of the problem given initial shape by Hannah Arendt. In fact, only her habit of looking at political matters by an inward light discloses that the problem even exists.

The six areas considered in these essays are: (1) The tension between tradition and the modern age; (2) ancient and modern ideas of history; (3) the question of authority; (4) the meaning of freedom; (5) the crisis in education; and (6) the social and political significance of the crisis in culture. For an extension of the discussion of freedom pursued in the Preface, we turn to the essay on freedom.

Well along in this paper, Dr. Arendt considers the origin of the *sense* of freedom. For this purpose she establishes a polarity of meanings:

> According to ancient understanding, man could liberate himself from necessity only through power over other men, and he could be free only if he owned a place, a home in the world. Epictetus transposed these worldly relationships into relationships within man's own self, whereby he discovered no power is so absolute as that which man wields over himself, and that the inward space where man struggles and subdues himself is more entirely his own, namely, more securely shielded from outside interference, than any worldly home could ever be.

Now comes the matter of origin:

> Hence, in spite of the great influence the concept of an inner, nonpolitical freedom has exerted upon the tradition of thought, it seems safe to say that man would know nothing of inner freedom if he had not first experienced a condition of being free as a worldly tangible reality. We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves. Before it became an attribute of thought or a quality of the will, freedom was understood to be a free man's status, which enabled him to move, to get away from home, to go out into the world and meet other people in deed and word. This freedom was clearly preceded by liberation: in order to be free, man must have liberated himself from the necessities of life. But the status of freedom did not follow automatically upon the act of liberation. Freedom needed, in addition to liberation, the company of other men who were in the same state, and it needed a common public space to meet them—a politically organized world, in other words, into which each of the free men could insert himself by word and deed.

This seems a reasonable genesis for political definitions of freedom, but one might question the claim that man would "know nothing of inner freedom" without prior experience of a "worldly" sort. This may be a chicken-and-the-egg situation, but it is at least possible that man enjoys freedom and seeks it because its primordial sensations are engraved upon the stuff of his inner being. What of the memory of lost Nirvanas? What of the "trailing clouds of glory" which Wordsworth declared each man brings with him to birth? What if these poetic or nebulous matters are not nebulous at all, but the substantial origin of what Ferenczi, in a perceptive figure, described as the time of "magical omnipotence" in the life of the infant—long before, indeed, the confinements of the world close in upon him?

Now it may be true that to have "ideas" about freedom requires a brain to shape them and various interpersonal and social distances to provide needed specificity. But to be without these finite measures may not leave us knowing "nothing of inner freedom." There is surely an order of knowing which comes before any attempt at conceptualization or definition, and if, at root, our longing for freedom can never be satisfied short of a return to *this* kind of knowing, plus all the relativities of our present awareness, then it may be supremely important to give that knowing its due.

COMMENTARY
1967 APPOINTMENT BOOK

THAT poets, as Shelley declared, are the unconscious legislators of the world, is hardly believed by many, and even those who consider the possibility are likely to be disturbed by it.

Yet what did Shelley mean? Let us say, simply, he meant that poets are the envisioners of progress toward an ideal human condition. They are unlike legislators in that they do not really argue; they declare. Poets deal with the substance of human life as it ought to be lived. Their reality is its existential reality—either the realized reality of the common present or the unrealized reality of a tomorrow of which they dream.

Visions are not subjects for debate. You do not "prove" the validity of a vision; you act it out in your life, as well as you can. The common capacity to envision and to move by the light of what is seen determines the quality—the humanity—of the common life. People are not "argued" into the practice of full humanity. The becoming of human beings results from visioning and longing, from pain and delight. Reason has its place in these transactions, but it is neither the motor nor can it supply the ideal. Reason is only the sanction, and sometimes a guide.

