VOLUME XXV, NO. 18
MAY 3, 1972

MYTH AND METAPHYSICS

IT is not only difficult, but practically impossible to decide upon standards and values for human life without using the inheritance of tradition and being affected by the people among whom we live. To be a human being, after all, is to be one among others, and the totally isolated, completely independent man or thinker probably has never existed. Even men who thought they were making completely new beginnings in thought can be shown to have been nurtured by their times, and while they have proposed new ideas, these were framed in the context of a great many more old ones.

Modern thought, with its cult of the precise fact, the unmediated perception of "reality," its devotion to the demythologized study of human behavior, has tended to strip bare the idea of the self, so that, until recently, introspection has been regarded as an unnatural and unhealthy preoccupation with subjectivity, leading nowhere, except perhaps to neurotic behavior. As a result, behavior has been left to the hardly examined controls of family influence, the tradition of "manners," the conventions of the time, and, finally, the law. All this has been regarded as a "new" way of thinking, and it may qualify as this, but it seems more important to recognize that it is really a way of *not* thinking at all about human beings, except as an objective study of what "other people" do. With this as the only sort of thinking that is taken seriously, it follows that the life of a great many people is pursued without even a casual inspection of motives, and that appetite, desire, and the whole gamut of impulses have play as though they needed no more regulation or control than breathing or the beat of the heart. Meanwhile, the cultural attitudes shaped by the commercial stimuli of advertising and popular forms of entertainment seem to fit perfectly with this "permissive" view of life. As a writer in last week's Review remarked, "It is the system of affect-images that tells us who we are and what sort of world it is we live in." One could say the demythologizing of modern thought has made room for popular images, in endless variety, of the skillful and insatiable *consumer,* who never has enough of anything, and who is always ready for something new to eat, wear, or take home. Demythologizing, then, has accomplished little more than the vulgarization of myth.

What is an affect-image? It is a felt conception of an ideal which we try to be like. It may be a simple hero image, or, for persons of maturity, a conception of excellences which they wish to develop. Plato spoke of the hierarchy of ideal Forms in which men might "participate," and thus come to embody those excellences in themselves.

This is the way humans think about themselves, whether consciously or unconsciously. Small children do it spontaneously. "At the preschool level," said the writer in last week's "Children" article, "dramatic play is spontaneous and continual. Being a mother, father or baby, a lion or a monkey, a fireman or a sailor, a small child acts out his feelings about himself and his world all day long." Children cannot be prevented from pursuing this sort of personification. Samuel Slavson tells of an experiment in which a group of children were deprived of all sources of fantasy. The result was that they began inventing their own. It is a continual process, the means of the self-creation of human beings.

Great civilizations supply large stores of mythic material in tales of heroes and legends on which the young are nurtured. Scandinavia had her saga singers, Europe her troubadours, India her reciters of the wonderful exploits of Rama, which the young absorbed in childhood. The Greeks knew their Homer by heart. And the spirited young, if deprived of great tradition, like the children of Slavson's report, devise their own myths. Ralph Ellison, in *Shadow and Act*, tells of his boyhood with friends in Kansas City, Oklahoma, comparing their life with the freedom of Huck Finn:

> Like Huck we observed, we judged, we imitated and evaded as we could the dullness, corruption and blindness of "civilization." We were undoubtedly comic because, as the saying goes, we weren't supposed to know what it was all about. But to ourselves we were "boys," members of a wild, free outlaw tribe which transcended the category of race. Rather we were Americans born into the context of the forty-sixth state, and thus, into the context of Negro-American post-Civil War history, "frontiersmen." And isn't one of the functions of the American frontier to encourage the individual to a kind of dreamy wakefulness, a state in which he makes—in all ignorance of the accepted limitations of the possible—rash efforts, quixotic gestures, hopeful testings of the complexity of the known and the given?
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> Spurring us on in our controlled and benign madness, was the voracious reading of which most of us were guilty and the vicarious identification and emphatic adventuring which it encouraged. This was due, in part, perhaps to the fact that some of us were fatherless my own father died when I was three—but most likely it was because boys are natural romantics. We were seeking examples, patterns to live by, out of a freedom which for all its being ignored by the sociologists and subtle thinkers was implicit in the Negro situation. Father and mother substitutes also have a role to play in aiding the child to help create himself. Thus we fabricated our own heroes and ideals catch-as-catch-can, and with an outrageous and irreverent sense of freedom. Yes, and in complete disregard for ideas of respectability or the surreal incongruity of some of our projections. Gamblers and scholars, jazz musicians and scientists, Negro cowboys and soldiers from the Spanish-American and First World Wars, movie stars and stunt men, figures from the Italian Renaissance and literature, both classical and popular, were combined with the special virtues of some local bootlegger, the eloquence of some Negro preacher, the strength and grace of some local athlete, the ruthlessness of some businessman-physician, the elegance in dress and manners of some headwaiter or hotel doorman.
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> Looking back through the shadows upon this absurd activity I realize now that we were projecting archetypes, recreating folk figures, legendary heroes, monsters even, most of which violated all ideas of social hierarchy and order and all accepted conceptions of the hero handed down by cultural, religious and racist tradition. But we, remember, were under the intense spell of the early movies, the silents as well as the talkies, and in our community, life was not so tightly structured as it would have been in the traditional South—or even in deceptively "free" Harlem. And our imaginations processed reality and dream, natural man and traditional hero, literature and folklore, like maniacal editors turned loose in some frantic film-cutting room.

