

INSTEAD OF AN APPARATUS

ONE explanation of the puzzling character of the changes which are now taking place in our society may be that they are different in principle from the changes of the past. In the first place, they are not really political, although they may often have political consequences. They do not grow out of struggles for power, although, because they result partly from the efforts of people to be free from the control of power, the problems of power are clearly an issue.

To put the matter briefly, people are thinking of themselves in different terms. The equations of the politics of power do not include the values which are gradually emerging. The formations of power and power struggles are obstacles to this development, not because the emerging values depend upon power, but because the claims and expectations based on power displace the role of values in human life. And since, by comparison with conditions as they were fifty and a hundred years ago, the present is much more of a "closed society," the innovations and changes now taking place assume bizarre and often transitory forms. Driven by deep feelings which affect persons of all ages, people are making changes in their lives by improvisation and experiment. These attempts are not "organized," except on a very small scale.

Study of utopian literature is not much help in understanding what is going on, nor is it a good guide to the future. With only a few exceptions, as Marie Louise Berneri says in her *Journey Through Utopia* (Schocken paperback, 1971), the goals of utopias seem to be "uniformity, centralization, and state control." This was not true of Diderot's *Tahiti*, or of *News from Nowhere* by William Morris, but these were exceptions, and the angry antiutopias of the twentieth century by Huxley and Orwell anticipate in a negative way the change in motivation that is now everywhere in evidence. Social structure and organization are

no longer seen as the important elements of an ideal society. Human attitudes come first, and political forms are increasingly regarded as only the outward shell of the moral dynamics by which people live.

What is at the root of the general disgust with existing conditions? There must be dozens of ways to generalize an answer to this question, but certain considerations which were commonly neglected by most if not all of the utopian writers of the past should provide a clarifying focus. One of the papers in the collected essays of C. Wright Mills, *Power Politics and People* (Oxford University Press and Ballantine), edited by Irving Louis Horowitz, deals with what Mills calls "The Cultural Apparatus." His opening paragraph throws light on the restlessness and dissatisfaction of large numbers of intelligent people:

The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in second-hand worlds. They are aware of much more than they have personally experienced, and their own experience is always indirect. The quality of their lives is determined by meanings they have received from others. Everyone lives in a world of such meanings. No man stands alone directly confronting a world of solid fact. No such world is available. The closest men come to it is when they are infants or when they become insane: then, in a terrifying scene of meaningless events and senseless confusion, they are often seized with the panic of near-total insecurity. But in their everyday life they do not experience a world of solid fact; their experience itself is selected by stereotyped meanings and shaped by ready-made interpretations. Their images of the world, and of themselves, are given to them by crowds of witnesses they have never met and never shall meet. Yet for every man these images—provided by strangers and dead men—are the very basis of his life as a human being.

Basic, then, to the irrepressible longing for change in the present is the hunger to stop living in a "second-hand world." Too much of modern

life is fabricated and artificial. Men have lost touch with the immediacies of existence. Objectives are defined in institutional instead of human terms and the "challenges" of life are remote from the natural confrontations which make striving and daring spontaneous expressions. Neither conventional nor "radical" politics has much bearing on the causes which have produced these conditions, which result from the activities of what Mills names "the cultural apparatus." He gives a brief account of its operations:

This apparatus is composed of all the organizations and *milieux* in which artistic, intellectual and scientific work goes on, and of the means by which such work is made available to circles, publics, and masses. In the cultural apparatus art science, and learning, entertainment, malarkey, and information are produced and consumed. It contains an elaborate set of institutions: of schools and theaters, newspapers and census bureaus, studios, laboratories, museums, little magazines radio networks. It contains truly fabulous agencies of exact information and of trivial distraction, exciting objects, lazy escapes, strident advice. Inside this apparatus, standing between men and events, the images, meanings, slogans that define the worlds in which men live are organized and compared, maintained and revised, lost and cherished, hidden, debunked, celebrated. Taken as a whole, the cultural apparatus is the lens of mankind through which men see; the medium by which they interpret and report what they see. It is the semi-organized source of their very identities and of their aspirations. It is the source of The Human Variety—of styles of living and ways to die.

Mills wrote this for the *Listener* in 1959, but the twelve years since have not diminished its accuracy. He continues, speaking of the effect of the cultural apparatus on the "overdeveloped society," which was Mills' term for the Affluent Society:

Nowadays, in the overdeveloped society, everyday life and the mass arts; private lives and public entertainment; public affairs and the stereotypes put out about it—they reflect one another so closely that it is often impossible to distinguish image from source. So decisive to experience itself are the results of these communications that often men do not really believe what "they see before their

very eyes" until they have been "informed" about it by the national broadcast, the definitive book, the close-up photograph, the official announcement. With such means, each nation tends to offer a selected, closed-up, and official version of world reality. The cultural apparatus not only guides experience; often as well it expropriates the very chance to have experience that can be rightly called "our own." For our standards of credibility, our definitions of reality, our modes of sensibility—as well as our immediate opinions and images—are determined much less by any pristine experience than by our exposure to the output of the cultural apparatus.

