

## AN IMPOSSIBLE ENTERPRISE

A READER has offered two suggestions for articles during this year, in the form of answers to questions: (1) How do we go about inculcating or cultivating *vision* in people? (2) There is so much destructive anger and resentment in America today—what are the sources; and how do we train or educate so that people will reject those who appeal (pander?) to their fears and insecurities?

Some embarrassment is appropriate in any attempt to take such questions on, since they seem to encompass all that is worth talking about in the human undertaking. What, to begin with, is "vision"? The dictionary provides four meanings of the word, including "something seen in a trance or ecstasy," but the meaning intended by our correspondent seems best expressed by "unusual discernment or foresight." He means that people who see clearly do what is right and good. Do we know how to teach clear perception? The answer must be yes and no. It is more or less possible to establish in the young habits of careful observation—we know something about the *techniques* of seeing—but this may not lead to vision in the larger sense of the question. In fact, that "larger sense" remains undetermined unless we define it in terms of its assumed broad effects, rather than in itself. We shall all probably agree that what leads to truth, beauty, and goodness in human behavior *must* result from vision; vision, in short, is an intuitive value, not, or not yet, scientifically defined. No doubt our reader is concerned with the means of generating the *capacity* for vision, rather than proposing that we tell others what are the ends and means that vision will reveal. For, after all, in our present state we have little or no agreement on what we see or on what it may be possible to see (meaning by "see" the vision of the mind). Yet such possibility cannot be neglected in considering how vision might be fostered or developed. After all, one

must take a position on what is real, what is good, and how cause and effect work, in order to say anything at all about vision, and nearly everything else. Plato's Dialogues are perhaps the best evidence of this, since his question was virtually the same as our correspondent's—Can virtue be taught?

Some passages from Ortega's *Man and Crisis* should make the question a bit more concrete:

Man, every man, must at every moment be deciding for the next moment what he is going to do, what he is going to be. This decision only he can make; it is not transferable; no one can substitute for me in the risk of deciding for myself, in deciding on my life. When I put myself in another's hands, it is I who have decided and who goes on deciding that he will direct me; thus I do not transfer the decision itself, but merely its mechanism. In place of deriving the norm of my conduct out of that mechanism which is my own intelligence, I take advantage of the mechanism of another's intelligence. . . .

Man cannot take a single step without anticipating more or less clearly his entire future, what he is going to be; that is, what he has decided to be throughout his life. But this means that man, who is always obliged to do something in the circumstances that surround him, has in deciding what he is going to do no other course than to pose to himself the problem of his own individual being. When we meet a neighbor it does not take great perspicacity to note how he is guided by that self which he himself has chosen, but which he never sees clearly, which always remains a problem to him. For when each one of us asks himself what he is going to be, he has no choice but to face the problem of man's being, of what it is that man in general can be and what is it that he must be. But this, in turn, obliges us to fashion for ourselves an idea, to find out somehow what this environment is, what these surroundings are, this world in which we live. The things about us do not of themselves tell us what they are. We must discover that for ourselves. But this—to discover the self of things and of one's own being, the being of everything—this is none other than man's intellectual business, a task which is therefore

not an extrinsic and superfluous addition to man's life, but a constituent part of that life.

These ideas are essential elements in whatever we conclude about the "inculcation" or encouragement of vision. While an individual may have great vision without conscious reference to such matters, those who concern themselves with "teaching" need to consider these rather splendid generalizations. They represent the conditions under which one must work. Ortega continues, adding another condition:

As soon as we find ourselves living, we find ourselves not only among things but also among men, not only on earth, but also in society. And those men, that society into which we have fallen by the process of being alive, already has its own interpretation of life, its repertory of ideas, or ruling convictions about the universe. So that what we can call "the thought of our time" enters to form part of our surroundings; it envelops us, it penetrates into us, it carries us. One of the factors that make up our destiny is the mass of circumambient convictions in which we find ourselves. Without realizing it, we find ourselves installed in that network of ready-made solutions for the problems of our lives. . . . from the very moment of birth—in family life, in school, in reading, and in social intercourse—we are constantly trying to receive and absorb those collective convictions into our veins before, almost always before, we have become aware of the problems for which they are, or pretend to be, solutions. So that when we come to feel actual distress in the face of a vital question, and we really want to find its solution, to orient ourselves with respect to it, not only must we struggle with the problem, but we find ourselves caught within the solutions previously received and must also struggle with them. The very language in which we will have to think our own thoughts is itself an alien way of thinking, a collective philosophy, an elementary interpretation of the life which so closely imprisons us.

This seems a fairly comprehensive account of the environmental side of the human condition—the circumstances, outer and inner, in which we find ourselves. But various things—actually, an infinitude of things—could be added to the account. For example, the humanistic psychologist, Sidney Jourard, has put the contribution of most individuals succinctly:

As children we are, and we act, our real selves. We say what we think, we scream for what we want, we tell what we did. . . . very soon . . . the growing child learns to display a highly expurgated version of his self to others. I have coined the term "public self" to refer to the concept of oneself which one wants others to believe. We monitor, censor our behavior and disclosures in order to construct in the mind of the other person a concept of ourselves which we want him to have. . . . We say that we feel things we do not feel. . . . We say that we believe things we do not believe. . . . We have grown up.

But these misinterpretations of ourselves are not entirely our own doing. Jourard also says:

In our culture we are trained from an early age not to pay too much attention to our inner selves, to our feelings, wishes, and needs, but are instead urged to listen to the commands of others or to the promptings of conscience. By the time most of us reach adulthood, we have lost intimate contact with our actual selves.

Yet "our culture" also provides us with a place on earth. We have affection and care from our parents, with varying equivalents of these qualities from the community into which we are born, and again in great variability certain benefits, often lacking elsewhere, from the national government or state. The good things we are used to have hardly any existence for us, being taken for granted. As Barbara Tuchman remarks in a recent book: "I feel bewildered when I hear that easy, empty slogan 'Power to the People!' Is there any country in the world whose people have more than ours?"

How, then, can we get at the factors, objective as well as subjective, that might increase clarity of vision? A look at the lives of those who by common assent possessed notable vision should help. And a look at the psychology of a researcher, Abraham Maslow, who spent his life studying the qualities and development of unusual people—the self-actualizers—he found to have vision might fill out the picture. Among those accounted to have vision we might select Thoreau, Gandhi, and Einstein. What do we know of them? Well, we know that from youth

they resisted the environmental influences spoken of by Ortega and Jourard. One has only to read Thoreau on Civil Disobedience and his essay, "Life Without Principle," to see how selective he was in his choice of principles and of nourishment for his mind. "If," he said, "I am to be a thoroughfare, I prefer that it be of the mountain brooks, the Parnassian streams, and not the town-sewers."

There is inspiration, that gossip which comes to the ear of the attentive mind from the courts of heaven. There is the profane and stale revelation of the bar-room and the police court. The same ear is fitted to receive both communications. Only the character of the hearer determines to which it shall be open, and to which closed. I believe that the mind can be permanently profaned by the habit of attending to trivial things, so that all our thoughts shall be tinged with triviality. Our very intellect shall be macadamized, as it were,—its foundation broken into fragments for the wheels of travel to roll over; and if you would know what will make the most durable pavement, surpassing rolled stones, spruce blocks, and asphaltum, you have only to look into some of our minds which have been subjected to this treatment so long.

If we have thus desecrated ourselves,—as who has not?—the remedy will be wariness and devotion to reconsecrate ourselves, and make once more a fane of the mind. We should treat our minds, that is, ourselves, as innocent and ingenuous children, whose guardians we are, and be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention. Read not the Times. Read the Eternities. Conventionalities are at length as bad as impurities. ("Life Without Principle.")