Grown men, too, are guided by mythic imagery, as happened with Willie Loman, for whom his "Uncle Ben" became the ideal of the wheeler-dealer who is always successful, who always outwits his opponents and is always several steps ahead of everyone else. But Uncle Ben was hardly a good model for Willie Loman, and from the viewpoint of the social community he was a monstrous distortion of any reasonable account of a successful human being.

Who or what is responsible for the currency of such "ideals" in the psychological atmosphere of modern society? In a secular society, is there any group or body for whom such matters are a primary concern? To ask this question is to realize at once that hardly anyone but a few individuals show an interest in such matters—that, indeed, the psycho-dynamics of human beings is an area that has suffered almost total neglect until very recently in modern times. Yet the question of how men think and how they form their intentions and ideals is not only a social problem. Actually, before there can be any sort of social solution which would take the form of education, there would have to be widespread individual concern with the issues involved, and fruitful individual thinking in sufficient distribution to generate a temper of mind from which a suitable educational approach might develop.

But how would individual thinking of this sort begin? With what would it start? The fundamental assumption might be that ideas affect conduct, that they influence or shape behavior. This suggests that by thinking men may improve their lives. It also amounts to a statement about human nature. It proposes a difference between what is and what might be, that there are bad and good ways to behave. If this is the case, then moral decision is a reality in human life. Already, with this proposition, we have the basis for an elementary metaphysic, in which man is maintained to be a center of moral awareness with the power of choice. By choice he can re-create himself. And this is the foundation of humanistic doctrine as formulated by Pico della Mirandola in the fifteenth century. It is the basis of the Socratic dialogues and the meaning of dialectic inquiry.

But myths are not a form of dialectic. They are dramatic episodes in the lives of gods and heroes. They illustrate the confrontations of human experience, the qualities of human nature, and sometimes the greatness of which men may be capable. How are the myths related to metaphys~cal ideas?

We don't really know much about the origin of the great myths, save that they seem to appear in cultures where there are also great philosophical systems—as, for example, in India and Greece. Perhaps we can say, then, that the myths are allegorical or personified expressions of metaphysical systems. Perhaps myths are "folk" expressions of metaphysics, giving intellectual abstractions the power of dramatic expression. It would follow that anyone who dares to devise a myth should first have undergone the discipline of serious metaphysical thinking. He has no right to tell a "story" that might become popular and exert a destructive influence on those who hear it. For to make up a myth is as serious an undertaking as to invent a religion. Even to speak of "inventing" a religion seems presumptuous; who could know enough to do that? Realizations of this sort may be behind the fact that many of the great men who are regarded as having been the founders of religions wrote nothing down.

Well, Plato was a myth-maker, and he wrote a great deal. There is an underlying metaphysic in Plato's philosophy which begins more or less as we have begun—with the idea of the responsible human individual who has the power to improve his life. Plato went beyond this, giving the responsible agent in man the name of soul, which he held to be immortal and separable from the body. Plato also said that there is a Supreme Good which is beyond definition, from which all lesser goods descend, and that the world of Ideal Forms is an eternal world to which the intelligent principle in man may gain access through self-discipline and the sustained practice of philosophy, which is the search for truth. The world of Ideal Forms is the world of timeless, eternal truth. The excellences of men on earth result from their participation in this higher world of reality, which alone is truly real. The best of all possible worlds would be a world in which men reflect as much as possible of this real world of ideal truth in their thought and behavior.

This, although much simplified, is Plato's metaphysic. There is a sense in which it has been the basis for moral striving in the Western world ever since his time. Often Plato would create a myth to illustrate a point in his metaphysical scheme, and by giving this meaning in story form, avoid the danger of formulating what could be turned into rigid theological belief, since myths have a fanciful aspect and are not to be taken literally. There is always a contribution by the hearer to the understanding of a myth. He has to risk something to interpret it. Some of the responsibility is his.

In general, then, we can say of Plato that he gave the world the idea of a vision of the Good, which men could hold before themselves as an ideal, and as a conception of transcendence to sustain them during the confusions, failures, and disappointments of daily life.