Before we go on, it ought to be noticed that humans are *social* beings and that a single individual, totally uninfluenced by the thought of anyone else, is practically impossible to imagine. We are born not only into a physical status quo, but a psychological one as well, and both these situations are necessary and natural. By the brilliance of his criticism, Mills makes it seem as though there is something essentially vicious in being affected by others, when the fact is that the best possible society would be one in which the influences exerted on the young would all be invitations to learning and growth. Such influence could not be passive or "neutral," but would provide the sort of training which does not close out change or deny the possibility of new plateaus of understanding. This sort of social environment is very difficult to illustrate in history, but it sometimes occurs in rare educational situations.

The fundamental defect of the existing cultural apparatus, as Mills describes it—apart, even, from the commercial motives which for the most part give it life—is the "mass" common denominator of its appeal. In this respect it matters little whether the media are controlled by capitalist or socialist authorities or interests, since to reach "everybody" the intellectual level must remain childlike, and the moral level be set by universally acceptable clichés. Very little demand of the reader or listener or viewer can be made at the level of mass communications. The rule is the same, whether the objective is winning markets or gathering votes.

How this rule is made to apply in practice is well illustrated in a passage in a current novel, *Ex Officio*, by Timothy Culver (available in a Dell paperback as *Power Play*). In this story an ex-president of the United States is interviewed for a later television broadcast. During this taped performance the former chief executive candidly reviews his term of office and speaks of his own failure and that of other presidents to put an end to the paranoia afflicting the foreign policy of the United States. He tells of mistakes made, of faint-heartedness at crucial moments, and of the need for courage and self-sacrifice, even at the cost of one's career, in order to overcome the fear which paralyzes constructive action. The two producers, after reviewing what they have on tape, decide they can use only fragments for the telecast. One of them undertakes to explain why to a relative of the ex-president:

"Television transmits images. . . . I mean that television transmits *images*, in every possible sense of that phrase. In the technical sense it transmits images, that's obvious. But in another sense, too. In the people sense, in the sense that I've got an image of you and you've got an image of me. This is a different thing from a book, a book doesn't transmit an image, it transmits part of a mind, that's something else again. What television transmits is an immediate, specific, all-in-one package interpretation of an entire human being. An image. That's what television does, it's what it knows how to do. . . .

"All right. Now. Some people already have an image, and when the public sees them again on television they expect the same old image. It makes them comfortable, they feel safe. Change the image, everybody gets upset. You take one of the night-time talk shows, on comes a guest, a comic, he's known as a very funny man. But tonight he doesn't tell jokes, tonight he wants to do some serious talking about astrology. Why not, nobody's one-dimensional. But you know the kind of thing I mean?"

Howard nodded. "People get embarrassed," he said.

"That's right. The audience gets embarrassed. The guy has fallen out of his image. . . . The emcee, Johnny Carson, whoever, he cuts this guy short, he brings out the next guest, this is a famous expert on children's diseases. Everybody sits back, they're ready

for a serious discussion about crippled kids. Only, tonight this guy is in a mood for mother-in-law jokes, all he wants to do is yuk it up. But let me tell you something, this guy could have the funniest mother-in-law jokes this side of Henry Youngman, he's gonna lay an egg. He fell out of his image."

"I take it you're saying Bradford [the ex-president] fell out of his image just now."

"That's only the beginning," the co-producer said. "With Bradford Lockridge, we've got a whole new level to deal with. Here we've not only got a personal image, we also have our national image. There's an American image, too, and it's what we show on the screen, and if we deviate from *that* we've got more than embarrassment, we've got a mess on our hands. Remember the Democratic Convention in sixty-eight?"

"Far too well," Howard said.

"A lot of people got mad about that. And you know who they got mad at? The kids, you think, for causing the trouble? The stupid politicians, for letting it happen? Not a bit of it. They were mad at television, for putting it on the screen, it was the wrong national image. They didn't send letters to Senator McCarthy or Mayor Daley, they sent them to the networks and the FCC."