Gandhi, who found in Thoreau confirmation of his own vision, had to meet objections to his hope of teaching non-violence to "the masses," who were said to be "prone to anger, hate, ill-will." He said in his paper, *Harijan* (Nov. 4, 1939), replying to the charge that masses of people "are known to fight for the most trivial things":

They are, and yet I think they can practice non-violence for the common good. Do you think that the thousands of women that collected contraband salt had ill-will against anyone? They knew that the

Congress or Gandhi had asked them to do certain things, and they did those things in faith and hope. To my mind the most perfect demonstration of non-violence was in Champaran. Did the thousands of *ryots* [peasants] who rose up in revolt against the agrarian evils harbour the least ill-will against the Government or the planters? Their belief in non-violence was unintelligent even as the belief in the earth being round with many is unintelligent. But their belief in their leader was genuine, and that was enough.

Five years earlier he had said in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Aug. 3, 1934):

There is no *prima facie* reason why under non-violence the mass, if disciplined, should be incapable of showing the discipline which in organized warfare a fighting force normally does. Besides, a non-violent general has this special advantage: he does not require thousands of leaders to successfully carry on his fight. The non-violent message does not require so many for transmission. The example of a few true men or women if they have fully imbibed the spirit of non-violence is bound to infect the whole mass in the end.

Again, he said in *Harijan* (Nov. 4, 1939):

I would ask you to read *Hind Swaraj* [Gandhi's first book, published in 1909] with my eyes and see therein how to make India non-violent. You cannot build non-violence on a factory civilization, but it can be built on self-contained villages. . . . Rural economy as I have conceived it, eschews exploitation altogether, and exploitation is the essence of violence. You have, therefore, to be rural-minded before you can be non-violent.

Of Einstein, his son-in-law, Dimitri Marianoff, related that one evening in Berlin, after the rest of the family had gone to bed, Marianoff asked him:

"How is it, Albert, that you arrived at your theory?"

"In vision," he answered.

In another passage in his book (*Einstein*, Doubleday, 1944), Marianoff records a different reply.

Einstein would never bind himself to an established formulated viewpoint. If life shows him today a better one he will unhesitatingly accept it.

Perhaps one of the finest tributes of his career was paid him by Dr. Millikan, who said, "The biggest element in Einstein's greatness is his humility, a willingness to change today what he said yesterday."

When one of the professors of Cal Tech once asked him how he came to formulate the Theory of Relativity, Einstein quickly replied: "By refusing to accept an axiom." Webster's definition of an axiom is, "proposition or principle that men universally accept." There you have Einstein.

Of equal interest is what Einstein said about the response of the American public during his first visit to this country. He spoke deprecatingly of how some individuals are admired "beyond all bounds just because people attribute to them superhuman abilities of spirit and character."

This very thing [he went on] became my fate and there actually exists a grotesque contrast between the capability and accomplishment people credit me, and what I really am. The consciousness of this fact would be unbearable to me, if there were not *one* beautiful consolation therein—it is a gratifying sign of our age—so often criticized for being materialistic, that it makes heroes of men whose goals rest upon purely spiritual and moral bases. This proves that knowledge and righteousness are rated, by a large part of humanity, higher than possessions or power. In an especially high degree, according to my experience, does this idealistic attitude prevail in America, so often described as a particularly materialistic nation. . . .

In the chapter, "Fusions of Facts and Values," in *Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Viking, 1971), Maslow spoke of two conclusions he had reached from his study of self-actualizing people, saying that they were (1) "very good perceivers of reality and truth, and also (2) that they were generally unconfused about right and wrong, and made ethical decisions more quickly and more surely than average people." Finding his second conclusion something of a puzzle, he went on to discuss what might explain it:

What I have called b-cognition, the perception of the Being, the otherness, or the intrinsic nature of the person or things, occurs more often in healthier people and seems to be not only a perception of the deeper *facticity* but also at the same time, of the *oughtiness* of the object. That is to say, oughtiness is

an *intrinsic* aspect of deeply perceived facticity; it is itself a fact to be perceived.