By insulating his thought against theological corruption, Plato kept the springs of his inspiration pure. He has been borrowed from by practically everyone how could they help it?—yet no matter what unfortunate distortion was imposed upon what they borrowed, it was always possible to go back to the original for a fresh inspiration. This, one may say, is happening today, as it has happened many times before in Western history. One rather impressive return to Plato was illustrated in a book issued twenty-four years ago, *Ideas Have Consequences,* by Richard M. Weaver, published by the University of Chicago Press (1948). The book has limited appeal in that it is a scholastic sort of analysis and was claimed at the time of his death as responsible for the renascence of conservative thinking. But this claim is unjust to Weaver's thought, which has little or nothing in common with ordinary political thinking of any sort, and he singles out what he terms the bourgeois outlook as embodying practically all the major offenses against the Platonic view he espouses. He also rejects with severe criticism the manipulations of finance capitalism. Weaver's real weakness is that he gives no attention to the corruptions and degradation of the systems of thought which have borrowed some of Plato's ideas for their own purposes, so that what he says may seem to be a defense of those systems, although he hardly mentions them at all.

Weaver finds the moral confusion and impotence of modern times to be a result of the abandonment of the idea of transcendence, embodied in the Platonic world of universal Ideas or ideal Forms—a process which began with the triumph of Nominalism in Medieval philosophy. "The practical result of nominalist philosophy," he says, "is to banish the reality which is perceived by the intellect and to posit as reality that which is perceived by the senses. With this change in the affirmation of what is real, the whole orientation of culture takes a turn, and we are on the road to modern empiricism." We have only to think of Mumford's *Pentagon of Power* and the analysis of the development of Western thought which it contains to see that Weaver was quite a bit ahead of his time in writing *Ideas Have Consequences.* It is a sturdy intellectual anticipation of many of the critical themes which are being developed today. Weaver said in his introduction:

> The whole tendency of modern thought, one might say its whole moral impulse, is to keep the individual busy with endless induction. Since the time of Bacon the world has been running away from, rather than toward, first principles, so that, on the verbal level, we see "fact" substituted for "truth," and on the philosophic level, we witness attack upon abstract ideas and speculative inquiry. The unexpressed assumption of empiricism is that experience will tell us what we are experiencing. In the popular arena one can tell from certain newspaper columns and radio programs that the average man has become imbued with this notion and imagines that an industrious acquisition of particulars will render him a man of knowledge. With what pathetic trust does he recite his facts. He has been told that knowledge is power, and knowledge consists in a great many small things.

Again:

> Since both knowledge and virtue require the concept of transcendence, they are really obnoxious to those committed to material standards, and we have seen how insistent was the impulse to look to the lower levels for guidance. Into social thinking there now enters a statistical unit, the consumer, which has the power to destroy utterly that metaphysical structure supporting hierarchy. Let us remember that traditional society was organized around king and priest, soldier and poet, peasant and artisan. Now distinctions of vocation fade out, and the new organization, if such it may be termed, is to be around capacities to consume. Underlying the shift is the theory of romanticism; if we attach more significance to feeling than to thinking, we shall soon, by a simple extension, attach more to wanting than to deserving. Even institutions of learning have yielded to the utilitarian standard, and President James B. Conant of Harvard University declared in a recent address that the chief contribution of American universities has been the idea of equality of all useful labor.
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> This is the grand solution of socialism which is itself the materialistic offspring of bourgeois capitalism.

This argument would have been stronger if Mr. Weaver had permitted himself to admit the abuses of social hierarchy in Western history, and had been able to see that the vast leveling tendency of the revolutionary movement was a natural reaction to the betrayal of the many by the powerful few. That the many, when they come to power, may prove less wise than even those few, does not change the bitter facts of the past. But his real complaint is against the materialism of all classes of modern society:

> It clarifies much to see that socialism is in origin a middle-class and not a proletarian concept. The middle class owes to its social location an especial fondness for security and complacency. Protected on either side by classes which must absorb shocks, it would forget the hazards of existence.. The lower class, close to the reality of need, develops a manly fortitude and is sometimes touched with nobility in the face of its precariousness. The upper class bears responsibility and cannot avoid leading a life of drama because much is put into its hands. Lightnings of favor or of discontent flash in its direction, and he at the top of the hierarchy, whether it rests on true values or not, knows that he is playing for his head. In between lies the besotted middle class, grown enormous under the new orientation of Western man. Loving comfort, risking little, terrified by the thought of change, its aim is to establish a materialistic civilization which will banish threats to its complacency. It has conventions, not ideals; it is washed rather than clean. The plight of Europe today is the direct result of the bourgeois ascendancy and its corrupted world view.
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> Thus the final degradation of the Baconian philosophy is that knowledge becomes power in the service of appetite. The state, ceasing to express man's inner qualifications, turns into a vast bureaucracy designed to promote economic activity. It is little wonder that traditional values, however much they may be eulogized on commemorative occasions, today must dodge about and find themselves nooks and crannies if they are to survive at all. Burke's remark that the state is not "a partnership in things subservient only to gross animal existence" now seems as antiquated as his tribute to chivalry.