In short, the security managers of the medium of television couldn't use the interview Bradford Lockridge had made for the program because it would violate the expectations and habits of the mass television audience. Making and keeping that audience "comfortable" is crucial to the survival of a television network. So there are absolute limitations on what can be communicated over television, based on the psychological conditions of its survival as a medium. This is something which everyone who remains in decision-making jobs in television must understand.

The foundation motive of getting people into a comfortable, "buying" mood is of course largely responsible for establishing these limitations. Just as large manufacturers need a nation-wide market, to obtain the enormous sales that will finance mass production techniques and permit a lower unit price for their products, so the need to *sell* that market at a minimum cost means reaching millions

of people with a single program; and this necessity, in turn, dictates the quality and appeal of the program, more or less as Culver's novel tells it.

If it be asked if *nothing* good can be done under such conditions, the answer must be that of course good programs are possible, but that they must be tailored to fit within certain rigidly limited lines of mass acceptability, going beyond these only by vague intimation, usually in terms of familiar symbolism. John Holt's recent review of *Sesame Street* (in the *Atlantic* for May) is a useful illustration of how various limitations affect the "good" programs.

It is this systematic vulgarization of the common mind, a process by no means confined to television, which has brought about the deep revulsion toward the icons and images of the present society, and at the same time helped to trivialize the quality of the counter-society responses, since the actual *thinking* accomplished by people continuously exposed to such influences can hardly be at a very high level. At the primary, intuitive level, the phenomenon of revolt has undeniable splendor; it is in the elaboration of this feeling, in terms of practical alternatives, that the intellectual impoverishment of the age becomes increasingly manifest.

Another difficulty comes from the nihilistic tendency of even some of the best criticism we have been getting. Both past and present are made to appear so unrelievedly ugly and evil that there seems nothing worth remembering in the one, and nothing that deserves continuing in the other. But living intelligently in the present *must* involve coherent dialogue with the past. We are not born, fully armed, from the brain of Zeus. Simply to come to maturity means to assimilate the past in order to be no longer its captive. Every past is both a prison and a launching pad, depending upon how well we understand it. The language we use was evolved in the past, by others it is true, but those others are in some sense a part of ourselves, since we sprang from them.

To turn against the past before we have understood it is to lock ourselves in a present which will soon become another past. It is to stop thinking, and thus to make the future fearful and incomprehensible. And that is precisely what the mass media are under the practical necessity of doing, in order to maintain their audiences. They dare not expose or stir a single authentic thought process, lest it have a disturbing effect on people who have been trained for a generation to expect only relaxation and "entertainment" from the mass media. Now and then one reads in learned periodicals that the media have outrun the schools in educational "techniques" and that their methods must now be adopted by educators. But if the schools can survive only by competing with the mass media, perhaps they should die away, since what the mass media accomplish is predominantly the transmission of already existing and established "images"—models, we might say, which are put into peoples' minds by approved behavioristic techniques.

The real needs of the modern world, as indicated by the confusing and largely formless changes already under way, cannot be defined in terms of any existing models. These needs call for *creation* and synthesis, not imitation and conformity. For such purposes, the mass media are virtually useless. They have many practical values, serving a complex society in all the ways that efficient signaling devices can be used, but when their influence is said to be "educative," one can only conclude that the authorities who express this view are thinking like economists instead of human beings.

If it weren't for the associations of the term, we could say simply that we need an entirely new "cultural apparatus." The cadres of past revolutions were cultural centers of a sort—one hears again and again of old radicals who began their education in prison, through the companionship and sometimes the books of older, literate, and well-educated prisoners. "Apparatus" certainly sounds too official, and the living

qualities of culture cannot be transmitted through bureaus and organizations. What is now called for is spontaneous and voluntary cultural formations, independent of existing institutions. The past and the present are at least rich in tools for such undertakings, and we can use the tools while freeing ourselves of the systems and the apparatus.

Mills began his essay by saying, "The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in secondhand worlds." The language is plainly pejorative. "Secondhand" is a nasty expression. It signifies an unworthy and discarded inheritance. But from the baby that sucks nourishment from its mother's breast to the bee endowed with inalienable instincts to serve the structure of the hive and perform certain limited labors until it dies, every living thing is born into a matrix of existing conditions. Men come into an imperfect historical and psychological matrix—it is the nature of being human for this to happen. Why, then, treat it as a disaster?

Supposing we can get rid of the negative feeling-tone of Mills' language, there is still the trap of relativism to be dealt with. Even "good" societies filled with "nice" people who intend the very best for coming generations provide limiting conditions of knowledge and belief. So, as we might say, they are not "free." But freedom, here, is a word charged with confusion and misconception. The fault is not in the fact that the community fails to be omniscient and therefore totally free—which would also probably be non-existent!—but in assuming that some abstract completion of knowledge would supply true goodness and freedom. It may be that only limited or relative knowledge is for us *identifiable* knowledge, which puts another complexion on the problem. The trap of limitation or relativism was no trap for Socrates, nor need it be a trap for anyone who recognizes that the moral obligations of human beings do not have a one-to-one relationship to some hypothetical condition of final knowledge or scientific certainty.

