

## WHO AND WHAT WE ARE

HOW does historical change come about? We seem, today, on the verge of a great alteration in human attitudes, yet the socio-political structures inherited from the past are at the same time imposing in their apparent strength; and governments, made by men trained in old habits and beliefs, are hardly susceptible to the moral and intellectual influences that cry out for change. But change there is bound to be, even if it cannot come about except through the collapse after failure at many levels of the familiar authority and ways of doing things, followed by the rule of chaos for a time.

As for our question, it amounts to asking how great changes have come about in the past, and if we dare to be selective in going to history for reply, there is the possibility of at least a partial answer. To understand what was accomplished by the Founding Fathers of the United States—certainly a major change in the conception of government and social order—we may go to Bernard Bailyn's essay on Thomas Paine and *Common Sense* in *Fundamental Testaments of the American Revolution* (Library of Congress, 1973). Paine's pamphlet was published in January, 1776, after the first skirmishes of the war, but before any of the colonies had instructed their delegates to the Congress to work for independence. Except for some leaders in Massachusetts and Benjamin Franklin, the colonists wanted justice from England, but not freedom. It would not be much of an exaggeration, Bailyn remarks, "to say that one had to be a fool or a fanatic to advocate American independence." In what was probably the most brilliant political pamphlet ever written, Paine changed that view. *Common Sense* was nothing less than a work of genius, and it was widely read throughout the colonies. He tore to bits the well received political assumptions of the time and

replaced them with sublime conceptions of self-reliance and the dignity of men who had learned independence on the frontier. He freed them of their inheritance of loyalty to the king of England, using contempt and ridicule as a weapon, then roused them to share in his vision of a future of their own. As Bailyn says:

In passage after passage in *Common Sense* Paine laid bare one after another of the presuppositions of the day which had disposed the colonists, consciously or unconsciously, to resist independence, and by exposing these inner biases and holding them up to scorn he forced people to think the unthinkable, to ponder the supposedly self-evident, and thus to take the first step in bringing about a radical change.

As for loyalty to their traditional monarch, Paine wrote:

In England a king hath little more to do than to make war and give away places; which in plain terms is to impoverish the nation and set it together by the ears. A pretty business indeed for a man to be allowed eight hundred thousand sterling a year, and worshipped into the bargain!

Bailyn gives an explanation of the *power* of Paine's work:

The great intellectual force of *Common Sense* lay not in its close argumentation on specific points but in its reversal of the presumptions that underlay the arguments, a reversal that forced thoughtful readers to consider, not so much a point here and a conclusion there, but a wholly new way of looking at the entire range of problems involved. For beneath all of the explicit arguments and conclusions against independence, there were underlying, unspoken, even unconceptualized presuppositions, attitudes, and habits of thought that made it extremely difficult for the colonists to break with England and find in the prospect of an independent future the security and freedom they sought. The special intellectual quality of *Common Sense*, which goes a long way toward explaining its impact on contemporary readers, derives from its reversal of these underlying presumptions and its shifting of the established

perspectives to the point where the whole received paradigm within which the Anglo-American controversy had until then proceeded came into question.

In a sense like Gandhi, Paine outran his countrymen with his vision, yet nonetheless set a fire going in their hearts, as Gandhi did with the Indian people.

The verbal surface of the pamphlet is heated, and it burned into the consciousness of contemporaries because below it was the flaming conviction, not simply that England was corrupt and that America should declare its independence, but that the whole of organized society and government was stupid and cruel and that it survived only because the atrocities it systematically imposed on humanity had been papered over with a veneer of mythology and superstition that numbed the mind and kept people from rising against the evils that oppressed them.

This is an account, simplistic no doubt because only a single explanation, of how the American people were aroused to undertake government of themselves. What of the French Revolution, which came at about the same time?

In a hardly remembered book, *Secret Societies and the French Revolution* (issued by John Lane in 1911), Una Birch published some essays which had appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* and *The Nineteenth Century and After* in which she explored the influence of certain of the secret societies of the eighteenth century on the people of France. Masonry, she shows, had spread from England to France and there were numerous other groups busy absorbing the learning and aspirations of the Enlightenment. Miss Birch finds that most historians have ignored the vast influence of these groups which, when the revolution broke out, quickly became political. In the title essay she says:

It has been the habit for so long to regard the Revolution as an undefined catastrophe that it is hardly possible to persuade men that at least some foreknowledge of its course and destination existed in the mind of the Illuminists. When Cagliostro wrote his celebrated letter from England in 1787 predicting for the French people the realization of the schemes

of the secret societies; foretelling the Revolution and the destruction of the Bastille and monarchy; the advent of a Prince Egalité, who would abolish *lettres de cachet*; the convocation of the States-General; the destruction of ecclesiasticism and the substitution of the religion of Reason; he probably wrote of things he had heard debated in the lodges of Paris. Prescience might also explain the remark attributed to Mirabeau, "Voilà la victime," as he indicated the King at the opening of the States-General at Versailles. Two volumes of addresses, delivered at various lodges by eminent masons, prove how truly the situation had been gauged by Condorcet and Mirabeau. In fantastic phraseology the philosopher announced at Strasbourg that in France the "idolatry of monarchy had received a death-blow from the daughters of the Order of the Templars," while the statesman uttered in the recesses of the lodge of the "Chevaliers Bienfaisants" in Paris, the levelling principles and ideas which he afterwards thundered from the tribune of the Assembly. The path to the overthrow of religious orthodoxy had to a great extent been made smooth by the distribution, through the lodges, of Boulanger's "Origines du Despotism Oriental," in which religion is treated as the engine of the State and the source of despotic power. "Des Erreurs et de la Verite," springing as it did out of the self-consciousness of the philosopher of the Revolution, represents, more than any other book, the feeling of the mystical aspirants after a reign of brotherhood and love. It became the Talmud of such people and the classic whence they drew their opinions. Religions? their very diversity condemns them. Governments? their instability, their foolish ways prove how false is the base on which they rest. All is wrong, especially criminal law, for it upholds the monstrous injustice of not only killing guilt but also repentance. Saint-Martin spoke to eager ears when he spoke thus to men, men willing to believe that man alone had created evil that God at least must be exonerated from so monstrous a charge, men willing to work for that reign of brotherhood which meant the restoration of man's lost happiness.

A little later this writer says:

At the great Revolution the doctrines of the lodges were at last translated from the silent world of secrecy to the common world of practice; a few months sufficed to depose ecclesiasticism from its pedestal and monarchy from its throne; to make the army republican, and the word of Rousseau law. The half-mystical fantasies of the lodges became the habits of daily life. The Phrygian cap of the "illuminate" became the headgear of the populace,

and the adoption of the classic appellations used by Spartacus and his Areopagites the earnest of good citizenship. Past time was broken with, and a calendar modelled on those in use among the secret confederates became the symbol of the new epoch. The *ternaire*—Liberty Equality, Fraternity—instead of merely adorning the meeting-places of masonic bodies, was stencilled on all the public buildings of France; and the red banner which had symbolized universal love within the lodges was carried by the ragged battalions of the people on errands of pillage and destruction.

The great subversive work had been silently and ruthlessly accomplished in the face of popes and kings.

Looking back on these great events of the eighteenth century, one might almost wish for a similar simplicity today. In those days men were concerned with their relations with other men—politics, we call it—and sought to make arrangements which would be both just and fulfilling, and also free. Here in America we made arrangements which nearly all of us have been convinced were remarkably good, and then went about our business, turning the political scene into an arena of personal acquisition. By the end of the nineteenth century it had become evident that the politics the eighteenth century had devised were no longer any guarantee against gross injustice, and plans were made for another kind of politics to restore social equilibrium. The last half of the nineteenth century was the time of socialist invention—Marx in Europe and Bellamy in America. The Marxist program was based upon relentless class struggle, its power coming from resentment and hatred of the ruling class, the moneyed aristocracy. Bellamy's dream was of a classless brotherhood in which all men would see the light and form a corporate state to administer the common fraternity. Henry George was a third figure with a plan for change, based on better relationships of humans with the land.

So there were revolutions and reforms, yet today the best human intelligence is concerned with other and perhaps more important matters such as how to put a stop to the waste and

destruction of the planet, how to persuade human beings not to slaughter one another by the million, for the skills of acquisition have reached a point of efficiency and ruthless indifference to human want that have become ominous and frightening to men of reason. What are *they* now thinking about? How might it be possible to redirect the energies of the human race?

The thinking of the best minds of the time is no longer political, but psychological and moral. There is a slowly gathering and strengthening reaction to the amoral stance of the scientific mind—amoral not because scientists are not decent human beings but because of what happens as a result of the institutionalization of scientific theories about man and nature. There seems a sense in which we are no longer deeply concerned with how we design our relationships with one another in political terms, but with how we think about ourselves. Old questions, thought to be settled and disposed of for a century or more, are again coming to the fore. It is slowly being recognized that we behave more or less according to who or what we think we are. But we return to such questions with a sophistication that we have never had before, or so it seems. We move cautiously yet inevitably in a philosophical direction. The question of "proof" remains a barrier, yet we still proceed, since what a human thinks about himself—what he is, where he came from—can hardly be demonstrated but is nonetheless the most important of his thoughts. The public truths of science, we are concluding, have only secondary value. Our *vision* makes us what we are and determines what we do. So we must think about these things.