Richard Weaver is not a particularly warm-hearted man, and he seems at times too much the Southern gentleman, yet in his book he exhibits a consistency of thought and criticism that is lacking in most criticism done at this level. Plato is his mentor, human fraternity his law, and vision his guide. His book should not be forgotten, since much of it has gained force since 1948.

REVIEW

TWENTIETH-CENTURY HOMESTEADING

MANAS first took note of Ralph Borsodi's *Flight from the City* in 1948—our beginning year of publication—and has been calling attention to this small but exciting book ever since. We admire it as much or even more than anything else Mr. Borsodi has written, for the reason that it is the sort of book which moves people to act on their own initiative. After reporting on Louis Bromfield's two books about his Ohio farm, it seemed a good idea to return to Mr. Borsodi, so, planning on this for a review, we got our copy of *Flight from the City* down from the shelf and took it along to work. But, first thing in the morning, one looks at the mail, and waiting there on the desk was a new Colophon paperback from Harper & Row titled *Flight from the City*, with a fine introduction by Paul Goodman and new material added by Mr. Borsodi. Somebody, either MANAS or Harper & Row, must have a finger on the Pulse of Things!

This is an especially good book to read in these days of so much frustration and anger, disappointment and blame. There are certainly a lot of people in the world who misuse their power and do ruthless, unjust things to other people, and ways must be found to stop them or slow them down, but the mood of failure and powerlessness which is beginning to characterize the times is due even more to a basic misconception as to how life and nature distribute their benefits. Americans are collectively victims of too much super-salesmanship concerning the merits of their System and Way of Life. Goodness of life does not result from either systems or ideological beliefs. It comes from effort and ingenuity, from self-reliance and resourcefulness, and from fellowship and cooperation in the process of working towards ends which honor and contribute to the common good. These are the principles which underlie a good life, and the best system is the one which is progressively defined by practice when such principles are applied. Some sort of consensus, of course, is needed concerning the meaning of the common good, and here the root ideas of philosophical religion are a source of guidance, but men attentive to the lessons of experience do not seem to have much trouble in reaching working agreement on the meaning of brotherhood among human beings and a collaborative attitude toward the natural world. Attention to some of the laws of nature seems to lead to recognition of others, before too long.

As we said, there is a lot of evil-doing in the world, but its scope could be enormously reduced by the multiplication of resourceful, self-reliant people who use to the hilt what freedom is available to them, as the only way to create more. Freedom is really nothing more nor less than the space which is generated around the lives of free men. And a free man is a man who is making the best use he knows of all his capacities. The political conventions abstract this space and reify it, as though it were an independent reality, but when men depend more on the conventions than upon themselves, the space collapses, no matter what proud system they live under. When this happens their freedom departs, and then they demand another system. But no system will last unless it is mostly a ratification in law and custom of growth and achievement that have already been realized, in some measure, by the deepened and expanded lives of the people.

Flight from the City, you could say, is a case study of the demonstration of this sort of truth by one family.

In 1920, Ralph Borsodi and his wife were living in New York City. He had a job as an economist. The Borsodis with their two small sons occupied a rented home and they bought all their food and clothing from stores. Suddenly their house was sold and they found themselves homeless during a severe housing shortage. This was the opportune time to carry out a decision they had dreamed of—moving to the country. They found an old house within commuting distance, on seven acres of land, in Suffern, New

York. There was an old barn and a collapsing chicken house, and some apple, plum, and cherry trees. So they moved, starting from scratch on an adventure in country living. Borsodi, an office worker, had to learn to be a mechanic, a man of all trades. His wife had her plans, too, which began with canning and ended by weaving fabrics and making her own clothes. They had little capital so the development of the place went slowly, which was probably a good thing since it kept them from making any big mistakes. He kept his job, of course, since that had been the idea from the beginning. The place in the country was not to be a means of income, but a means of better living and a supplement to the family economy. So, by the end of the first year:

> We cut our hay; gathered our fruit; made gallons and gallons of cider. We had a cow, and produced our own milk and butter, but finally gave her up.
>
> By furnishing us twenty quarts of milk a day she threatened to put us in the dairy business. So we changed to a pair of blooded Swiss goats. We equipped a poultry-yard, and had eggs, chickens, and fat roast capons. We ended the year with plenty not only for our own needs but for a generous hospitality to our friends—some of whom were out of work—a hospitality which, unlike city hospitality, did not involve purchasing everything we served our guests.

