VOLUME XVII, NO. 1
JANUARY 1, 1964

ACTION FOR PEACE, FREEDOM, AND COMMUMITY

[It is generally admitted that a long-range program in behalf of a peaceful civilization must involve more than last-ditch defiance of military undertakings and determined opposition to armament technology and manufacture. The problem of how to combine various levels of efforts for peace is complex. While the idea of eliminating from personal life the attitudes and actions which lead to violence is no doubt basic, there is a large intermediate area, involving the patterns of many social institutions, where far-reaching change is needed to eliminate cultural seed-beds of violence. In this article, Robert Swann, an active member of the New England Committee for Nonviolent Action, illustrates the thinking done along these lines by serious peace-workers seeking to broaden the base of their activities, and makes some concrete proposals. Readers wishing to offer comment or support may write the New England CNVA, RFD No. 1, Box 197B, Voluntown, Connecticut.]

THERE is growing recognition that the persons who take part in the nonviolent-action wing of the peace movement are directly related to the nonviolent civil rights movement, since, although our goals are different, they are harmonious, and our methods are the same. For instance, while almost everyone will tell us, "I agree with your goal (peace), but I cannot agree with your method (civil disobedience, demonstrations, etc.)," it is difficult for the thousands who are using nonviolence in the civil rights movement to give this stock reply. Further, because of the increasing participation of many peace actionists in the *Freedom Now* movement, there is a gradual growing together at many different levels of the action wings of both movements. This synthesis should be looked upon as having great promise, not only for the-peace movement, but for the civil rights movement as well, since the latter needs dedicated actionists such as Eric Weinberger, who understand and work for the total "Nonviolent Revolution." Without such total change—which means the conversion of the white segregationist and the reform of his institutions—there can only be temporary, unstable progress towards freedom. The fact of the Quebec-Washington-Guantanamo Walk for Peace now proceeding in the South—whatever its difficulties—is evidence of this growing together.

As the movement for *Freedom Now* moves North, of necessity it focuses on the major northern cities where the Negro is forced to live in *de facto* segregation. (Martin Luther King thinks that segregation in northern cities may be more frustrating and dangerous than it is in the South, since there seems no evidence of progress; it appears to get worse) CORE, NAACP, and local groups have combined in the northern cities to attack discrimination on the level of the mass action which was pioneered in the South. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that in the key areas of jobs and housing (school segregation, for instance, in the North is a by-product of housing segregation), discrimination is intricately linked with the general problems of economic need and unemployment, as well as with the complex issues of urban planning, transportation, etc. If, then, it can be seen that our present dependence upon the arms economy to secure jobs is not only immoral but impractical, the civil rights movement might join forces with the peace movement to demand elimination of the waste of arms spending and a change-over to the productivity of a peace economy. (The immediate direction of this change might be taken from proposals by Seymour Melman in *The Peace Race*.)

How, then, should the nonviolent peace action movement participate in the struggle to secure both peace and Freedom Now, given the growing number of people ready to demonstrate and act in many northern cities? This question has been a constant theme of discussion, not only at

the New England CNVA Summer Training Program in Nonviolence, but in many peace action circles. One aspect of this problem is raised by the very nature and fact of present-day urban life, with its complex technology and intricate patterns of community relationships. You cannot, for instance, ask how to fight segregation in Negro ghettos and slums, without encountering the specters of "Urban Renewal" or "Redevelopment," which to most Negroes have come to mean "Negro Removal." Further, any such consideration brings up the related problem of urban (and regional) planning, which includes transportation as well as housing.

Most of a week's discussion in the CNVA Training Program sought light on these questions. Participants included a number of resource people: Ernst Hacker, planner with New York Planning Commission; Dwight Strong, Secretary of New England Citizens Crime Commission, and his wife Eleanor (both of whom were "displaced" by the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension into Boston); Chester Hartman, Boston planner, who is doing a study of the psychological effects on the "displaced persons" from the West End "renewal" project in Boston; Mark Skinner, psychologist and CNVA activist from the Hyde Park Area of Chicago; and Ed Forand, of the *Catholic Worker* in New York City. Here are some of the conclusions and proposals:

1. There is an increasing resistance movement developing to oppose the indiscriminate displacement of people caused by urban renewal, expressways, and turnpikes in center cities. Examples include the so far successful fight against the lower Manhattan Expressway, the unsuccessful "Protect the Hub Association" against the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension in Boston, the growing battle on the lower East Side in New York against urban redevelopment housing projects, and the fight to save several old sections of Chicago from urban renewal. Most of these efforts, incidentally, were not staged as "nonviolent" actions, nor were they mainly Negro in their composition. Increasingly, however, the attack against "slums" tends to become an attack on predominantly Negro communities occupying the denser areas.