Little by little, therefore, philosophers who dare to raise such questions are getting a hearing. In his recent book, *Death and Consciousness* (McFarland, 1985), David Lund (of Bemidji University in Minnesota) proposes that "life after death may very well be a reality and, at any rate, is not ruled out by any scientific findings or compelling arguments of a logical or philosophical

nature." We may have no "proofs" of another life, but we do have some evidence, even probabilities, and these "may justify belief without conferring a guarantee." Twenty or thirty years ago, almost no academic could have published such a statement. The mood of the times is changing. We are, in short, becoming free to think about the essential nature of our beinghood.

Prof. Lund offers this criticism of the scientific rules which shut out important considerations:

Since the very method of science leads it to attend to only the physical aspects of nature, as they are the only ones which can be publicly observed, the scientific study of man will be confined to an investigation of his bodily existence and characteristics. The scientific method requires the scientist to take the position of an outside or external observer. When a scientist looks at another human being. . . only the person's physical characteristics and bodily behavior are publicly observable and thus accessible to the scientific method. Even the psychologist, if he ignores the testimony of introspection, will confine himself to this external approach. Such exclusive preoccupation with the "outside" . . . leads to doubts about the very existence of the "inner" self or "I"—that which the person finds himself to be in the process of having any experience. The concept of the physical or "scientific" object, the public object viewed from without, creeps surreptitiously into our conceptual framework and shapes our concept of what it is for something to be real. We come to think of reality in physical terms, and everything else tends to slip between the meshes of our conceptual net. Thus it is not surprising that, rather uncritically, we come to think of ourselves as bodies.

Writing in *Human Nature and the Human Condition* in 1959, years before the present rush of interest in the self, Joseph Wood Krutch remarked that we think of ourselves as no more than animals which "originated as the result of a mechanical or chemical accident," made what we are by "the struggle for existence" and "natural selection." He concluded:

Thus though man has never before been so complacent about what he has, or so confident of his ability to *do* whatever he sets his mind upon, it is at

the same time true that he has never before accepted so low an estimate of what he *is*. That same scientific method which enabled him to create his wealth and to unleash the power he wields, has, he believes, enabled biology and psychology to explain him away—or at least to explain away whatever used to seem unique or even in any way mysterious. . . . Truly he is, for all his wealth and power, poor in spirit.

Another pioneer, A. H. Maslow, wrote in 1968:

Many people are beginning to discover that the physicalistic, mechanistic model was a mistake and that it has led us . . . where? To atom bombs. To a beautiful technology of killing, as in the concentration camps. To Eichmann. An Eichmann cannot be refuted with a positivistic philosophy or science. He just cannot; and he never got it until the moment he died. As far as he was concerned, nothing was wrong; he had done a good job. I point out that professional science and professional philosophy are dedicated to the proposition of forgetting about the values, excluding them. This, therefore, must lead to Eichmann, to atom bombs, and to who knows what!

For such reasons, the Delphic and Socratic rule, Man, know thyself, has become far more than remembered classical rhetoric. But we know hardly anything about how to "discover the self." In *Death and Consciousness*, David Lund says:

We cannot photograph it or take physical measurements of it. . . . to think clearly about our own nature, we must abandon the perspective of the external observer and concentrate upon our experience of self-consciousness. We must introspect or turn within to our own states of consciousness in our effort to discover the existence and nature of the self. At this point we must leave behind the scientific method, insofar as this method is applicable only to publicly observable phenomena. For self-consciousness is directly observable only by the one whose self-consciousness it is. No one else can directly apprehend our conscious states. . . . It is the most fundamental feature of our world.

Even the biologists have begun to think and inquire along these lines. In a recent review of books on heredity (on Darwin and Mendel), zoology professor R. D. Lewontin (of Harvard) remarks:

. . . I think first of the impending visit of a friend, then I strain to hear which Scarlatti sonata my wife is practicing, and then I return again to think about the relation of ego and mental images. I have passed among three very different mental states all under the control of the willful "I." Some kind of information about all these states must all the while have been resident in my *brain*, but only one at a time was in my *mind*. What chooses among them? "I." The central problem remains for neurobiology: What is "I"?