This capacity is surely an aspect of vision. Maslow continues:

This oughtiness, demand character, or requiredness or built-in request-for-action, seems to affect only those people who can see clearly the intrinsic nature of the percept. Therefore, B-cognition can lead to moral sureness and decisiveness, in just about the same sense that the high IQ can lead to a clear conception of a complicated set of facts or in about the same sense that a constitutionally sensitive aesthetic perceiver tends to see very clearly what color-blind people cannot see or what other people do not see. It makes no difference that one million color-blind people cannot see that the rug is colored green. They may think it is colored gray, but this will make no difference to the person who clearly, vividly, and unmistakably perceives the truth of the matter.

Because healthier, more perceptive people are less oughtblind—because they can let themselves perceive what the facts wish, what they call for, what they suggest, demand or beg for—because they can therefore permit themselves to be Taoistically guided by the facts—they will therefore have less trouble with all value decisions that rest in the nature of reality, or that are part of the nature of reality. . . . One finds what is right for oneself by listening carefully and Taoistically to one's inner voices, by listening in order to let oneself be molded, guided, directed.

Now, about teaching or "inculcating"—in this we accept the counsel of Thoreau, who said early in *Walden*:

I have lived some thirty years on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors. They have told me nothing, and probably cannot tell me anything to the purpose. Here is life, an experiment to a great extent untried by me; but it does not avail me that they have tried it.

One must do it by oneself, he is saying; vision cannot be taught; yet it certainly helps to read Thoreau!

In the second part of *Walden* ("Higher Laws") he tells about his gradual abandonment of hunting, then of fishing, yet when his friends asked

him about their sons, he said, yes, let them hunt, "remember that it was one of the best parts of my education."

We cannot but pity the boy who has never fired a gun; he is no more humane, while his education has been sadly neglected. . . . Such is often the young man's introduction to the forest, and the most original part of himself. He goes thither at first as a hunter and fisher, until at last, if he has the seeds of a better life in him, he distinguishes his proper objects, as a poet or naturalist it may be, and leaves the gun and fish-pole behind. The mass of men are still and always young in this respect.

Vision-in-the-making, it seems, is a private, individual affair, not to be outlined or hastened by others. Yet there must be ways to make an environment hospitable to vision. If we cannot have an assembly line for visionary production, we can try to make clear-seeing less expensive for those inclined to pursue it, and at least establish for ourselves some of the conditions that have been suggested casually or otherwise, by those for whom vision became a natural thing.

## *REVIEW*

### THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

IN his books on philosophy—which come out with surprising frequency—Jacob Needleman shows that the most important thing in such works is the stance of the writer. As stance in serious inquiry changes, everything else, including the subject-matter, changes, and all that has been previously said needs to be revised. Needleman's stance is that of an insistent questioner, although with positive intentions. You get the impression from reading him that he is making periodic reports on his own search for truth and meaning. These become especially valuable by reason of the writer's questing imagination, his extensive background in the literature of what may be termed "religious psychology," and the way in which he distinguishes between his firm and his tentative conclusions.

There is a sense in which Needleman does things with the problems of philosophy that no one else has done in the present or recent past. He is looking for answers to the great questions, and without embarrassment. He has no pretensions to olympian objectivity, usually borrowed from the scientists of fifty years ago. He is looking for "the truth," and sees nothing to be shy about in pursuing this search. He finds it neither naive nor old-fashioned to revive questions that have either been taken for granted or ignored for generations, even centuries.

This is the spirit in all his books, and pre-eminently in the volume we have for review—*Consciousness and Tradition* (Crossroad, 1982, \$14.95). The keynote is given in an early chapter:

For a contemporary individual, searching not for a new conceptual definition of religion, but for the secret of how to live, the fundamental message of the religious traditions is that man *does not know himself*. He knows neither the extent of his weaknesses nor the possibilities of his greatness. Thus, at the heart of all the sacred traditions of the world there have existed methods and practices by which man can become

directly acquainted with *both* the animal and the divinity within him.