It is no accident that "love" and sometimes a less than admirable irrationalism are the declared foundations of the changes of the present. This is no doubt the inevitable reaction to a theory of knowledge which has for centuries boasted its independence of moral sentiments and frailties, and so there has been a return to the rudest sort of emotional beginnings—again, as though *thinking* had nothing to contribute to what is to be accomplished by love. But love is fulfilled only through the channels made for its flow. Model "societies," it is true, are not available for our guidance, but there or its flow. Model "societies," it is true, are not available for our guidance, but there have been many examples of men who were able to combine a large-hearted affection for their fellows with the highest social intelligence. These men recognized every imperfection in the environment as a stepping-stone to growth.

REVIEW

WHAT IS THE INDIVIDUAL?

INDIVIDUALISM, a collection of essays edited by Ronald Gross and Paul Osterman (Dell paperback, 1971, 95 cents), presents the views of a number of well known writers concerning the relationships between the individual and modern society. Among the contributors are Bertrand Russell, John Gardner, David Riesman, Herbert Marcuse, John Kenneth Galbraith, Edgar Friedenberg, William H. Whyte, Jr., Vance Packard, Paul Goodman, Erich Fromm, and several others. One of the "others" is Ralph Waldo Emerson, of whom more later.

As a whole, the book is urbane, informing—and frustrating. That is, it seems almost entirely devoted to the *situation* of modern man, while the reader is likely to hunger for at least a little theory. The issues of individualism all derive from inexplicit questions or problems arising from the nature of the individual, and these are dealt with only in terms of behavior or the paradoxes of behavioral contradiction. An attempt to "define" the individual would of course lead the modern writer into very marshy ground, yet that will not prevent the reader from hoping for some discussion of the matter. Only Emerson, in his more evocative passages, has daring in this direction.

Perhaps it should be openly admitted that we live in an age when metaphysical affirmation is simply impossible for those in the main stream of contemporary thought. A Plotinus or a Leibniz could offer a metaphysical account of the nature of man's identity, but not a modern writer, who is willing to supply only very general judgments, forming them from a study of the practical and psychological consequences of human behavior. John Gardner, for example, in a consideration of the flight from responsibility which Erich Fromm called "Escape from Freedom," has this to say:

Most human beings *are* capable of achieving the measure of autonomy and mature individuality

required by our conceptions of individual dignity and worth. But certain kinds of separation of *the self* from *all that is beyond the self* are inherently destructive and intolerable to human beings.

It is important to keep these facts in mind when we use the phrase "escape from freedom." Unless we specify what the individual is running away from and what form the running away takes, we may conceal under one label a wide range of distinctive behavior patterns.

It makes a great deal of difference whether the individual is really running away from freedom—i.e., from the moral responsibility of individual choice—or from the meaningless isolation that modern life so often thrusts on us and the arid egocentrism into which we are so often driven by romantic notions of individualism. If it is the latter, then the flight is justifiable, and the only question is what the individual chooses to run *to*. He may make the catastrophic mistake of submerging his individuality in a mindless conformity to a cause or a group. Or he may be wise enough to relate himself—as a free and morally responsible individual—to the larger social enterprise and to values that transcend the self. This will be difficult, of course, if the larger social enterprise is so fragmented or decayed that he cannot in fact relate himself to it.

Mr. Gardner then quotes Henry Murray as saying:

Individuality is something to be built for the sake of something else. It is a structure of potential energies for expenditure in the service of an idea, a cultural endeavor, the betterment of man, an emergent value. . . . An individual self is made only to be lost—that is, only to pledge itself to some enterprise that is in league with a good future; and thereby find itself once more.

There is an implicit metaphysic in these ideas of individuality, but for a clear conception of the origin and nature of the individual one must go to ancient philosophical systems which teach a primeval differentiation of the one transcendent Spirit into countless individual expressions, which, as they find presence in man, are each driven by an inalienable longing toward a goal which seems an ultimate paradox—to recover its original, primitive, unconfined freedom and at the same

time to preserve the quality of individual, independent action all along the way.

Emerson struggled mightily to give this idea articulation. His essay on Self-Reliance, fortunately included in this book, might be read as a heroic incantation intended to evoke awareness of the magnitude of human potentiality, when the soul begins to intuit its high calling.