But there is a deliberate and reasoned use of the "legislative" inspiration of the poets. This is finely illustrated by the 1967 Peace Calendar published by the War Resisters League, embodying the second and completing volume (with the Calendar for 1966) of a collection of poems of war resistance, compiled and edited by Scott Bates. These poems show the high role of the poetic imagination in shaping the future of mankind. Read at a single sitting (which is not the best way to read them), they fill the reader with that vast sense of being-in-affirmation of which the poet is capable, and without which we would be but mindless and speechless beasts of the field. These poems are the expressions of men who indeed inhabit the world as it must become. For, as Robinson Jeffers said, writing of our "Eagle Valor, Chicken Mind," to remain what we are makes only for weeping—

> Weep (it is frequent in human affairs), weep for the terrible magnificence of the means,
>
> The ridiculous incompetence of the reasons, the bloody and shabby Pathos of the result.

It is necessary, in shame, to give our ear to these men. And we must not ask them either for justifications or for those "lesser evil" arguments in which we find ourselves at home and so adept. That is not their calling. They speak of what we are and what we must become. Who else speaks of this? Who else will dare, save those who know there is now nothing else to be said?

The price of the War Resisters League 1967 Peace and Appointment Calendar is $1.50. Send money to the League at 5 Beekman Street, New York 10038. The book is well printed, spiral bound, has a lovely cover by Ben Shahn, and contains the work of some eighty poets.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
TEACHERS AT WORK

THE pamphlet, *Helping Children Accept Themselves*, by Helen L. Gillham (Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1959), is a practical help for both teachers and parents. Older people sometimes forget how painful may be the confrontations which our widely differentiated society imposes upon children. The introduction to this series of "case histories" of children who were helped by their teachers is not a tract denouncing the times, although it could easily be made into one. Instead, it begins with a quiet assay of the school environment entered by the child:

> Children are confronted with conflicting goals and values at many turns, often in connection with a precept long instilled in the minds of Americans—that of respect for the individual. As a nation we pride ourselves on the opportunities given each one to seek knowledge, to experiment, to enter business, to gain material and spiritual benefits in a way best suited to his talents. As a nation we take pride in our ability to help other nations develop their resources through aid from us. Fund-raising drives within our own country for research in disease and for aid to the crippled and the blind show our interest in helping the individual become a person of worth and dignity, regardless of physical handicaps.
>
> At the same time there is racial discrimination and violence within our country. Publicized incidents are known to the whole world. Known only to a few are the unpublicized incidents of college students who refuse to have roommates of other faiths; of student teachers, as well as regularly employed school personnel, who resent assignments to work with under-privileged children; or of parents who will not send their child to a neighborhood school because several American Indian children attend it. . . .
>
> While only a few persons may know about or be directly affected by denial of our basic values through the actions of certain individuals and groups within our society, in the end more than a few people are hurt. Children will develop unhealthy feelings of doubt and distrust of themselves and of other people as they see people sorting others into categories rather than thinking of them as worth-while human beings. Elizabeth Campbell has said, "What the child hears, thinks and feels today will influence what he learns, thinks, and feels tomorrow."

This pamphlet is mainly concerned with children's *feelings.* Good teachers have always been attentive to the feelings of children, and spontaneous understanding is sometimes enlarged by psychological theory, yet may also be restricted in direct proportion to the preoccupation of adults with ideological self-justification and dominant group egotisms. What becomes evident from Dr. Gillham's work is the fact that a small child who has been harmed by these influences, if helped over a difficult hump of self-acceptance, may thereafter be able to take much more formidable obstacles in his stride. You can't ever remove all the problems that will threaten a child, but his capacity to cope with them can be strengthened through the teacher's skill.

There is the case—one among many in the pamphlet—of the twelve-year-old boy from an Indian reservation whose father ran what the boy, Alfred, and others, called a "dive." Alfred's parents cared little for him, and he was ashamed of them. He lived with his grandparents.

The teacher waited for a chance to help Alfred to appreciate his Indian heritage. One day, during a social studies session, the talk turned to the Indians. The teacher said:

> "I have been unable to find any material in the libraries which tells how our country's Indians made certain kinds of beautiful baskets. Neither have I been able to find any of the songs which I am sure the tribe must have had. Do any of you know of any Indians who might know either the songs or how to make the baskets?"