2. There is growing agreement among responsible city planners, social workers, and psychologists that such destruction of community tissue in cities cannot be justified on the basis of "slum clearance" and "improved transportation"; that, in fact, such proposals often (if not usually) represent the demands of greedy developers, real estate interests, banking interests, etc. The cumulative effects, from the emotional and psychological point of view alone, are staggering and may be compared to the effects on people of being "bombed out" of their homes during World War II. From a planning point of view, almost none of these projects takes into consideration the *real priorities* of long-range goals, so that even when, as sometimes happens, they are humanely conceived and executed, they are apt eventually to prove more destructive of human values than the conditions which they set out to correct. This is due, again, to the basic concern with profit, not people. The professionals (city planners, etc.), however conscientious, find themselves virtually helpless before the forces ranged against them.

3. That, as we move into a period of increasing international stability (accommodation with Russia, with the resulting possibility of disarmament), there will be an effort to find new outlets for American capital to satisfy demands for "sound investment" and to reduce unemployment, leading to a renewed attack on urban problems. The increasing pressure on the part of Negroes to secure "equal" employment also tends to put pressure in this direction. A period of disarmament could, then, contribute to the danger of an "inverted tyranny," under which our own cities would become the targets of massive community destruction in the name of Redevelopment. The late President's call for a series of conferences in every major city on "urban

renewal" may have been a warning of what is to come.

4. That, from an over-all, long-range planning point of view, a vital phase of the attempt to improve and revitalize our cities (and the surrounding regions) is in transportation. There is already a considerable consensus among city planners that a greatly diversified and improved transportation system is desperately needed by most cities. The motor car with its vast subsidies in public road systems now dominates in the competition of various kinds of transportation (trains, subways, rapid transit lines, busses, etc.). The omnipresent automobile not only brings blight and destruction to downtown areas, but has meant a very real loss of freedom of choice (of means of travel), especially in rural areas where the car has become virtually the only practical vehicle, since fewer trains run every day. Of course, the decreasing use of mass public transportation, with increasing dependence upon the motor car, has raised the cost of all transportation to both city and rural residents, putting an especial burden upon all low-income groups. This is an important factor in intensifying the central city ghettos—a hidden form of class and race discrimination. Further, the direct correlation between fatal motor car accidents (40,000 each year) and injuries, and the total miles driven during the year creates a serious moral issue. Since the ratio of accidents to mileage is far less for public vehicles (trains, subways, etc.), it follows that the decision, conscious or unconscious, to emphasize the motor car over mass means of transportation brings an annual loss of many thousands of lives.

5. That although resistance movements to the increased invasion by the automobile into the central city have appeared in both Boston (Protect the Hub Association) and New York (Committee against the Lower Manhattan Expressway), they have been successful (so far) only in New York. The progress in New York seems to be due largely to good timing to the involvement of virtually the entire community, and to the efforts of various professional planners and social workers (professional and non-professional). So far, nonviolent direct action has not been used against either of these threats to the community by proposed "progressive" expressways or turnpikes. On the other hand, in cases of urban renewal, there has been sporadic, relatively unorganized, and sometimes spontaneous, direct action, such as picketing and sit-ins, but, so far as we know, these activities have been unsuccessful.

It seems clear, on the one hand, that responsible professional planners and critics are now quite unable (for the reasons given) to apply their best insights to the needs of cities and surrounding regions; and on the other, that the resistance movements (against community destruction and discrimination) could profit greatly from the guiding counsel of some of the best professionals in the field. Also needed are the experience and leadership of the nonviolent movement in both the civil rights and peace areas, to coordinate the nonviolent action aspect of this new and growing movement, which is neither purely civil rights nor disarmament, but reaches beyond both toward the ideal of a functioning nonviolent society, involving economic as well as personal and political changes and transformations.