They soon found it was foolish to raise a surplus for the market. The complications which resulted from this were greater than any advantages. The idea was to produce everything they could for themselves, using machinery wherever it was a common-sense help. They often improvised. For example, Borsodi figured out how to hitch the motor from a discarded washing machine to a low-cost grist mill so that Mrs. Borsodi could grind wheat flour and corn meal with ease. And, being an economist, he kept books on all their operations. He found that home production gave better products and was actually cheaper for a vast variety of articles used in the home. While quantity buying and mass production made store food products cost much less to produce than the Borsodi's food, *distribution* absorbed all the economies of mass production, and then some. So the Borsodis had better food at lower cost than the store-bought kind. The self-sufficiency they achieved was not without importance, either. But in plain dollars and cents they were ahead:

> Eventually I stumbled on an economic law which still seems to me the only satisfactory explanation of our adventure with the canned tomatoes: *Distribution costs tend to move in inverse relationship to production costs.* The more production costs are reduced in our factories, the higher distribution costs on factory output become. At some point in the case of most products a time comes when it is cheaper to produce them individually than to buy them factory made. Nothing that we can do to lower distribution costs by increasing the efficiency of our railroads, and nothing we can do to eliminate competition as socialists propose, upsets this law. As long as we stick to the industrial production of goods this law is operative.

Borsodi the economist began a great restorative operation, which had the effect of making economics what it was originally and what it ought to be—intelligent housekeeping:

> These discoveries led to our experimenting year after year with domestic appliances and machines. We began to experiment with the problem of bringing back into the home, and thus under our direct control, the various machines which the textile-mill, the cannery and the packing house, the flour-mill, the clothing and garment factory, had taken over from the home during the past two hundred years. Needless to say, we have thus far only begun to explore the possibilities of domestic production.

No doubt there have been many men around the country who have applied new-found abilities in some such way, but Borsodi saw the significance of the accomplishment; he understood what was happening in principle, and in writing about it opened up a vision for others. Hundreds of other men and their families have been inspired by his example. What he did was a great idea in 1920, but it is incalculably more important, today. Today it is an idea whose time has come.

Paul Goodman makes this clear in his Preface. He points out that while Americans as a people are much more "affluent" than they were in the booming 1920's—the Gross National Product is five times as great—the profusion of "things" is losing its attraction for the coming generation. As Goodman says:

> . . . now many people, millions of young people, have had it. The basic needs and values of human life are proving to be more historically significant, to have more staying power, than economic" or "political" considerations. This ought not to be a newsy proposition, but it is impossible to persuade policy-makers to it. They will continue with every expedient except simplification. They will subsidize cities that cannot possibly pay for themselves, provide employment by producing useless or harmful products, pay people not to use the land, increase the number of degraded pensioners, etc., until resources are exhausted, the world is smothered with junk, and there are no longer citizens but aliens.

Goodman's point, here, might be that if the sound intelligence of books like *Flight from the City* continues to be ignored, the policy-makers will lose the initiative, and the sweep of rejection of all their works will encompass them along with the stubborn mistakes they have been making for several generations. But if enough men freely choose to apply such intelligence in whatever way they can, this example may be strong enough to change the patterns of the future by peaceful means.

A large audience for books like *Flight from the City* certainly exists. And Goodman finds it ironic that the Borsodis, people of great personal discipline, who would no doubt be regarded as "the squarest of the square," are nonetheless responsible for a book that "has become part of the hippie counter culture." Goodman adds:

> Another historical irony—a bitter one—is that it is in the United States that people are first beginning to listen to people like Borsodi. It is the so-called underdeveloped countries that could most profit by these proofs of the efficiency of small-scale production, decentralization, and self-reliance; but most of them are hell-bent toward urbanization, centralized industrialization, and inflation. New Delhi pays no attention to the wisdom of Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, or Jayaprakash Narayan, not very different from Borsodi's economics. Cuba strives to become a vast sugar plantation enmeshed in a world market bound to be disadvantageous and disastrously insecure. Africa and Latin America are urbanizing at a much faster rate than Europe or North America and can afford it not at all. Indeed, I can think of only little Tanzania, led by the Gandhian Nyerere, that pursues a policy of small-scale production, self-reliance, and protecting its rural base.

Flight from the City covers a period of practical experience in homesteading of a little more than ten years. It deals with the practical problems of water supply, plumbing, food production, weaving, construction, and methods of financing such undertakings. There is a chapter on education, since the Borsodis, after some experience with the local schools, decided to teach their children themselves. There are two chapters on the social implications of their experiment. In the Harper paperback edition, which is $1.95, an excellent bibliography has been added by Mr. Borsodi, in which he lists the books and pamphlets which they found most valuable in planning new developments.