One of the children said that in Alfred's (his grandfather's) house there were lots of Indian baskets in a cupboard. The teacher looked at Alfred, who agreed but said the baskets were "a bunch of trash." The teacher said she'd like to see them, anyhow, and asked if she could sometime walk home with Alfred and have a look. Well, step by step, Alfred gained another view of

himself, or of a part of himself, by enjoying the respect felt by others for elements of the Indian tradition. Nothing was rushed—in fact, the usefulness of all this to Alfred became secondary to the generally exciting experience, over two weeks, of having his grandparents visit the school every day and make Indian history come alive for the whole class. The grandfather "wasn't a very good singer," he said, but he sang the songs the children asked about:

> Mrs. Kraus had been *hoping* this idea would come out but had wise]y refrained from forcing the issue. She felt that she had penetrated Alfred's inner world as far as she dared. She knew Alfred would share more of his feelings when his pride and trust were at a higher level.
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> Nothing stupendous happened during the rest of the year except that Alfred seemed to like himself a little better and seemed prouder of his grandparents.

One more practical achievement completes what we can know of the story of Alfred. In the following year, the seventh-grade teacher, Mrs. Taft, continued what Mrs. Kraus had begun. For an English assignment she asked Alfred to write out one of his grandfather's stories of Indian lore. What Alfred wrote was so good that the children persuaded him to write some more. During the year he set down eight or ten of his grandfather's stories and the other children asked that they be put in the school library—so that "everyone can enjoy them—not just our class." This was done, and the book was frequently used as a "resource book" by both teachers and children.

Dr. Gillham summarizes what happened:

> Alfred began to *know* his grandparents rather than just take them for granted as part of his environment. Mrs. Kraus used the good judgment not to push acceptance of ideas on Alfred's part. She planted ideas gently; then she had the patience to wait for their nurture. She accepted Alfred's belligerent feelings in regard to the baskets which were "trash." She helped the group, as well as Alfred, to see the local Indians in a light that was new to all of them. She had followed the course of study in social studies, but had added to it by using right-at-her-fingertips material which gave added value.

In all this the children of the class helped enormously, and while the teachers provided cues, they could not "will" the result. The natural response of these children can be exemplified and stimulated, but it must grow in each one, just as it grew in Alfred, and it grows best when it has spontaneous support.

FRONTIERS

The Substance of Freedom

IN *Dissent* for November-December, answering critics of his review of *A Critique of Pure Tolerance,* David Spitz deals with a neglected aspect of the question of freedom. After a long discussion—illustrating in detail the enormous play of subjective feelings in expressions on the subject—Mr. Spitz writes:

> I would add but one last comment. It is that, throughout the history of freedom, men have sought to identify the meaning of the word freedom with the things they hold to be good. It is easy to understand why this should be so. The word freedom has an honorific glow. The things men hold to be good have not always seemed to be good to others. To make those things *appear* to be good, whether or not they really are good, was the almost natural consequence. Since the ultimate object sought or thus secured was deemed to be good, the deception was judged useful and proper and the gain pleasurable. In time the pleasures of misunderstanding freedom proved so rewarding that men ceased to think of it as a misunderstanding and identified that misunderstanding with the very meaning of the word. Thus it is that the term freedom today carries a variety of meanings, some visibly at odds with the ordinary understanding of the term.
>
> But if men are to communicate with each other, if men are to be honest with each other, it is surely time to use the word properly. The pleasures of misunderstanding freedom are trivial when compared to the pleasures of pursuing truth.

Is this a way of saying that freedom cannot have valid objective meaning without implying an equivalent content of limitation or pain? And should we then add that the resolution of this dilemma, when it occurs, is always the achievement of individuals who learn how to neutralize the negative aspect of their freedom by subjective balancing operations? One suspects that if this is so, we may be in a position to grasp why popular or political definitions of freedom ignore the resolving power and responsibility of individuals, a policy which can only produce the dilemmas we encounter in the course of time.