We are proposing, therefore, that nonviolent leadership in civil rights and peace join with concerned and qualified planning professionals to help give direction, leadership, and coordination to the various groups now active in resisting injustices in center city situations. This would include opposition to discrimination, segregation, ill-planned urban renewal, arbitrary expressways, and attention to housing and school problems. Hopefully, this would lead to coordination on regional and national levels. In the beginning, the coordinating group might take the form of a regional association initiated by those concerned and those already involved in such projects as the Boston Freedom Schools, Hartford North End Community Action Project, New York Committee

against the Lower Manhattan Expressway, etc. Later, a new organization might emerge, with the professionals either directly involved or acting in an advisory capacity.

Such an association would first work out a general policy, and might then suggest lines of direct action in which existing organizations could work jointly (as cooperating cosponsors), so that it might not be necessary to form a new organization. For example, the Committee for Nonviolent Action might join with other existing organizations to carry out specific projects. At present such projects are beyond the scope and purpose of any existing civil rights or peace action group.

In general, then, the purpose of the association would be to lay guidelines of direct action to implement sound city and regional planning proposals and to coordinate and support resistance to the destruction of vital community tissue within cities, whether the threat comes from the automobile, expressways, urban renewal, discrimination, or the arms industry.

The program of such an organization might include:

1. Demands that center city communities not be sacrificed to selfish interests, and organization of resistance to all such plans.

2. Plans for renewal which take into consideration the human beings now living there and provide for gradual assimilation to, or new housing as an integral part of, the old community.

3. Insistence that federal subsidies not be used to benefit special interests, but to help the people of the immediate area affected, perhaps by direct offers to landlords and tenants for remodelling and improvement without rent increases, possibly even rent decreases; and provision of detailed plans.

4. Demands that federal and local money for urban renewal, expressways, etc., be spent on the basis of long-range planning priorities. (Here, especially, the professional planning associates would be counted on to advise for each local situation.)

5. Demand that some of the vast sums now being spent on useless military hardware be devoted to diversified, improved, mass transportation systems (Congress just voted a small amount for experimentation in several cities) to help solve central city transportation problems as well as to provide needed employment.

6. Being sure that all such plans benefit the "low man on the totem pole" first; this means primarily the Negro.

7. Consideration of "non-hoardable scrip" (as suggested by Richard Gregg in his recent book, *The Big Idol*) as a means of reforming the present violent institution of money and stimulating the economy in center city ghettos where unemployment is high.

8. Encouraging the development of "communities of work" (taking the emphasis off profit) in such areas or neighborhoods, especially when they become affected by depreciating money and/or increase of government spending.

9. Redistricting of central city areas along lines suggested by Jane Jacobs, in *Life and Death of Great American Cities*, to form a kind of horizontal, or "parallel government."

10. Use of nonviolent direct action to implement, dramatize, and achieve the above aims.

Immediate possible action: If enough people in a given area can agree on at least some of the elements of a program such as the foregoing, an effort could be made to dramatize these demands at the time of conferences for Urban Renewal. This might take the form of picketing, leafleting the conferees, and demanding that spokesmen be heard.

What is needed is suggestions for policy and program, as well as action suggestions, in order to see how much agreement we have among those concerned.

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REVIEW
PHILOSOPHY AND DIPLOMACY

PREPARATORY to notes on Louis Halle's *Men and Nations,* we have for quotation two paragraphs from a Quaker publication titled, *Building the Institutions of Peace* (Swarthmore Lectures), which first appeared in 1962. The author, Mr. J. Duncan Wood, has been working in Geneva, "on the frontier where Quaker concerns meet those of an international world which, though employing different means, works for ends to which the Society of Friends is dedicated." Mr. Halle is also now located at Geneva as a professor at the Institut Universitaires de Hautes Etudes—having left the Policy Planning Staff of the U.S. State Department after a thirteen-year career of top-level diplomacy. It seems worth pointing out that Mr. Wood and Prof. Halle, with entirely different backgrounds, arrive at very similar conclusions, the explanation being, we suppose, that both embody "the philosophical attitude" in combination with an active desire to work for international understanding.