COMMENTARY
BASIS FOR SOCIAL STRUCTURE

IT was Russell Kirk who, at the time of Richard Weaver's death in 1963, spoke of *Ideas Have Consequences* as providing an intellectual foundation for the revival of conservative thinking. But as our lead article points out, this reading of Weaver ignores his disdain for the petty, acquisitive ends which dominate middle-class thinking, and it takes no note of the fact that Weaver's defense of private property rested on its implication of individual responsibility. He argued that the sort of property finance capitalism brought into being was "a violation of the very notion of *proprietas"* and held that big business and the rationalizations of industry abetted "the evils we seek to overcome." Even on the question of socialism, he found reason to praise the "socialist poverty" of the French poet Charles Péguy.

Why, then, was he claimed as an advocate for the conservative movement? The quotations on page seven of this week's issue are evidence enough. Weaver believed that an orderly society must be based upon hierarchy, recalling the social structure represented by king, artisan, and peasant. And he opposed the leveling tendency of the demagogic aspect of democratic politics.

Perhaps Weaver was unable to see that a return to the old sort of external structure in social organization is no longer possible, although the need for hierarchy is evident enough, since no organism of any complexity can survive without it. The lesson of the entire cycle of revolution since the eighteenth century is that structure and differentiated function must now be maintained by the inner discipline of human beings. The coercive authority of hereditary right is a synonym of infamy for modern man, and it has become obvious that the authority of military power is an even greater evil. Economic power as a weapon of control over human beings remains, cajoling when not compelling, and this, also, must be rejected as a tool of tyranny.

What is left as the basis for social organization? The Gandhian ideal of a moral aristocracy, made up of persons who will not resort to coercive power in any form, suggests itself as the only available: hierarchical structure compatible with present-day conceptions of human freedom. Now suppressed motives devoted to the general *human* good could come to the surface in communities guided by such leadership. Actually, the widespread longing for a renewal of community life may be an intuitive recognition of the need for this sort of structure, since it is at least possible for it to begin to take form at the community level.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
A SCHOOL IN BROOKLYN

SINCE many of the excellences in Esther Rothman's *The Angel Inside Went Sour* (Bantam) were left unmentioned in the brief account given in last week's lead article, we have been planning to devote more attention to it here. But a natural question arises: Is what happens in the Livingston School representative of the problems that are commonly encountered in dealing with the young? Livingston students, as Dr. Rothman explained to a would-be teacher, needed help in learning how to fit in with "middle-class" life, which they had never known or experienced. Surely that ought not to be regarded as a typical objective!

But that, you could say, is only what Dr. Rothman was doing on the surface. Underneath the immediacies of helping the girls to learn how to cook, make their own clothes, and fit themselves for jobs, there was a consistent program encouraging self-determination. This remains important, no matter what the goal or the practical uses made of what is learned in school. The pupils in the Livingston School had come from other schools where their lives had been rigidly shaped by outside forces, by the demands of the system. The girls who came to Livingston had rebelled, but this did not mean that they knew how to make decisions for themselves; it meant only that they were independent spirits. How could they be helped to make constructive decisions? Dr. Rothman reflected:

> Students throughout the world were becoming increasingly determined to have a voice in the decisions that affected them. Our girls had to learn to be part of that world, whether they were ready or not. The world would not stand still for them. And being part of that world meant making decisions. We would not ask them to examine national or international politics, nor to become social critics if they did not want to but we had to teach them that within their power they had the right and the obligation to control their own destinies. In school this meant making decisions about learning. Outside of school, it could mean deciding not to join a drug society, or to finish going to school, or not to become pregnant.

What could the school do? Well, it could stop scheduling classes and invite the students to decide what they would study, and when. Dr. Rothman talked the idea over with one of the girls:

> "Joanne," I asked, "here you are in my office because your teacher reported you for cutting a class, and so you're in trouble. What if you never had to cut a class because there would be no scheduled periods and you could go to any subject you wanted to, would you like that?"
>
> "Yeah," she beamed, "I'd like that."
>
> "Where would you go?"
>
> "Music, I'd go first to music and maybe beauty culture, and oh, I'd go to the yard."
>
> "The whole day?"
>
> "Yeah."
>
> "Well, that's one day," I said, "but what if you had the choice of going where you wanted every day for a whole term or a whole year. Would you like that?"
>
> I expected her to pounce on the idea gleefully but she didn't.
>
> "Naw."
>
> "Why not?"
>
> "Cause I'd never learn nothin, that's why. I'd never do readin or math or nothin."
>
> "Why not?" I asked again.
>
> "Cause I'd never go," she explained.
>
> "Why not?" I insisted a third time.
>
> "Well, you gonna make me?" she asked.
>
> "No—"
>
> "See?"
>
> "Yeah, I see," I said, "if you didn't decide to go by yourself, no one would make you go, and you'd be stupid. Right?"
>
> "I guess so," she agreed.
>
> "So?" I asked. "What's wrong with that?"
>
> "What's wrong with that?" she screeched. "Are you funny or somethin? Teachers are supposed to teach, that's what."
>
> "And pupils are supposed to learn," I said, "only teachers shouldn't order you to learn, you should learn because you want to."
>
> I was silent for a minute, then ordered, "Joanne, look down at your shoes." She was startled, but she looked.
>
> "What do you see?"
>
> "My feet," she said with obvious reluctance.
>
> "That's right," I answered. "Your feet are in your shoes. No one else's. Did someone else get in your shoes and make you walk away from class?"

> "No—" She was loath to say it.
>
> "So, if you want to be stupid, that's your own feet doing the walking. That's your business, isn't it?"
>
> "Yeah, it's my business, I suppose," she said glumly.
>
> "So, if you want to go to class and learn, you'll be smart, and if you don't want to go to class, you'll be stupid, and you'll have nobody to blame but yourself."
>
> "That's right," she agreed heatedly, "and that's hard, too damned hard, I don't like it to make my own mind up, I'm not used to it and I won't know how to get used to it, and I don't like it."

But a girl as honest and intelligent as that would find a way to get used to it when the program was put into effect. Another girl found the responsibility of having to choose what to do with her time so frightening that she asked to stay home for a while. She was sure she would get into trouble if she came to school and was unable to decide what to study.

> "Okay, Phyllis," I told her, "you can stay home, but you know what you're doing, don't you? You're deciding to stay out of trouble by staying away. That's a decision you're making, and it's a good one for now, but soon you'll be able to decide to come to school and still stay out of trouble. You tell me when you can do it."
>
> And she did, a few days later. Phyllis decided to come to school, but because she was afraid of the new program, afraid she would waste all her time, she wrote out a weekly program, period by period, and followed it, just as if bells were rung. Far better for Phyllis to internalize her schedule than for us to force it upon her.

When the program actually got going, there were other reactions. It was carefully planned, even to providing a lounge where the girls could go for some free time, and when it was first started, the school tried it for a day at a time, then for a week, then for a month, and finally, after it proved quite feasible, self-determined study was permanently adopted. But during the testing period there were reversions to the old program:

> The girls understood what we were doing, but each time we went back to scheduled classes the uproar was loud and clear.
>
> "I thought you trusted us," Joanne complained.
>
> "I do," I answered.
>
> "Sure, then how come you're goin back to treatin us like we got no minds of our own?"

The question of the middle-class job aims of these girls recalls a conference held at the Lower East Side Action Project (LEAP) in which Paul Goodman, noting the desire of some of the youngsters in the project to take part in the middle-class "square" world, said:

> I feel we have a lot of kids here who have the same kind of garbage in their minds that any kid in Yale or Harvard has. They have the same ambitions, want to climb up the same way, and who needs it?

Well, the question may need to be asked, but the Puerto Rican youth Goodman was referring to had never been in the middle-class, square world. One of them wanted to become an architectural draftsman, but had been discouraged from any such professional aspiration by his faculty adviser in high school. "Be an auto mechanic," he was told. This only made him more determined to become a draftsman, and LEAP wanted to give him some help. He was talented enough, and had every right to try, but he met only deprecation and barriers in school.

It seems clear enough, as Dr. Rothman remarked, that people who have been shut out of middle-class opportunities need to have them, so that, if they then outgrow this level of cultural attitudes, the rejection will at least be more than sour grapes!

Speaking of draftsmen reminds us of a story told us by a teacher of three-dimensional design in a California art school. This teacher had been a commercial artist in his younger years, and in full maturity had turned to fine arts, becoming a sculptor. He also taught, and some of his students were quite poor, needing to make extra money to get through school. This teacher would sometimes try to help the students by getting them commissions involving some craftsmanship. As he related what often happened: "The students feared that their integrity would be damaged by entering the world of business and doing jobs for money, but I found that the ones who complained most bitterly of this had failed to acquire the basic technique necessary to executing so simple a thing as a sign for a store." The small-minded middle-class objectives may indeed need to be bettered, but it will take mastery of at least the middle-class virtues in order to do it!

FRONTIERS

Refugees in America

AMERICA as a civilization is a mixture of countless ingredients as well as a synthesis with an atmosphere and character distinctively its own. It is easy enough to draw contrasts between the Old World and the New, but to understand how elements of European culture are incorporated into American life, enriching it while giving a new incarnation to those who come here from abroad, is much more difficult, for the reason that, except for the individuals involved, the process is a very private affair.