The brooding intellects of our time, the minds that will give focus to future events, are not focused on politics, on the relations of the self with others, but upon understanding both the paradoxes and wonders of the self—the relations of the self with itself and the resulting contests and struggles. We have understood our age at least to this extent, that we see that we construct our world according to how we think about our interests and what we want for a future. The project, then, is not political reform and the invention of a better social system, but recognition of the nature of our being and the extent to which we are the creators of our own destiny. And already we are suspecting that this is a very ancient quest and beginning to listen to certain ancient thoughts on who and what we are.

## *REVIEW*

### HELPING. . . HERETICKING

A BOOK that we started out being a bit suspicious of—for several reasons—but then decided, after reading in it, that it deserves attention, is *How Can I Help?* (Knopf, paperback, \$5.95) by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman. Ram Dass has background as a psychologist and a therapist, Paul Gorman has studied philosophy and been active in politics. They wrote the book mainly, it appears, for people in the helping professions, and despite our suspicions it seems filled with sound thinking. It should certainly help people who want to be of help.

What sort of help do they need? After our reading, we should say philosophical common sense based on a true ground of assumption. What are professional helpers up against? Each one, no doubt, would have a somewhat different story, but an extract from a paper by a young social worker, after a summer out in the field, might be an illustration. This young woman was assigned to a Canadian rural area with a large Indian population. In her report she said:

It has really been made clear to me how vital it is for a worker to have a good clear idea of her or his own personal values and beliefs. Everyone has a bias, the most you can do is be fully aware of it. I have found that my most basic spiritual, material, and political ideals are greatly challenged by the work. . . . I would be sure to check out the full implications of the mandate in practice before I took a job. . . . I have found my personal life-experience to be a liability as well as an asset. I tend to identify too strongly with the people I am serving, and am reluctant to make judgments. As this is essentially a native community, or collection of communities, the importance of cultural differences—being aware of them—trying to learn about different cultural patterns and learning to adjust one's ideas and practice has proved to be vital. The issues here are incredibly complex: one is dealing with a people who have been victims of a long history of cultural and literal genocide, oppression in theory and practice by governments, and are the result of a system which has both created and sustained dependence on outside sources for nearly all services.

These forces have created symptoms of social and cultural decay such as multi-generational sexual and physical abuse as well as widespread abuse of alcohol, drugs, and other substances (Lysol, aerosol sprays, gasoline, etc.). The range and extent of social problems is mind-boggling. . . . The work required of a frontline case-worker seems to me to consist of interfering and meddling around with people's lives and offering inadequate "services" which are too little and too late, as well as days of mindless paper work.

Yet the case-worker also has opportunities to be of authentic help. In any case, the Dass-Gorman book would somehow prove useful, and not only to social workers. The writers are highly skillful in language, they know how to dramatize, and what they say, often in striking and original ways, usually makes a great deal of sense. In short, the book is interesting as well as good. For this reason you are not put off by their obvious skill. For example, one little section starts out:

There's one thing I've learned in twenty-five years or so of political organizing: People don't like to be "should" upon. They'd rather discover than be told.

He is speaking of what might be a good thing to say to a meeting of people who are not quite sure how they feel about the "nuclear issue," or other matters. They wonder who is going to talk to them and where he comes from.

Sometimes it's enough just to share information with others: the number of nuclear warheads deployed and poised; the wage rates of women compared to men; the unemployment statistics for minorities; how many children starve to death in a single day. We trust these situations to speak for themselves. Injustice will strike others as injustice has struck us. We're appealing to collective understanding and comparison. It's Us talking it all over, seeing what We need to do.

But much of the time we come into social action—knocking on a door with a petition, addressing a meeting, writing a pamphlet, showing up at a demonstration, or just talking informally—and we're just a little self-righteous. We're convinced we've got something we're "correct" about. We've got our ideology and our scenario: here's how the situation really is, and the facts to back it up, if you'd take the time to read them, and if we all don't do this

there's going to be that, so you better get started, and right away, right now.

Some of the time this attitude is blatant; at other times it's more understanding. But at some level what we're communicating is the feeling that *we know*, others don't, and we've got to Change Minds. Changing Minds is a tricky game, especially when it's being fed with urgency and self-righteousness. There's often an air of superiority in what we say. People instinctively back off. They feel like they're being told, being "should" upon. Social action, they understand intuitively, ought to be fully voluntary if it's to have power and endurance. But we're not quite leaving them enough room when we set about trying to change their minds. We don't have the inclusiveness, the steadiness, the real willingness to listen that is critical at the outset of any action. It's not quite Us—it's this one trying to move that one.