Mr. Wood observes:

> It is recorded that a traveler in France once came upon a wayside hotel named "The Immaculate Conception and Commercial." This is a very apt name for the house in which the world lives and might appropriately be hung up as an inn sign outside the Headquarters of United Nations. Human motives, whether expressed individually or collectively, are just such a mixture of the lofty and the base, the sacred and the profane, the sublime and the ridiculous. It is to this complexity that we have to address ourselves, and within the walls of this house that we have to live and work.
>
> A Quaker teacher of history remarked recently that he found it exhilarating to discuss world affairs with his senior pupils at a time when, as never before, we seem poised on the brink of eternity. Such joyful acceptance of being matched with the hour is as commendable as it is rare. Most of us tend to respond to humanity's present predicament with anxiety, frustration, indifference or apathy—anything but exhilaration. We feel that we have been matched with an hour more dreadful than any yet recorded and, though it is largely of our own creation, beg the Lord to take it away. But many generations have felt just the same, and we should not add to our anxieties by imagining ourselves to be unique.

We turn now to the Preface of *Men and Nations.* Mr. Halle writes:

> Anyone who, trying to understand the practical questions of national policy, explores below the surface, discovers that they are rooted in questions of philosophy. For example, the answer to the question that confronted the prospective victors in World War II, whether to insist on the unconditional surrender of their opponents, ultimately depended on answers to questions about the nature of men and nations. If nations were corporate persons, some good by nature and others evil, and if the defeated nations were among the evil, then it might be a mistake to accept anything less than their unconditional surrender. But if nations were not persons, or if all shared a common nature, then reasons might appear why it would be wiser to negotiate terms.
>
> This relationship between practice and philosophy explains why one who was professionally concerned with questions of policy came to be preoccupied, at last, with questions of philosophy. The book to which these remarks are prefatory is the final product of an investigation that began casually some ten years ago, when I was still in government, and has been pursued with mounting intensity up to this moment of its completion.
>
> Originally, the book began with the practical questions. The form it took was that of an inquiry, pursuing the dialectical procedure of question and response down into the realms of philosophy. Each response would raise a further question, so that the process became self-propelling. One simply followed where the argument led. Sometimes it would lead to a dead end, in which case one would have to go back and look for an alternative line of advance. At last something like a final answer would begin to take shape. The inquirer who had spent years at the task would be tempted to believe that he was nearing its completion. Back along the line of argument, however, there always remained unsatisfactorily resolved points—as he would bring himself to recognize at last.
>
> Because my focus was on the problems of politics from the beginning, the book must be regarded as a work of political philosophy. But it is the application, rather than the philosophy itself, that deserves the adjective. The reader will see that, if I

> had begun my inquiry with questions concerning the nature of civilization, or with questions concerning the meaning of art, or with questions of religious experience, I would have arrived at the same philosophy. I would have arrived at it if I had set out, simply, to discover the meaning of life.

Prof. Halle also explains why *Men and Nations* does not "offer a model of a political order regarded as final." The author hopes to show that, on the international scene, it is precisely the perfectionist conception of a "proper political order" which makes the rivalry of nations a hopeless rivalry. According to operational definition, the diplomat is the man who cannot afford a philosophical quest if he is to perform his function to the satisfaction of his national constituents. As Webster says: *Diplomacy:* "Artful management in securing advantages without arousing hostility; address or tact." When one's purpose is to "artfully secure advantages," the matter of "arousing hostility" becomes an entirely quantitative concern. But the philosopher, unlike the diplomat of this definition, desires to avoid hostility for only one reason—that it will stand in the way of perception of a truth upon which men can agree. The "advantage" to be sought is a step forward in the cause of truth, and not a presumed "advantage" to one particular nation only.

Like the diplomat, Prof. Halle uses the concept of "balance of power," but it takes him into dimensions of ethical and philosophical awareness of which professional diplomats are occupationally oblivious. The chapter titled "The Organization of Mankind" is an example of Halle's mingling of philosophy and Realpolitik:

> The kind of political world we should work for is one in which the frontiers of various communities cries-cross one another, in which a stabilizing tension prevails among them all, in which each is checked by the others to prevent it from becoming absolute.
>
> This means that we must resist the absolutist claims of the nation-state. In such a nation-state as I described in Section 30, for instance, we should be glad to see a strong church in a relationship of some rivalry with it; we should welcome vested interests of workmen, of businessmen, or of other groups that also provided a check on it, while themselves are being checked by it and by one another; and we should welcome the impact of ideas of propriety from without, representing wider communities that compete with the state for the allegiance of its inhabitants.
>
> What I am describing is a multiple balance of power, world-wide and ubiquitous, in which none of the associations involved can gain an unlimited ascendancy. I would have such a system prevail within the nation-state, over the larger world to which it belonged, and in terms of other frontiers crossing its own—until its own frontiers came to be less formidable than in our day, until a single system of checks and balances could be discerned over the whole area of mankind.