Much turns on the value-charged word "properly" in Mr. Spitz's last paragraph. Obviously, our feeling of what is a "proper" use of such words as freedom is determined by the "moral emotions." What is proper is what is good and right. The organizers of the cadres of a struggle against external oppression are not likely to care for a definition of freedom which stresses the inward relations of individuals. Such a meaning, they might say, if it exists at all, is not relevant to their needs. Organizing for freedom means organizing for power to change a set of political circumstances. This is a way of saying that whenever power is held to be the instrument of freedom, it imposes a power-related content on very nearly all shades of the meaning of freedom. You may condemn this as arbitrary, but the man on the barricades will have a different view.

Yet, curiously, in the most extreme case of oppression known to us—the Nazi death camps—there came with great force to one of the "victims" a purely subjective idea of the meaning of freedom. The account of freedom developed by Dr. Frankl (in *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*) is that it is the condition which allows human growth. Frankl wrote:

> This intensification of inner life helped the prisoner find a refuge from the emptiness, desolation and spiritual poverty of his existence. . . . As the inner life of the prisoner tended to become more intense, he also experienced the beauty of art and nature as never before. Under their influence he sometimes even forgot his own frightful circumstances.

This is an observation about human potentiality, even human fulfillment, in an extreme situation. It is reasonable to say that our understanding of freedom should include this view. But it is often difficult, one finds, to regard such suggestions with patience. Why should this be? What Dr. Frankl says is hardly offensive in itself. Actually, it can only be offensive to a spirit which would draft all man's moral energies for the struggle for power.

Some misplaced longing for purity makes us insist on action that is subject to no compromises, admits of no qualifications. There is thus a high price for what, somewhat too easily, Mr. Spitz speaks of as "the pleasures of pursuing truth."

Probably dozens of examples could be found to illustrate how the moral emotions block impartial consideration of all the meanings of freedom. We do, of course, give impartiality some latitude at a distant scholarly level. We speak admiringly of the Eastern concern with self-knowledge, and sometimes say, a little grandiloquently, that we of the West must learn to balance our lives with an infusion of serenity and inward search. Yet when an Easterner *applies* this conception to both personal and social life, and strives for individual consistency, as Gandhi did, we shrink from its awesome consequences. It seems that no ideological version of "freedom" can ever accommodate to Gandhi's basic voluntarism, although the two attitudes may be joined in the blur of imperfect practice on the one hand and inconsistency on the other.

Actually, this kind of coexistence of theoretically incompatible views seems to be the inevitable practice, and becomes abhorrent only when exposed by absolutists who insist upon perfection in form, as distinguished from the day-to-day subjective balancings accomplished invisibly by individuals. It is the inability of abstract analysis to recognize the pertinence and necessity of these day-to-day resolutions that makes the conclusions of the analysts seem so inaccessible to any action save "total revolution."

But what, if we accept this argument, will protect us from the follies and ignominies of compromise? There is no way to meet this objection save by returning to the definition of freedom as the condition which allows human growth. Growth is not a partisan value. It is a right of both oppressor and oppressed. Crazy as it may sound, Gandhi was as conscientiously concerned with preserving the condition of growth for the oppressor as he was with relief for the oppressed. An act for freedom, in his eyes, had to be an act of universal benefit, in this sense. This made the struggle for freedom also a struggle for identification with others, even the "enemy." It was his way of declaring, in the most unequal of objective circumstances, that all men are human, not more, not less. The danger of compromise was eliminated right here, by seeing moral reality as the substance of mutual understanding, and not in total vindication of an abstract right. But what if men refuse to see at all? There is a tab, Gandhi might say, for all past failures of men to try to understand and to be understood. Somebody has to pick it up. This is the meaning of sacrifice, in Gandhian terms. You do not sacrifice your faith in man, rather yourself. As he saw it, allegiance to principle *is* faith in man. He tried in his life to subdivide neither, and was more successful than most.