People want to Win, but winning may not be what is really called for. Not the winning that produces losers.

We can't do much with this book except quote it. Our interest is in pointing to the sense it makes, and this is better in the original than at a reviewer's second-hand. For example, the authors say this about Reconciliation:

Reconciliation is not some final tactic, a way to tie up loose strings. Reconciliation is not a peace treaty signed on a battleship. Reconciliation is a continuous state of consciousness. What Lincoln had in mind *throughout* was to save the Union. What Gandhi had in mind *throughout* was to free both colonized and colonials. What King had in mind *throughout* was to liberate everyone from the scourge of racism.

The only way it seems possible to achieve such goals—extraordinarily difficult as they are—is to remember, again and again, who we all are *behind* our terrible conflicts. Somehow we must be able to encompass the paradox that we are, in these battles, both enemy and friend alike. We may be humans with deep differences, but we are all humans, all God's children. In that, we are One. Perhaps we must fight . . . but we must never forget.

We seem, at last, to be outgrowing our Momma-knows-best habit of mind. Dass and Gorman show how easy it is to use other people for the gratification of our own feelings.

Or we may notice how often, in the guise of service, we try to impose our values on another. Perhaps we give them a little sermonette—"Don't you see, you're really God's child, my dear?"—when what they really need, if we'd bother to listen, is just a little empathy—"Yeah, I feel lousy too. Let's take a walk and feel lousy together." When they resist our wise words and don't buy what we're selling, we turn them off: "Well, Lord knows I tried. If they'd only just listen . . ."

Just about every kind of situation and attitude is dealt with in this book, which is hard to find fault with. For suspicious people, this may come as a surprise.

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*Declaration of a Heretic* by Jeremy Rifkin (Routledge & Kegan Paul, paperback, \$7.95) is a book of 140 pages intended by the author to popularize the rising tide of opposition to the scientific world-view. It has two themes—the elaboration of the frightening consequences of what Mr. Rifkin calls the "two great scientific discoveries in this century"—the techniques of nuclear physics and the brash procedures of genetic engineering. The results of the first discovery are well known and the source of immeasurable fears; knowledge of what will grow out of genetic engineering lies mostly in the future, but the author finds the thinking of the experts in this area ominous and irresponsible. His dissent from the conventional beliefs about these discoveries is his qualification as a heretic. He has read widely and writes clearly to show how and why the prevailing beliefs of our time have achieved their preeminence, and to demonstrate what is wrong with them. Broadly stated, his conclusions seem to have full validity, although some thoughtful readers are likely to feel that he reaches them in ways that are too patly righteous, that he may gain a following among readers who don't mind being partisan in spirit so long as they are able to feel moral in tone. His mood and style are indicated by the following:

Today's faith system is the scientific world view. Today's church is the scientific establishment. It is the Nobel laureates and other scientific functionaries

who serve as the defenders of the faith, the standard bearers of the world view of Western civilization. Today's orthodoxy is steeped in the catechism of the Enlightenment. The apostles of truth are no longer Peter, Paul, John, Mark and Luke. They are Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Locke and Darwin. If there is a universal faith today, a faith that supersedes political ideologies, economic philosophies and religious doctrines, it is most assuredly the faith we place in the scientific world view. Its central assumptions have become dogma. We have all been baptized in the precepts of the scientific method. We have all learned to pay homage to the prelates of the scientific academy: the hordes of experts who discover and decipher the "truth" for us.

One can certainly agree with this criticism, but at the same time want more understanding of why the scientific prophets, now to be abandoned, thought as they did. Even in turning away from certain of the Enlightenment assumptions, it would be well to regard their formulators with a sympathy based on a grasp of their motives. For this, Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* would be valuable reading.

As for Mr. Rifkin's polemic against the genetic engineers, a book he lists as one of many for suggested reading would be a valuable supplement—Erwin Chargaff's *Voices in the Labyrinth* (1977). This work is by a biochemist who knows at first hand what the genetic engineers are trying to do, and is equally opposed to it, saying in one place: "Once you can alter the chromosomes at will, you will be able to tailor the Average Consumer, the predictable user of a given soap, the reliable imbiber of a certain poison gas. You will have given humanity a present compared with which the Hiroshima bomb was a friendly Easter egg. You will indeed have touched the ecology of death. I shudder to think in whose image this new man will be made." A conclusion not different from that of Rifkin, the popularizer, yet grounded on another sort of knowledge.