This ideal is one to which many defenders of national interest give lip service, but its realization depends upon a willingness to sacrifice merely ideological righteousness. Prof. Halle concludes:

> Such an organization of mankind would not work well, however, where men were not governed by a respect for limits. They would have to accept as normal and salutary the existence of diversity, of rival systems of thought and rival views, of competition in the market-place under a regime of freedom that sets limits to what the competitors might do to one another.
>
> So we get back to the knowledge of our own ignorance, which is basic. For men will not set limits where, out of ignorance, they believe that their views are God's views, or that they know infallibly what "nature" or "history" intends for mankind. We men can practice toleration of diversity only when we think of ourselves as searchers, all searching alike for a truth of which we have intimations, but that none of us has yet found. Then any issue must be merely that of opinion against opinion. But where we conceive an issue to be that of truth against error we cannot practice toleration for the righteous may not tolerate the wicked, the spokesmen of God may not tolerate the servants of Satan.
>
> Socrates alone among his contemporaries was wise enough to know his own ignorance. Only the growth of a like wisdom among us can make freedom secure. Only by its virtue can we maintain the conditions necessary for progress in the knowledge and imitation of the *Logos.*

COMMENTARY
TIME TO SET A PRECEDENT

WHO could possibly be satisfied with the world as it is today? Not, obviously, the members of the Committee for Nonviolent Action, for whom Robert Swann seeks some new assignments (see lead article), nor Louis J. Halle, who has been laboring for ten years (see Review) to bring out a book which declares for the conscious struggle to realize on earth "the primary world of perfect ideas."

Many men share in the vision of a changed world and a changed mankind. The question is, what will make these things come about?

After all the votes are in, all the discouragements catalogued, and all the pessimisms uttered, there remains the undoubted fact that we have to keep on working and trying, even though, at times, what we do seems to have no effect.

What we lack, after all, is only precedent. There is nothing in the history books about the transformation of a mass society into a vast web of natural community life. We know a great deal about the virtues of the small community as a matrix for human growth, as an environment scaled to the needs of individuality, and we are beginning to learn something about the psychology of human fulfillment. What is unprecedented, in our situation, is the prospect of communication which goes past the Terrible Abstractions—the generalizations about the Mass Society which make all those people out there something less than human beings, which accumulate their multimillion units into fearsomely large identities—nation-states—so that we never address ourselves to them as men at all, nor they to us.

What are the peace walkers really trying to say to the rest of the world? Why are they trudging from village to village, in India, in the American South, carrying their flags of nonviolence, their reproaches to cruel folly, their appeals of friendship and cooperation? They are saying, not just to the world, but to all the individuals they meet: *We are men.* We are men who speak for ourselves. We do not allow anyone to speak for us in wrath or hostility. We are human beings, and are determined that no national organization will cut us up into inhuman fragments. No group can make us kill the members of other groups in behalf of national "identity" and "interests." Our interests are in people and their common humanity, not in political abstractions and their angry mandates of destruction. We are men. And so are you.

This is a very simple communication. It has the unequivocal objective of recognizing the reality of mankind in the individual human beings who make it up.

The idea is not new, nor unique to peace walkers. It is a constant theme in Mr. Halle's book. He quotes, for example, E. H. Carr, on the hopes for a postwar international organization after World War II: "What we are concerned to bring about is not the putting of Albania on an equal footing with China and Brazil, but the putting of the individual Albanian on an equal footing, in respect of personal rights and opportunities, with the individual Chinese or the individual Brazilian."

People of intelligence and human sympathy say such things in conferences and in speeches, but they are not heard. Least of all are they heard by individual Albanians, Chinese, Brazilians. The peace walker is determined to be heard. His purpose is no more complicated than that.

The peace walker is also a man who does not hear. He is deaf to the denials of the humanity of the Chinese, the Albanians, the Brazilians. Why should he listen to these denials? Why should *anyone* listen to them? To deny the humanity of these people is to deny one's own.