We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. . . . This one fact the world hates; that the soul *becomes*. . . . We do not yet see that virtue is Height, and that a man or a company of men, plastic and permeable to principles, by the law of nature must overpower and ride all cities, nations, kings, rich men, poets, who are not.

This is the ultimate fact which we so quickly reach on this as on every topic, the resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE. Self-existence is the attribute of the Supreme Cause, and it constitutes the measure of good by the degree in which it enters into all lower forms. All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain. Commerce, husbandry, hunting, whaling, war, eloquence, personal weight, are somewhat, and engage my respect as examples of its presence and impure action. I see the same law working in nature for conservation and growth. Power is, in nature, the essential measure of right. Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing and therefore self-relying soul.

This is probably the closest we can come to a theory of individuality from comparatively recent sources. It remains vague, save for the substance the reader adds from his own feelings of inner reality, yet it helps to explain the irrepressible longing felt by all human beings to act for themselves, either in the high terms proposed by Emerson or in some reflected counterfeit of "freedom" or independence. Emerson's injunction is uncompromising, yet his sweeping demands are always in behalf of the loftiest of ideals:

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal

palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. . . . I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions. Every decent and well-spoken individual affects and sways me more than is right. I ought to go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways.

What is the difference between Emerson's essay and the other contributions to *Individualism*? Emerson speaks to single men, to individual persons, while nearly all the other contributors address a more abstract audience—the "students" of the psycho-social make-up of society. Emerson is concerned with what a man ought to do, how he should live his life, and where he should look for essential guidance in his decisions. The other writers bring us thoughtful examinations of "conditions" and review the mass responses of human beings to the restrictions imposed by society. Emerson speaks of the resources in men; the others are content to make descriptive analyses, although, perhaps, adding some hopeful generalization at the end.

Apparently, there is little confidence among these modern writers that men actually make history. Their lack of prescription—Fromm and Goodman are something of exceptions—either reflects an overwhelming modesty or a deep suspicion that History lies in wait and creeps up on us with its confinements, as a vast impersonal process might overtake unsuspecting innocents. Emerson seems without uncertainty. "An institution," he says, "is the lengthened shadow of a man." What he does not add, but surely implies throughout his essay, is that it takes a rather extraordinary man to throw off the influence of institutions and to live what may be called his own life. Emerson sees no other road to freedom. He also declared that "all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons."

The formula is doubtless a bit simple, yet it seems largely true that epochs are shaped by a very few, or have been in the past. Is it too much

to say, for example, that Gandhi was a major architect of whatever peaceful epoch may lie in the future? Did Stalin place an unlovely stamp upon a period of history not yet over? Was not Adam Smith the origin of the decisive thoughts of a great many men who lived after him?

Emerson has a passage on those who may be regarded as the makers and shapers of epochs:

Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another you have only an extemporaneous half expression. That which each can do best none but his Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that person has exhibited it. Where is the master who could have taught Shakespeare? Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin, or Washington, or Bacon, or Newton? Every great man is a unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely that part he could not borrow. Shakespeare will never be made by the study of Shakespeare. Do that which is assigned to you, and you cannot hope too much or dare too much. There is at this moment for you an utterance brave and grand as that of the colossal chisel of Phidias, or trowel of the Egyptians, or the pen of Moses or Dante, but different from all these.

This seems indeed a confirmation of Henry Murray's idea. The "individuality" of these men is something they *created* through extraordinary effort and skill. And this is the sort of individualism by which men attain to the only freedom that does not bring accompanying chains, although it does bring—obligations and high responsibilities. But here, again, we must admit the rarity of such men. Is individuality then so scarce an attainment? In its full flowering and highest expression, it is certainly not common. And if we can take such men as models, we must add that it is always earned. This is an aspect of the subject that seems never to be mentioned. One would think that purely historical or social factors have to do with the "production" of individuality, or with the conditions favorable to its development. But just as the qualities of free men create their own space, so do the creative energies of distinguished individuals generate

"fields" which invite a similar development in other men. This is the positive side of the subject of individuality, which obtains almost no consideration from today's writers on the subject. It must be that they are only barely aware of the fact that men are centers of causation, in relation to which circumstances can never be more than raw material. As Emerson said:

A political victory, a rise in rents, the recovery of your sick or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.

COMMENTARY

EDUCATION BY COMMUNITY

THERE is another reading of Mills' assertion that men live in secondhand worlds, since they are aware of much more than what they have personally experienced. This is also a way of saying that men live in their minds. The mind consolidates a vast amount of experience, sometimes generalizing it in terms of principles. "Science" might be defined in this way.