How can he speak so confidently, as though this human duality were well established? It is well established for Needleman. For some it is given by intuition. To this he has added a close study of Plato's allegory of the Cave:

As we know, the inner human condition life in the cave, is described as a state of affairs in which the lower element in man, the multiform desires and fears, rules the higher elements, *thumos* and *nous*. Unregenerate man spends his life as a pawn of these desires and fears (the appetitive element) which themselves do not seek knowledge, but only a sort of gratification much like the scratching of an itch.

This idea of the passive submission to the appetitive is what lies at the basis of Plato's derogation of sensory experience. That is, it is this particular sort of passivity—the very opposite of self-mastery—that characterizes unregenerate man's sensory life. Man's immediate contact with the world is not just through the senses, but also and equally through the appetitive reaction to the data of the senses. Thus it is not that the senses deceive, it is that appetitive reaction is not in the interest of truth, but only in the interest of its immediate and—with respect to the whole of man—partial gratification.

. . . the very same part of man which automatically seeks pleasure and avoids pain with regard to the data of the senses also seeks pleasure and avoids pain with regard to the concepts of the mind. This general state of affairs, or condition of the psyche, is termed *doxa*, opinion. . . .

But this is not all. Plato tells us that there is in man a certain power or function—perhaps, in modern terms, a certain emotional force—called *thumos* [Plutarch calls it the animal soul], "the spirited element" which, serving the desires and fears, locks man even more deeply in his psychic cave. For without the aid of *thumos* the "multitude in the soul" could never have the strength—simply because it is such a "rabble"—to cause man constantly and passionately to trust in and fight for the goals of this multitude. And this, ironically, in the name of victory, conquest, achievement, "hard struggle," devotion, self-realization, or—most ironically—love.

So that, with *thumos* thus serving the appetites, the force that could help turn the psyche toward genuine freedom and self-mastery plunges man into the darkness of the double lie or veritable lie, a state

of inner deception in which falsehood is passionately and proudly held fast. As Cushman has observed (in *Therapeia*), here lies the source of *hubris*, false pride: the misdirected *dunamis* of the "spirited element" in its attachment to the multiform and inconstant appetitive element. In modern terms it might be possible to speak of this as the origin of the "ego."

Here the complexities of our psychological condition—the endless small as well as large self-deceptions we practice—and our misjudgments and misunderstanding of our fellows seem well accounted for. We are overtaken by an inner longing to break out of this psychic cave, yet continually mistake extension of the cave for freedom. The longing, however, persists. The nuances of Promethean unrest continue, and today, as Needleman points out, Westerners are looking eastward for guidance, to the traditions and disciplines of religions thousands of years old. But what reaches us from the Orient is fragmentary in form, torn from its historic matrix of familiar custom and religious devotion—which, even in the East, may now have been worn away to little more than outward forms. Needleman asks:

Will modern man make use of these fragments of ancient traditions in the same way, that is, for egoistic purposes, that he has made use of the great discoveries about the external world which were made by modern science? Will he relate to his inner environment with the same attitude that he has related to his outer environment? Upon that issue hinges the crisis of the contemporary religious situation.

This questioning conclusion is repeated more broadly in the essay on religion:

In all of this, the overriding question is whether traditional modes of spiritual search can be really effective in a world that has almost totally cut its ties to the ancient ways of living. Are the forms by which truth was once transmitted inapplicable to the conditions of modern life? This question insists itself because among the followers of the new religions one often witnesses the process by which only those parts of ancient traditions are accepted which seem relevant or attractive. *Can part of a tradition lead to the same result that once required the complete tradition?* This has always been a problem in the spiritual

history of mankind: the tendency of the mind to select out of a teaching only those aspects which it likes, while ignoring other aspects which are also necessary, thereby creating a subjective religion out of a carefully interconnected totality. It is one of the most fundamental teachings: man must not create his own god. In any event, many of the extraordinary teachers who have come to the West from Asia are wrestling with this now. Whether they will succeed in transmitting to modern people the workable essence of religion, while adapting the outer aspects to the modern temperament, no one as yet can say.