It is of course not easy to grasp affirmations of the common humanity of all men. It is not easy to let go of the reassurances and guarantees of the

mass society. It is not easy, and it is indeed unprecedented, but it is what we have to do. "When," as Louis J. Halle says, "the masses of our kind are virtually continuous over the land surfaces of our planet, when all of us live from the fruits of all its lands, and when it can be encircled in an hour by one of our engines, then mankind is the smallest community that is self-contained and self-sufficient." Any other view has become wholly self-destructive. While the concept of "we" and "they" (the good and the wicked) has, Mr. Halle continues, "dominated the history of mankind to our own present," this idea now has only genocidal implications:

> If the world is divided between the good and the wicked then the triumph of the good implies the destruction of the wicked. "The only good Indian," said the North American pioneer, "is a dead Indian." So Yahweh destroyed the people of Sodom; so the children of Yahweh, when they captured Jericho, destroyed the children of Baal; so the representatives of the people of France put the aristocrats to the guillotine, so the Nazi regime in Germany undertook the extermination of the Jews; so we Americans were able, in 1945, to destroy the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. . . .
>
> The dehumanization of the foreigner, the image of one's antagonist as a demonic being, the implicit denial that human pleasures and human sufferings, human strengths and human weaknesses, human virtues and human vices, are to him as to us—this is based upon an inadequate appreciation of existential reality. We have seen how . . . the progress of human knowledge has been increasingly inimical to a narrow parochialism, how in the most mature minds . . . it has found expression in a concept of man's universal brotherhood. With the disappearance, at last in our time, of the physical circumstances that separated our communities in the past, the ancient concept that denies the common humanity of all must appear increasingly obsolete.

The precedent that we have to establish is the rejection of this obsolete idea. It should not be too difficult.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

MATTER FOR REFLECTION

A PASSAGE from an autobiographical sketch written for *Life* (April 19, 1963) by Peter Ustinov supplies a basic text for discussion:

> A newly born child is striking by its expression of immense old age and omniscience, whereas the face of a man engaged in dying peacefully is remarkable for its serenity and the smiling tolerance of the human activities he still dimly sees. There is a mystic link between the margins of life, a cool majesty in which some secret is shared, a secret far removed from the high summer of love, sex, ambition and fretful jockeying for position.

There was a time when the poets were held to be those who had special feeling for capturing luminous moments in human experience. Shelley, for example, saw no point in dwelling on the crucifixions of the spirit of man. On one occasion, it is reported, he looked intently into the eyes of a tiny child and said, "Oh, if he could only tell us"—or words to that effect. And there are moments when the atmosphere and countenance of death speak of deathlessness—or as one of the ancient Upanishads puts it, "endlessness."

The child's look of astounding maturity, however, soon turns to confusion as he becomes aware of the mysteries of motivation and tricks of behavior which await him in the "adult" world. He will have an identity, to be sure, but there are always those around with suggestions—or insistences—as to its configuration. He is first of all a "baby," later a child—a baby or child in a particular family and culture. It often seems to us that teachers who truly live their calling proceed as if the child had "brought something with him"—a core of "identity" before the construct and overlay to be known as the personality is developed under environmental influence.

Most children merge with their environments, and to be able to do so illustrates one activity of philosophy, successfully pursued. The child, like a plant, derives nourishment wherever it may be found. Later, he may find that more air, more light, and a richer soil are needed, so he achieves a transplantation to an environment more suited to his taste. This is the classic pattern, the time of mastering the disciplines common to all members of the tribe before innovation is attempted. But in our day, when the "patterns of the tribe" may be sensed by even the very young as conflict-producing and often ridiculous, he may know nothing more strongly than that he does not want to grow up absurd. Those whom we call "delinquents" may often be moved by such feeling, and our second quotation is some verse by a boy in a school for delinquents (quoted from the *Manchester Guardian*, Sept. 14, 1963):

> Me
> What am I?
> A boy.
> Why am I?
> I can never arrive
> At a satisfactory
> Answer
> As to why
> I am
> But there must be a reason
> For without a reason
> What is the point of
> Me
> Being around to eat
> Good food
> And using up
> Useful space.
> So,
> Why
> Am I?

The "What am I?" question commonly receives an answer which is typically provincial. A boy or girl is "black" or "white," a Russian or an American, but such definitions fail to go beyond the role which a single segment of society expects the child to play: there is no hint of what it means simply to be alive and grow, irrespective of time, place and circumstances. We present the child with the time, place and circumstance, as though these have nothing to do with the inner identity which the writer of the verse seeks.