## *COMMENTARY* THE DICTATE OF REASON

IT is of particular interest that, as Bernard Bailyn points out (see page 1), Tom Paine's real point, in *Common Sense*, was not only that "America should declare its independence, but that the whole of organized society and government was stupid and cruel and that it survived only because the atrocities it systematically imposed on humanity had been papered over with a veneer of mythology and superstition that numbed the mind and kept people from rising against the evils that oppressed them." This analysis of Paine's motivation was confirmed by publication of *The Age of Reason*, which he began in France, before Robespierre imprisoned him. This book was an attack on Biblical Christianity and the connection of religion with the vulgarities of politics. He completed it during his ten months in prison, and its publication made him many enemies in both England and the United States. His attack on superstition and his Deist advocacy of a pure morality founded on natural religion turned the many literal believers against him.

What would a man of Paine's penetrating intelligence have to say today about the country he did so much to bring to independent birth? Would he get in line, now, to support the centralizing tendencies which are so manifest at present, and the military policy which has ignored the warnings of both Washington and Eisenhower? Or would he endorse the views of the bioregionalists and share the opinions of William Appleman Williams, a distinguished historian who believes that the Articles of Confederation might be an improvement on the Constitution in an age when nuclear power has turned all the large nations into a threat to both mankind and the planet?

The uses made of power by these countries are in no way the ground of an argument in behalf of effective national defense, but rather the basis for declaring the nation-state obsolete. Only fear

and habit stand in the way of open recognition of this obvious lesson of contemporary history. Only much smaller political units—units marked out by the topography, climate, and watersheds of regions—with natural inclination to collaborate with Nature, and preserve her treasures and resources and health, would be proper replacements of national states. How can the logic of this view be made more persuasive?

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### A DESTRUCTIVE SYSTEM

NORMAN COUSINS, for many years editor of the *Saturday Review*, now works in the medical school of the University of California in Los Angeles, to humanize the education of future doctors. In the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* for last Oct. 6, he tells about students and their problems, saying:

Student suicides and emotional breakdowns are on the increase throughout the United States. Not all these disasters are the consequence of academic pressures, drug abuse and complicated personal relationships also take their toll. Nonetheless, scholastic failure is a major problem of American youth, shattering many students' sense of self-worth.

A student and friend told Mr. Cousins about a classmate who had been getting poor grades. Panicked by feelings of failure, he was loading a revolver to shoot himself with when the friend happened to come in his room. This suicide was prevented by intervention, but the general rash of self-destructiveness goes on. Cousins asks: How responsible are the schools for this trend?

Were there unreasonable pressures on some students? Had the school been responsive to the emotional needs of students confronted with academic demands? Are grades overemphasized as indicators of academic success? Have schools generally allowed competition for high marks to obscure the basic purpose of education?

Schools are not sensitive individuals. They are institutions which reflect the goals of the society which surrounds them and gives them support. Only individuals here and there, aware as Mr. Cousins is aware, of the desperate states of mind fostered by those goals are able to temper the effect of the social and academic environment. Some day, one hopes, such individuals will have charge of the schools and colleges, but today the pressure on students is unremitting. Cousins writes:

True, being dropped from school isn't the end of the world. Thousands of successful people in the United States don't have college degrees. But today's recruiters from the business or professional world want top students—and *top* means academic

standing. The job market is the most competitive it's been since the Depression. Anyone hoping for a career in medicine, law, engineering, accounting, education, communications or business management knows the bread-and-butter value of high grades.

When it comes to qualifying for jobs—most jobs—we have a measuring society. Who does the measuring? Bureaucrats who are believed to be good at it. But what can be measured in a human being, although having some importance, is far from being the best criterion of excellence and worthiness. As a matter of fact, the best doctors are not the ones who got the highest marks in medical school, but men and women able to enter into the lives of their patients and to help them to do what needs to be done. This quality is almost impossible to grade. It comes out only in practice. A similar rule will apply to the other professions. This can be pointed out to bureaucrats, but it won't much affect their work. They can't measure the quality of a student's character, but only certain intellectual skills. Mr. Cousins comments on this and tells a story:

Most tests, for example, measure ability to memorize but seldom evaluate what's most important: the ability to find and use reliable information; the ability to think creatively.

An engineering journal recently reported an episode at an Ohio university. A physics test question asked students to determine the height of a building with the aid of a barometer. One student answered: "I would take the barometer to the top of the building. Then I would tie a string to the barometer and lower the barometer to the ground. I would mark the string at the point where the barometer touched the ground. Then I would pull up the barometer and measure the length of the string. The length is the height of the building." The professor, admitting that the answer was not incorrect, asked the student to apply a more academically acceptable scientific principle.