Certain it is that such questions need to be raised. What, here, is meant by "tradition"? The word has both a high and a low meaning. The low meaning refers to memories of a past way of life, recorded in texts, long repeated in habits, which can hardly be truly revived save by an authentic "reincarnation" of the seed ideas from which the tradition grew. The high meaning would be the conscious, living intentions that created the forms now remembered as tradition.

Another way of thinking about the great ideas known in the past, which have come down to us in the form of scriptures, would be to become so intent on their meaning that their forms of expression are reshaped by us in our conceptual idiom. This would make them no longer "old," but contemporary in the only way that timeless truth can be recognized. Platonists accomplish this in some measure, and Jacob Needleman shows that it can be done. From the stance of this achievement he repeats the encouragements and warnings that he gives to himself. Such is the excellence of his book. He keeps asking his questions—the right ones to ask, it seems to us—while pretending to no authority except that of an alert and experienced mind.

His critique of modern psychology—a field in which he had training—seems quite accurate:

The sense that it is something in ourselves which needs to be attended to is what spurred the development of modern psychology in the early part of this century. But without the eternal truths of the great traditions to guide them, psychologists failed to identify the parts of the human nature that actually

can achieve value and moral power in life. The vision of human wholeness offered by modern psychology thus fell far short of the real integrity that is offered to man as a possibility. The lesser unities—the happiness, self-reliance, and adjustment to life which psychology offered—did not have the crystallized power to withstand the pulls of outer life, the present automatizing effects of technology in our culture. Therapeutic success was not as strong as the forces of our culture and so even the most mentally healthy among us now suffer the same sense of inner emptiness as the rest of the modernized world. Far more is needed within the being of man to meet and master the movements of inner force toward the mechanical parts of human nature where they are sectioned off and fragmented. Plato's ruling principle within man, the spirit, the higher mind, was not found by psychology—of course, it was not even sought.

Yet beginnings were made, as by Karen Horney and Maslow and Carl Rogers. And now the search is continuing in the attention given to religious philosophy by inquirers such as Huston Smith and Jacob Needleman. They see the obstacles ahead, are able to define them with something like precision, and invite their readers to similar individual explorations. Nor do they submit to discouragements—something their ruling principle will not permit.



**COMMENTARY**  
**APOLOGIES TO THOREAU**

WRITING about vision as a central subject—which, in the lead article, is what our correspondent obliged us to do—becomes an awkward undertaking because "vision" is a value-charged word which is so much used, so commonly waved as a flag, that it has become a cliché. And rescuing clichés from their popularization is an awkward if not impossible task. All that can be done is to take the original meaning of the term—if it can any longer be determined—very seriously.

A similar situation exists for the topic of this week's *Frontiers*—Voluntary Simplicity. As simplicity becomes increasingly fashionable, it is glamorously attached to products you can buy at the store—faded blue jeans, for example. A person who finds simplicity natural flees from the atmosphere of such pretensions. Thoreau was a past master at ridiculing them. True simplicity is not something you can "will," but an attitude toward life that grows from within, in consequence, as Gandhi explained, of becoming indifferent to the things that unnecessarily complicate one's life. Having an enduring purpose which eliminates all but what supports that purpose is the secret of simplicity. Thoreau's ironies obliquely convey this realization.

Yet complaints are futile. For any far-reaching change in a mass society, preliminary fashions in the direction of the proclaimed reform are inevitable. The unconscious hypocrisy of these waves of pretension is probably unavoidable. Is, then, "Assume a virtue if you have it not" a good rule?

Probably so. All posturing exacts a penalty, and we may learn from this. Doing something, in contrast with the drift of doing nothing, has its effect. If one takes up bicycling or jogging because of the virtue it exhibits to people on the streets, one's muscle tone nonetheless improves. The rewards of action come, even if, for a time,

they are worn like medals. Little by little, because any exercise or discipline is in principle a good thing, one's thinking may change. One has at least gone through the motions, and the motions may be precursors of a deeper authenticity in the reason for doing them.