Culture, into which all men are born, is in part made of tradition, and great traditions are the natural foundation for education and growth. But confining traditions are a means of shackling the human spirit. So, one wonders, what is meant by Mills' sentence: "No man stands alone directly confronting a world of solid fact"? What, indeed, is a "solid fact," apart from the ideas by which men identify it? Is it a "fact" at all before it is defined by an idea?

It is doubtless impossible to think about human experience except in terms of the meaning of experience, initially according to the ways men have already conceived it. A man takes from his culture nourishment about "solid fact," just as his environment supplies food and drink, and Mills might never have thought of calling the human world a "secondhand world," if the nourishment it now provides were not so artificial and contrived. What he really proposes, then, is that this world ought not to be so filled with "stereotyped meanings and shaped by ready-made interpretations."

What Mills calls the "cultural apparatus" is what the ancient Greeks named *Paideia*—the total community in its educational aspect. The community conveys to the young an impression of the meaning of things. If there is decency in the community, and respect for youth, it will hold a mirror up to life, pointing to the means by which human beings may fit themselves for its major confrontations and for the daily responsibilities that come to all. But today "the cultural

apparatus not only guides experience; often as well it expropriates the very chance to have experience that can be rightly called 'our own'."

The task, then, is much as Plato conceived it: the recreation of community as a fit instrument for instruction of the young and of all. Everyone who starts a new school has something like this in mind. A. H. Maslow, who was very much aware that the human environment is chiefly a psychological environment, wrote *Eupsychian Management* as his contribution to enrich the Platonic tradition. Mills' criticism is especially valuable in showing how far-reaching are the changes that ought to take place.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

ON HUMAN GREATNESS

SIMONE WEIL died at the age of thirty-three, in England, in 1943. During the last year of her life, while she was employed at the headquarters of the Free French in London, she wrote *The Need for Roots* (Beacon paperback), intending it as an outline of a program to be followed by the French for the reconstruction and regeneration of France after the Liberation. While there is no special section on education, the entire work could be regarded as on this subject, since her concern is throughout with the shaping of human attitudes. The remark of a reviewer, while doing little to indicate the various excellences of this book, reveals its mood and suggests its possibilities: "Her daring is of the kind frequently encountered among Utopians: with an absurd practicality she comes right to the point, not even bothering to acknowledge the existence of the so-called reality problems that furnish the hard-headed with an excuse for venturing nothing."

Early in the second part, called "The Growing of Roots," Simone Weil remarks that education consists in "creating motives." She adds: "To show what is beneficial, what is obligatory, what is good—that is the task of education." Finding the uses of fear and hope, in the form of threats and promises, wholly unworthy for the purposes she has in mind, she turns to the formulation of educational ideals:

An educational method which is not inspired by the conception of a certain form of human perfection is not worth very much. When it is a matter of educating a whole people this conception should be that of a whole civilization. It must not be sought in the past, which only contains imperfect models; far less still in our dreams of the future, which are necessarily as mediocre as we ourselves are, and consequently vastly inferior to the past. The inspiration for such an education must be sought, like the method itself, among the truths eternally inscribed in the nature of things.

Here are a few indications on this subject.

Four obstacles above all separate us from a form of civilization likely to be worth something: our false conception of greatness; the degradation of the sentiment of justice; our idolization of money; and our lack of religious inspiration. . . .

Our conception of greatness is the most serious defect of all and the one concerning which we are least conscious that it is a defect: at least, a defect in ourselves; for in our enemies it shocks us. But in spite of the warning of Christ's parable of the mote and the beam, it never occurs to us to recognize it as ours.

After showing that all the histories of Europe confuse force with excellence and neglect the qualities of peoples who have suffered defeat, she turns to the tensions of that mid-war time:

People talk about punishing Hitler. But he cannot be punished. He desired one thing alone, and he has it: to play a part in history. . . . The only punishment capable of punishing Hitler, and deterring little boys thirsting for greatness in coming centuries from following his example is such a total transformation of the meaning attached to greatness that he should thereby be excluded from it. . . . It is nonsense to try to make out how far Hitler and Napoleon may be said to resemble and differ from each other. The only problem of any interest is to know whether you can legitimately exclude one from greatness without at the same time excluding the other; whether their titles to admiration are similar or essentially different. And if, after having clearly posed the question and looked it squarely in the face for some time, you allow yourself to slip into untruthfulness, you are lost.

Marcus Aurelius said, using more or less these words, with reference to Alexander and Caesar: if they were not just, nothing forces me to imitate them. Similarly, nothing forces us to admire them.

Nothing forces us to do this, except the sovereign influence of force.