The student provided three more inventive answers, all correct, but none solved the problem using the principle the professor had in mind. Some teachers, no doubt, would be tempted to give the student a failing grade. Others, though, would feel lucky to have an original thinker and would admire his lively intelligence.

Facts are perishable. In medicine, the understanding of disease and treatments changes constantly. In history, interpretations of events change. Public perceptions and philosophies change.

Schools should stress how to deal with changing knowledge, not reward the memorization of facts.

Cousins has another tale:

The story is told of an exam in a Harvard philosophy class taught by William James that called for an essay on comparative values in philosophy. Gertrude Stein was in the class and turned in a one-sentence essay—"I don't feel much like writing about philosophy today"—and received a top grade. Several students who submitted full papers but who received lesser grades questioned James on his grading of Stein's answer.

"One of the prime values of philosophy is honesty," he replied. "She demonstrated it."

It must be admitted that if this attitude prevailed among professors, the way they taught and tested their students would absolutely wreck the university system and put all the graders and testers out of jobs. In this case, then, James was subversive. He was also subversive in other respects, but the steamroller of orthodoxy in the higher learning put an end to this influence. Yet James, it must also be said, is still a living force in education and psychology, however ignored by the rank and file.

One other thing about academic life needs to be noted. Bar exams in all the states are noted for their toughness, and candidates sometimes have to take the exam two or three times to qualify as lawyers. We know a bright lady who, after raising a family of three children went back to school to be a lawyer. She got herself ready for the bar exam—and flunked. She knew the stuff and couldn't understand why. She told a wise old attorney about her experience, and he explained: "You knew and wrote too much in your answers, which became a burden to the examiner, so he failed you. Next time, write shorter answers," which she did, and passed with flying colors.

The moral is, in our society, it is well to be smart but not *too* smart—be conventionally smart and you'll get along. The conventionally smart in physics design our nuclear weapons, while the really smart—the humanely intelligent and responsible—will have nothing to do with this activity. The latter are few, the others many, but the hope of the human race lies with the moral insight of the few.

Parents of bright children have this to consider in bringing up their young. They need at least not to put road-blocks in front of the children who are apparently destined to join and work with the few, even though they may never enjoy "happy," conventional lives.

Americans do, it seems, learn from experience. In *Smithsonian* for last November, Mark M. Kindley tells about the 350 one-room schoolhouses in Nebraska that still survive, due partly to the efforts of parents who see the benefits of small schools and fight to keep them in existence. He says:

One-room schools *are* an endangered species . . . For more than a hundred years, one-room schools have been systematically shut down and their students sent away to centralized schools. As recently as 1930 there were 149,000 one-room schools in the United States. By 1950 their number had been reduced to 60,000. By 1960 there were 20,000. By 1970 there were 1,800. Of the nearly 800 remaining one-room schools, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than 350 are in Nebraska. The rest are scattered through South Dakota, California, Wyoming, North Dakota, Alaska, Washington, Vermont and a few other states that have on their road maps wide-open spaces between towns.

The writer of this article has visited one-room schools, talked to the teachers and students, and tells about how they work, which is, on the whole, better than the big consolidated schools. A researcher remarks: "Where there is a choice, people choose to keep the small schools." Mark Kindley reports:

The students do well. Nebraska, with the greatest number of one-room schools, ranks fourth on standardized achievement tests compared with other states. The high school in Valentine, which draws about a quarter of its students from one-room schools, ranks above average within Nebraska. Each year almost 70 per cent of its graduates go to college.

The County Superintendent says: "I don't think you could find a better education unless you went back to Plato and Socrates and the days when you had tutors."

## FRONTIERS

### How to Commemorate Orwell

BASIC thinking about family and community is the content of an interview with Griscom Morgan, Arthur E. Morgan's son by his second wife, Lucy, who, like his father, has given most of his life to working in behalf of community in the United States and elsewhere. He is actively engaged in the work of Community Service, Inc., in Yellow Springs, Ohio, which Arthur Morgan founded in 1940. What does Community Service do? Arthur Morgan's biographer, Walter Kahoe, says:

Its purpose is to serve as a focus, information center, and rallying point for research on the nature and role of the small community and to help plan and carry out community development and group activities. It was a need not being adequately served by an existing agency or institution. Community Service offers advisory services to ventures already in existence or merely trying to get themselves born. When money is available to pay for services, Community Service receives compensation. But, generally speaking, the enterprise is supported through contributions.