One may then be embarrassed for having tried the patience of a Thoreau.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves TEACHERS' VOICES

THERE is so much good sense in the Fall 1982 *Teachers College Record* (525 W. 120 St. Box 103, New York, N.Y.—\$20 a year) that it is difficult to decide which of its two dozen articles to give attention to. In general, the contributors write as teachers, with growing awareness of the ineffectuality of institutional viewpoints on the topic of this issue: Education for Peace and Disarmament. For example, John M. Broughton and Marta K. Zahaykevich, basing their critique of the (anti-nuclear) peace movement on a text by Simone Weil which emphasizes the crucial importance of knowing the causes and effects of war through history, have this to say:

One expects to find in a peace movement a concerted and consensual push toward world peace. However, this expectation has not yet been fulfilled, and does not appear to be a likelihood in the near future. The antinuclear movement has not analyzed or brought into question the underlying assumptions on which the continued stable functioning of state authority depends. Thus, for example, despite its self-identification as a peace movement, it has failed to mount any solid argument against the NATO alliance. This appears to be on account of its tacit valuation of supranational organizations, failing to distinguish military oligopolies from truly emancipatory antinationalist collaborations. This blind spot raises a legitimate fear, that the bulk of the peace movement is not essentially antimilitaristic, but rather represents a nationalistic group disenchanted with specific policies that its government has proposed as guarantees of the national security. Even where there is a genuine commitment to a supranational world order, this is usually conceived positivistically as a global "system." Such a system is equivalent to a single world state. Yet this is exactly our current problem: the existence of two world powers with pretensions to being the first world state. A world state would only reproduce the problems of nationalism on a larger scale, perhaps, one is inclined to muse, via intergalactic war. As Weil noted, it is the constitution of states themselves that is the problem.

A "tacit valuation of supranational organizations" may be one reason for the failure of nuclear pacifists to argue against the NATO alliance, but more important, we think, is the realization that direct attack on the authority of the State would greatly reduce the influence of their movement. How many people are ready to live in a nation which has no army, no armaments?

Pacifists who openly come out for abolition of the military would themselves have to accept Simone Weil's measured, even heroic, pessimism, expressed in her essay, "Theoretical Picture of a Free Society" (in *Oppression and Liberty*, University of Massachusetts Press, 1973). She wrote:

The only possibility of salvation would lie in a methodical cooperation between all, strong and weak, with a view to accomplishing a progressive decentralization of social life; but the absurdity of such an idea strikes one immediately. Such a form of cooperation is impossible to imagine, even in dreams, in a civilization that is based on competition, on struggle, on war. Apart from such cooperation, there is no means of stopping the blind trend of the social machine towards an increasing centralization, until the machine suddenly jams and flies to pieces.

Candid antinationalists have an obligation to write with realism about such a future, but this would, of course, lose them most of their audience. So they object, instead, to "policies," and are able to work up considerable self-deceiving enthusiasm in their devoted "activism." In contrast, Simone Weil goes on:

In such a situation, what can those do who still persist, against all eventualities, in honouring human dignity both in themselves and others? Nothing, except to introduce a little play into the cogs of the machine that is grinding us down; seize every opportunity of awakening a little thought wherever they are able; encourage whatever is capable, in the sphere of politics, economics or technique, of leaving the individual here and there a certain freedom of movement amid the trammels cast around him by social organization.

This seems an excellent account of what *teachers* are able to do, without raising false hopes. Simone Weil was writing in 1934, and her

next paragraph becomes intensely interesting in the light of current trends:

Who knows whether an industry split up into innumerable small undertakings would not bring about an inverse development of the machine-tool, and, at the same time, types of work calling for a yet greater consciousness and ingenuity than the most highly skilled work in modern factories?