On the matter of "racial integration" in the public schools, we continue to be impressed by the perspective of Hannah Arendt, whose response (in the *Nation* for Sept.7) to a photograph of a Negro girl being escorted to school in the midst of a jeering mob, was this:

> The picture looked to me like a fantastic caricature of progressive education which, by abolishing the authority of adults, implicitly denies their responsibility for the world into which they have borne their children and refuses the duty of guiding them into. Have we now come to the point where it is the children who are being asked to change or improve the world? And do we intend to have our political battles fought out in the school yards?

Miss Arendt continues:

> The most startling part of the whole business is the federal decision to start integration in, of all places, the public schools. It certainly did not require too much imagination to see that this was to burden children, black and white, with the working out of a problem which adults for generations have confessed themselves unable to solve.

Miss Arendt's reproach, we must admit, seems wholly just. Our only excuse may be that the children are less likely to be the victims of hardened abstractions than their parents, and that we did not know what else to do. Perhaps the success of the children in this "crusade" will bring a generation of people endowed with more private self-reliance, more strength of human identity, than today's adults possess.

FRONTIERS

A Letter on "Identity"

MANAS: Your article, "The Issue of Identity" (MANAS, Nov. 13), probably meets the problem it discusses as well as is possible from the relative point of view of the intellect, but it does not satisfy me. One can solve almost anything by resorting to paradox. Yet I believe that the intellect cannot avoid paradox in dealing with the concept of absolute being because, although the intellect can accept the idea of absolute being theoretically, it cannot possibly experience it. At best the intellect is conditioned by the relativities of this world. For that reason the intellect can conceive of absolute values, but it cannot understand them, nor can the individual live them absolutely. Hence paradox.

I am not acquainted with the intellectual writings of Zen Buddhism. The few individuals whom I have encountered, who professed that faith, seemed to be drunk with paradoxes which really meant very little. They seemed to believe that paradox alone can describe ultimate truth. In my opinion the intellect can never know ultimate truth, as is increasingly believed by many scientists. Paradox is merely a way out of the dilemma. Yet the intellect seems to crave an absolute and there must be a more profound reason for this than most psychologists have discovered. Perhaps the answer is that there must be an ultimate absolute which the intellect can't know but which the individual experiences as compassion. The intellect can know sympathy but not empathy.

The Eros of Freud is not compassion, which has its source in neither intellect nor will. No one can will love. Not only the great mystics, but also Schopenhauer, demonstrated the essential pessimism of any faith or philosophy founded in the will. The source of compassion must be found in some intuition of a spiritual absolute which the intellect cannot experience. Therefore genuine spiritual spontaneity must depend largely on negation, *i.e.,* ridding oneself of the desires created by a relative world. Ultimately this means negating the intellect. The truth, if it is to be obtained on this basis, requires recognition of the ultimate falseness of this world's relativities. The more one wills enlightenment in the true mystical sense, the less it will be found. Surely that represents the negative aspect of the Buddha's enlightenment. In my opinion it also represents the true meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. In view of that Sermon, I think Jesus was a true mystic and that his supposed teachings about the end of the world were probably misinterpretations by his disciples. Like all of the few great mystics, Jesus sought loss of ego-identity, but not through the intellect or the self-forgetfulness of work. The great mystics evidently experienced the "ultimate reality" sought in vain by the intellect.

Now the ego can be conditioned to a degree where individual identity is practically lost. The ego is conditioned from the beginning of life by society and most people know who they are because society tells them what they are and what to think. This has always been true of the great mass of people. The mass of laborers accepted what they were conditioned to accept even when they were chattel slaves. Educated individuals vary in interests, but once having chosen a profession or some business, most of us are conditioned by the profession or business. This extends even into social clubs where conditioned differences between clubs can be readily recognized, if looked for. Relatively few, whether educated or not, are really concerned over the intellectual's quest, who am I? Self-centeredness has always meant misery and most individuals escape that misery by being told who they are. Hence they don't have to think about it.

I can visualize theoretically two absolutes—that of the mystics and that of conditioning as analyzed by Seidenberg in his books on organization. Either one can eliminate to a large extent individual identity. I disagree with Seidenberg's conclusions only because he is an

essentially compassionate person, as compassion is found in a relative world. If that compassion does not come from the intellect or will, it must come from an ultimate spiritual absolute. That is as far as my intellect carries me, for I have not experienced "ultimate reality" as described by the mystics and I do not believe that it can be experienced by the use of drugs, as Aldous Huxley suggests and as some of the modern American "Zen Buddhists" try. There are no short-cuts to truth and paradox cannot be the ultimate answer.