Can one possibly admire without loving? And if admiration is a form of love, how can one bring oneself to love anything other than the good?

It would not be difficult to make a pact with oneself to admire in history only those actions and lives through which shines the spirit of truth, justice, and love; and, at a much lower level, those in which

it is possible to discern a genuine foretaste of this spirit at work.

Actually, very nearly all the proposals for the regeneration of France depend upon the making of such compacts by individuals, although Simone Weil nowhere says as much. If it is *paideia*—the entire community at its best—which educates the young, then *The Need for Roots* is a work on education for the reason that it is certainly concerned with rebuilding *paideia* from the ground up.

She shares in Tolstoy's contempt for the modern idea of progress:

The modern superstition in regard to progress is a byproduct of the lie thanks to which Christianity became turned into the official Christian religion, it is bound up with the destruction of the spiritual treasures of those countries which were conquered by Rome, with the concealment of the perfect continuity existing between those treasures and Christianity, with an historical conception concerning the Redemption, making the latter a temporal operation instead of an eternal one. Subsequently, the idea of progress became laicized; it is now the bane of our times. In laying down that inhuman acts in the fourteenth century were great and good things, but horrible in the nineteenth century, how could a little chap of the twentieth century, fond of reading history, be prevented from saying to himself, "I feel certain that the time when humanity was a virtue is now over and that we are returning to an age of inhumanity"? . . . The dogma of progress brings dishonor upon goodness by turning it into a question of fashion. . . .

No other method exists for acquiring knowledge about the human heart than the study of history coupled with experience of life, in a way that the two throw light upon each other. It is our duty to supply this food to the mind of youth, the mind of Man. But it must be a truth-giving food. Facts must not only be correct, so far as one is able to verify them, but must be shown in their true perspective relatively to good and evil.

History is a tissue of base and cruel acts in the midst of which a few drops of purity sparkle at long intervals. If such is the case, it is first of all because there is very little purity among men; secondly because the greater part of what little there is remains hidden. One must try to seek out if possible indirect testimony of its existence. . . . It is absolutely false to

imagine that there is some providential mechanism by which what is best in any given period is transmitted to the memory of posterity. By the very nature of things, it is false greatness which is transmitted. . . .

This transmission of spurious greatness, Simone Weil says, is not peculiar to history, but applies also to literature and the arts. In giving examples, she seems an Elisha who has taken on the mantle of an Elijah who was Tolstoy. Her standards are surely as exacting as the ones Tolstoy declared in *What Is Art?* She writes:

It is not only in the study of history, it is in all forms of study put before children that the good is held up to contemptuous attitude.

It is obvious—that is a truth which has long since become a platitude with children and men—that talent has nothing to do with morality. But in all spheres nothing *but* talent is held up to the admiration of children and men. In all manifestations of talent, whatever they may be, they see shamelessly flaunted before them the lack of all those virtues which it is recommended they should practice. What conclusion is to be drawn other than that virtue is in keeping with mediocrity? So far has this conviction penetrated, that the very word virtue has now something ridiculous about it—that word which at one time held so much meaning, like the words honesty and goodness also.

How should a child who sees cruelty and ambition glorified in his history lessons; egoism, pride, vanity, passion for self-advertisement glorified in his literature lessons; all the discoveries that have unsettled the lives of men glorified in his science lessons, without any account being taken of either the method of discovery or the effect of the unsettlement produced—how should he be expected to admire the good? Everything that tries to go against this current, for instance the homage paid to Pasteur, has a false ring about it. In an atmosphere of false greatness, it is useless to try to restore the true variety. False greatness must first be despised.

It is true that talent has no connection with morality; but then, there is no greatness about talent. It is untrue that there is no connection between perfect beauty, perfect truth, perfect justice: they are far more than just connected: they form a single mysterious unity, for the good is one.

What can we do with such counsels? In terms of "system," little if anything, it seems likely.

Yet there is certainly a fulfillment, today, of the necessity declared by Simone Weil. "False greatness" *is* now despised by a large and growing sector of the population, especially among the young. Yet still lacking are signs of very many who are trying to restore the true variety. There are, in short, large vacuums to be filled, a work which must be begun by those who make compacts with themselves "to admire in history only those actions and lives through which, shines the spirit of truth, justice, and love." This may be grandiloquent language, but such language, too, has need to regain honorable use.