A "memoir" by Henry Pachter, a German who arrived in this country in 1941, appearing in the just published *Legacy of the German Refugee Intellectuals* edited by Robert Boyers (Schocken, 1979, $10.00), is an engrossing study of the German intellectuals who were driven out of Germany by Hitler during the 1930's, and who finally arrived in the United States. Many of them, like Pachter, were scholars; others, like Einstein, were scientists; some were writers, some teachers, and some artists. Pachter tells about their last years and months in Germany, of the time spent in France, as a way station, where they were regarded as Germans and dangerous aliens, and about how they finally found a place in American life. He also tells how they felt during these difficult years. The loose-jointed pluralism of American opinion puzzled them at first:

> America allows the individual to retreat from society and to have ties to various associations and bodies in many different ways; Europe always assumes that one is part of a social group whose every attitude and opinion one shares. In America a religious crisis does not entail a political collapse; an economic depression may leave the social structure intact; a revolution at the universities need not involve other strata. A man may be a racist and yet support the welfare state, or he may be a civil rights fighter and yet hate labor unions. This was almost incomprehensible to me in the beginning. Later I found that herein lies the true secret of America's domestic security: each group is revolutionary in its own field at one time; no convergence toward a total revolution ever threatens the system as a whole. Since the refugees had no desire to be revolutionary in America, they thankfully embraced this system which permitted them to be dynamic reformers each in his own field. They accepted the so-called conformism which sits so lightly on most Americans' shoulders—precisely because it never seems to affect vital interests of the individual; politics does not involve Americans with the totalitarian intensity of European party life.

Pachter worked for intelligence during the war, and then got into market analysis, eventually becoming a teacher at the New School for Social Research in New York. This institution was formed as a means of giving distinguished German scholars an opportunity to provide the benefits of European discipline and learning to American students. Pachter did various jobs at the New School, over some fifteen years, serving finally as acting dean.

During this period he and his colleagues came to feel that Americans were lacking in a sense of tragedy. Without the long experience of Europe in wars and bitter defeats, Americans regard their history as a simple "success story" and refuse to believe that there are any problems which cannot be solved. Pachter thinks that European scholars such as Hannah Arendt have been able to deepen American sensibility and free their students from the shallow notion of progress. Then he says:

> Perhaps it would be fairer to state these contributions in a more modest way: it was a fortunate coincidence that precisely at the moment when America had lost her innocent faith in everlasting harmony and progress she became host to people whose nations had a longer memory of tragedy and whose personal experiences had made them singularly sensitive to the crisis of the Western mind. . . . I don't suppose that such impolite display of superiority must be attributed to any feeling of a cultural differential. At best, it is the irony of wisdom such as we find in the multi-refractory style of Thomas Mann: a little tired, a little ashamed to reveal the truth without devaluating its relevance, somewhat decadent or at least aged reflecting a knowledge that action may be necessary but not expecting it will solve the problem for good or avoid creating new problems. Perhaps such a Brahman attitude—that

> nerve of failure—was a necessary counterpoise for America at the moment when she was ready to make the century hers; indeed some refugees are proud to be citizens of this new Roman Empire provided they can be its Athenian teachers.

During his time in business, working as an economist, Pachter found his daily associations peculiarly hard to bear:

> My upbringing and experience probably would have made it hard for me to adjust to any business community or to live by business-oriented values in any country. Yet America seems to have developed the purest strain of that culture, unadulterated by aristocratic or intellectual impurities. . . . I find baseball the most boring of sports to look at. I agree with Brecht and Sartre that the consumer culture of the American middle class represents a low point in taste and "engagement." Had my naturalization depended on my acceptance of the "American way," I would scarcely have passed.

He goes on to speak of the low standards in secondary school education, the lack of intellectual life and communication among writers, and tells how he sought companionship among his European compatriots. But there is another side to his experience of America:

> How much of an American one has become he notices only on his first return "home," where everything now appears so small, so petty, so mean, so over-sophisticated, that one is prepared to praise everything American, even the shortcomings I took offense at the servility, the class spirit, the maid's constant "Ja, Herr Doktor," the chauffeur's heel-clicking, the over-correctness of officials and the air of importance in every business executive's ante-room. No matter how heavy the cultural heritage one carries on his back, "you can't go home again." No matter how close the friends to whom you return, you come home as a stranger, or at least a different person. Back in Europe, I loved America's freedom.

The rest of the book presents eighteen essays and notes on eminent refugee scholars, by various contributors. Bertolt Brecht, Hannah Arendt, Max Wertheimer, T. W. Adorno, Thomas Mann, Karl Mannheim, and Herbert Marcuse are among those whose work is considered.