I am not writing primarily for publication but for your reaction to my thoughts which are largely theory, since I live and work in a relative world where I am chiefly conscious of how little ultimate good I accomplish with my relative efforts to do good.

The point of this is that I think much of the present quest for greater self-knowledge is really an effort to strengthen the ego—for "good" ends of course—but it does negate the ego. I don't see how this can be reconciled with the experience of the mystics, nor do I think that it embraces true compassion.

READER

If we may interpret freely what seems to be the gist of this discussion, the point of concern and conjecture is the relationship between the timeless and the temporal aspects of human life and beinghood. Conceivably, there is that in every human being which is of the nature of the highest—call it "absolute," or the Quakers' "that of God in every man." When this reality finds expression and play in the life of a man, he pursues a wise and compassionate existence. Is there, then, a "rationale" by which this transcendence of limitation, this full-voiced sound of *logos,* is achieved?

The intellect, as our correspondent points out, suffers endless frustration in the attempt to define what men call "spiritual development." The human longing to know results in a multitude of pseudo-solutions, and these are all rejected by the same power of reasoning which produced them. Hence the use of paradox, which at least puts a stop to logic-chopping.

Possibly, the sole role of the intellect, in all such matters, is to learn how to define its own limitations, and this may take some doing. Used in this way, the mind might become a tool for clearing away the barriers to a sort of self-knowledge which is not additive, which is not conceptual structure, but a spontaneous flow of intuition; and this flooding feeling of true identity may, in the man who has a mind prepared, achieve in the eyes of others the wondrous symmetry of a Buddha or a Christ. Here, perhaps, is the marriage of heaven and earth, the meeting of time and eternity, accomplished in one who is wholly without longing, for how could he long for what he now knows he has never ceased to be?

There might be a sense in which this is no negation of the intellect, but its fulfillment. The intellect, with its thoroughgoing knowledge of all forms of finiteness, is a perfect scholar of limitation. It knows, as no stainless angel ever could, the follies and foibles of human nature. It knows man's sufferings and pains. And how could compassion go to work without such knowledge as this? Compassion sees the perfect in the imperfect; its vision of the noble depends upon each ignobility. Compassion, in order to touch the heart, must have bifocal sight.

No sage, seer, or mystic, it seems to us, who wants to help his fellow men will ever give up his hard-won knowledge of limitation, the fruit of his long engagement with relativities. To say that relativities have no meaning is to say that history, evolution, even existence itself, has no meaning. This might be in some sense a denial of compassion, for only those caught in the trap of relativities need help. The problems of the world seem to result largely from the assignment of absolute meanings to relative circumstances or values. So we make ready to destroy half a world to preserve a political form in which, we say, we

must survive. So a man deserts family, home, children and wife for some finite end—a drink, a drug, a prized possession—which has become for him an absolute obsession. A man without an orderly scale of relative values is a man without knowledge of how to live. But how do you get this scale, since what is absolute can hardly give instruction in comparative unrealities?

The man who has an answer to this question, and can get assent for it, will undoubtedly start a new religion to end all others. It is here, no doubt, that ordinary communication breaks down. The idea would be to help people to learn how to recognize moments of true freedom, true love, true accomplishment, true compassion, in their lives, without rubricizing the instructions in a way that will allow the theologians to take over and institutionalize this version of "the truth." It follows that the designer of good religions is always at pains to make language do what it can never do, and to leave clues as to the inadequacy of language all about. Again, hence paradox. The communication cannot really succeed, but compassion will always *try*. There is always the possibility of a repetition of the original "miracle," in which the dawn of full sight comes in its own time, by a law which bears no knowable relation to human striving.

Then, we might say, compassion moves unimpeded by *theories* of compassion. One might add the possibility that in every relativity there is an opening through which a timeless conjunction may take place in a *moment* of action. Conceivably, the wise man, the compassionater, lives in these moments. All moments, after all, are surrounded with and saturated by timeless duration. A man, in these terms, is a window from which the infinite looks out, or can look out, upon the temporal scene.

But in order to abandon obstructing theories of compassion, you have first to have them. To have the possibility of seeing, you have to know not-seeing. Before the window can be polished and made transparent, the dark and dusty pane must first exist. Thus intellect, which is the source of our identity, our illusions, our longings, and all our lifelong struggle. We finally do without it, but only after exhausting its extraordinary potentialities. Perhaps we make it into something else.