FRONTIERS

New Life for Men and Land

THERE is a great deal of writing and talking about what *ought* to be done in relation to the land and community, and much more about the things that people ought to stop doing, but very little reporting of what is actually going on in the right direction, partly because such efforts are so few. There is great satisfaction, therefore, in being able to report on the achievements of the International Independence Institute, a non-profit educational corporation devoted to revivifying the economic and community life of technologically undeveloped rural areas. The chief tool of this undertaking is the provision of credit. The Institute has its headquarters in Exeter, New Hampshire, and its President is Robert Swann, long identified with the peace movement and known to many through his activity, along with his wife, Marjorie Swann, in the New England Committee for Non-Violent Action, of Voluntown, Conn.

The establishment of healthful and harmonious relations with the land would solve countless problems. It is known, for example, that "urban riots have their roots in rural poverty, because a high proportion of the desperate people crowded into city slums are refugees from even worse rural slums." One obvious and crying need is for land that can be used by agricultural workers in the American South, who have been displaced by mechanical cotton pickers and other technological advances in farming methods.

One of the first projects the Independence Institute helped to initiate and support is the New Communities program in Southwest Georgia. This was done by sponsoring another non-profit corporation, New Communities, Inc., which is following more or less the example set in Israel for the functioning of land trusts. In this approach, problems of land tenure, community organization, and ecological planning are all given consideration. A total of 5735 acres of good farm

land in Lee County, Georgia, is under lease-purchase. The land is already being worked and some 800 families will be settled in this area in three or more town clusters developed as low-cost housing cooperatives. These communities will have recreation, health and education facilities. Small shops are planned for individual enterprise, also an industrial park for light industry, and a larger town center. This past year the New Communities project planted fifty acres of watermelons, fifteen acres of squash, ten acres of okra, 325 acres of peanuts, as well as several hundred acres of soybeans. A day-care center exists and a program to teach vocational skills is under way, also a pilot housing project for the fifteen or twenty families now working on the land, and for others who will come as soon as housing is available.

An announcement by the International Independence Institute says further:

We have worked on trying to solve both the economic and financial problems of developing New Communities, Inc. (N.C.I.), and at the same time charting an ecologically sound approach to farming. In pursuing these aims, it became increasingly clear that a better arrangement in the distribution of farm produce is necessary in order to encourage farmers everywhere to shift from reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides to an organic approach to farming, and at the same time to maintain a price level to the consumer which is not exorbitant even though higher than prices for non-organic foods. In short, while farmers need higher prices both to cover the higher costs of organic production and as incentive to change their present practices, consumers need a guarantee of quality and protection against price-gouging.

With this in mind, the Institute has been working with Lee Fryer to establish Earth Food Center, a non-profit organization which will act in the consumer interest, and also to launch Food and Earth Services, Inc., to work for improvement of the quality and distribution of organic and "earth" foods, not only in health food stores but chain outlets also. From their studies these groups have found that it should be possible to allow increases in price of from 10% to 20% to

farmers for organic food products. Since the Independence Institute is international in its interests, help is being given to groups in Latin America:

As a related part of our work with Earth Food projects, we have been helping to develop the market for organic Puerto Rico fruit (bananas, oranges, pineapples, mangoes, etc.) which is raised by small farms in the hill section of Puerto Rico. Distributed by the Earth Foods group, this new and better priced market will provide an incentive for organizing cooperatives of farmers in Central Puerto Rico and, we believe, will stimulate rural development there to provide an alternative to a take-over of thousands of acres of farm land by copper mining corporations.

Then, in Mexico, the Institute has been lending support to the Farm Centers International in Michoacan, which affords low cost credit to more than a thousand families of farmers, this year totalling some \$50,000 in loans. All the small loans under this program have been repaid, showing the soundness of this kind of help to farmers. It is hoped to expand this program of economic assistance to countries in Central America, if additional investment money can be raised by the International Foundation for Independence, an international credit mechanism created to implement the policies of the International Independence Institute. There are also plans for launching a pilot program on the Mexican model in Indonesia, on the island of Flores.

In the area of research and publications, Robert Swann and two associates have produced a *Guide to Setting Up Land Trusts*, which will be available soon. There are papers concerned with rural planning and community banking and credit on a grass-roots basis. The staff of the Institute is also involved in research for development of a "Community Based Welfare/Workfare System," which would help to remove the stigma of "welfare" and replace it with a non-compulsory "workfare" system. There may be applications for such a plan in the American South.

The fundamental conception of the Independence Institute is to serve in the provision of credit, not gifts, and to supply education, information exchange, publications, field research and training. This outlook is based on experience. It has been found that: "Outright gifts of goods and capital to underdeveloped areas, while often humanitarian in intent, tend to retard the development of indigenous economies and create dependency."

It goes without saying that the International Independence Institute will be glad to hear from potential supporters and investors in relation to its various projects and undertakings. Write to Robert Swann. The address is Exeter, New Hampshire 03833.