In a notable article in the *Atlantic Monthly* (February, 1942), "The Community: The Seedbed of Society," Arthur Morgan said:

For the preservation and transmission of the fundamentals of civilization, vigorous, wholesome community life is imperative. Unless many people live and work in the intimate relationships of community life, there never can emerge a truly unified nation, or a community of mankind. If I do not love my neighbor whom I know, how can I love the human race, which is but an abstraction? If I have not learned to work with a few people, how can I be effective with many?

In the interview with Griscom Morgan, conducted by Steven Ames and printed in *Rain* for September-October of last year, Griscom spoke of the interdependence of the family and the small community:

For scores of thousands of years, in hundreds of thousands of societies, all kinds of experiments have taken place, yet the biological family still remains a universal in human society. . . . We need to start with

what is the fundamental nature of human society and to go on from there. When we do that, we have tremendous possibilities ahead of us.

All the evidence I have seen—and I think there is tremendous evidence—leads to the conclusion that the biological family cannot exist without the larger association of the small community *and* that the small community by and large does not survive without the biological family. If you have the mass rearing of children, for example, as compared to their being dealt with individually, some of the fundamental qualities of individuality are lost. . . .

American society is characterized, says Robin Williams, by polarization between the idea of the individual as supreme and the society as supreme. Anthropologist Paul Radin said that the stable, competent societies are those in which this is not conceived of as a dichotomy. That is to say, both are sacred—the individual and the unities—and neither at the expense of the other.

After speaking of an Antioch graduate who has settled in an isolated folk society in Ohio, Griscom Morgan said that such capable individuals need to strengthen societies of this character, while the societies should recognize their need for such individuals. And "all this must be done in an atmosphere of mutual respect instead of mutual exploitation." Moreover—

We need folk colleges—people's colleges—in such places. Not just for intellectuals or whites, but to do what Highlander College has done for Appalachia and the South. If we had folk colleges to which the working class and rural people from across a region could come and have association with the intellectuals—then return to their local communities with the strength and conviction of their own culture—these different groups of the common people could reinforce each other.

We can't hold things together—and I think the Marxists are right here—we can't get to first base with intentional communities, with the middle class and intellectuals, however competent they are in economics and technology, if we've left the common people out of consideration. And yet the Marxists are all haywire in so many ways. They have no economy that works right. They're essentially authoritarian. It tends to be state capitalism, which is not a real socialist model.

I think one of our major contributions here at Community Service has been the understanding that capitalism is not the market system. Capitalism is death to the market system. The market system is what characterizes healthy folk societies all over the world. People have no understanding of why these healthy economies were wiped out by capitalism. They don't know how an economy comes to be dominated by capital. . . .

I think something like what happened to the Roman Empire will happen here: all kinds of groups, all kinds of movements, developing a new morale out of the demoralization of the old. So along with the fact that all kinds of old orders and regionalisms and localisms will be dying, there will be larger fellowships, transcending these regionalisms and localisms, which will have something deeply in common, that will be reinforcing, that will give a new beginning.

A while ago a German journalist came to study in the United States. He hadn't been here before. When he was through, someone asked him: "Isn't this a terrible place?" He replied: "I'm tremendously excited about the United States. The United States is just being born. What you see are just the dying remnants of Europe. But what's coming is a wonderful thing and it's just being born out of the ashes of the old order."

What have we to achieve or overcome in order for this birth to take place? A clue was given in the final paragraph of an article by Christopher Lasch in *Katallagete* (Summer 1985 issue) in which he said:

I do not mean to minimize the importance of political freedom or the forces that threaten it. But political freedom itself rests on a sense of selfhood that is growing more and more difficult to sustain. The conclusion prompted both by a review of the early theory of totalitarianism and by a consideration of recent cultural developments is that consumerism and the new sense of selfhood encouraged by consumerism are more pressing issues in 1984, at least in the West, than the future of political freedom. The greatest danger we face is not so much the decline or collapse of political freedom as the gradual weakening of its cultural and psychological foundations. The situation is not Orwellian in the usual sense, and a focus on 1984, the year and the novel, does very little to clarify it unless it helps to recall some of the underlying preoccupations behind the early theory of totalitarianism: the collective

crossing of a hitherto unapproachable moral barrier, signified by the death camps; the decline of the guilty conscience; the collapse of a public world; the amputation of the soul. It was Orwell's insight into the slow death of the spirit, not his apocalyptic fantasy of total terror, that marked him as a prophet; and we can best commemorate him by addressing ourselves to the work of moral and spiritual renewal instead of diverting ourselves with the prospect, at once terrifying and titillating, of unlimited political power.