Peter Abbs, who teaches English at the University of Sussex (and is author of *English Within the Arts*) shows that there is little hope of influencing present-day institutions:

The nuclear scientists—and 60 per cent of all scientists in the United States are engaged in military research of some kind—do *not* think about the human consequences of their work. We cannot, therefore, delegate responsibility to them. As a professional body, they refuse to make the necessary connections. Even less can we trust politicians and commercial agents. Our century is full of deranged psychopaths who have achieved leadership of their countries. And commercial agents, as we all know, have powerful financial interests always vying with any disturbing moral perceptions. We have no choice but to become responsible ourselves. And what is now demanded of us as individuals is that we recognize the magnitude of the peril, the great crisis of our military-technological civilizations, East and West, whose experts and leaders might well choose to inflict nuclear war rather than consider more subtle and life-affirming alternatives rooted *not* in any power complex but in a comprehensive concern for life as a whole, alternatives that lie at the very root of our work as teachers.

To heighten the contrast between those alternatives and conventional peace appeals, we quote further from Broughton and Zahaykevich:

"Ground Zero" is a name and phrase designed not only to evoke explosive imagery but also to confine attention to a single fragmented moment in time, the perfectly ahistorical vision. The educational purpose of "Ground Zero Week" was precisely to induce enactment of the devastation to be experienced in a nuclear holocaust. Such phrases, images, and descriptions serve as "fear-jerkers." The education that is supposed to produce enlightenment and understanding engenders instead a spurious, packaged emotional repulsion. This is not education for disarmament; it is the pedagogy of the oppressor.

What could be more important to think about for peacemakers eager to reach "the masses"? An essay titled "Beyond Nuclear Numbing" by Robert Jay Lifton, a psychologist, begins:

It is a fact of the greatest absurdity that we human beings threaten to exterminate ourselves with our own genocidal technology. One must never lose that sense of the absurdity the madness, insanity of it. In fact, all work in nuclear areas has to combine a sense of that absurdity, with a pragmatic, everyday struggle to do something about it. This struggle begins with our confronting the issue of what the bomb does to our minds and our mental ecology, and that includes the terrible question of the bomb's ability to impair our capacity to confront it.

In our universities, we have done virtually nothing to address the situation, to explore it as compassionate thinkers and scholars. This is an intellectual and moral scandal, and we should not forget that.

A puzzling question emerges: Did the "scandal" exist *before* the threat of the bomb? Are there common attitudes which would naturally respond—or not respond—in this way to the prospect of world disaster? In discussing the reasons for apparent indifference to the threat of nuclear war, Dr. Lifton remarks in passing that: "The majority of teachers in the universities in Nazi Germany did not actively take part in mass murder, but they sat back and did virtually nothing, or accommodated themselves or went along. There is a lesson in that for us. Now. Here." He concludes his analysis:

There is a significant individual step that each of us must take, the movement from that destructive and self-destructive stance of resignation and cynicism toward a stance of addressing the problem, of seeing oneself as responsible to the problem of joining with others and taking a stand. . . . One has to have the faith to imagine a human future without nuclear war, and then to feel power, authenticity, and vitality in that active imagination in teaching and learning and action; yes, action, and strong action.

Dr. Lifton is author of *Death and Life* (1967), a study of the psychological effects of the atom bomb on the survivors in Hiroshima.

## *FRONTIERS* "Voluntary Simplicity"

SOMEWHERE in the neighborhood of two hundred years ago, Goethe counseled, "Free yourself from *what is superfluous* to yourself!" In 1845, Henry David Thoreau went to Walden Pond to practice this rule, which he learned from continuous dialogue with himself. Then, some fifty years later, Gandhi began a similar spartanization of his life.

Gandhi read Ruskin's *Unto this Last* in South Africa on a train ride from Johannesburg to Natal, and later said of its effect, "I determined to change my life in the light of the book." A principle embodied by Ruskin in an essay written in the same year (1862) gives the spirit which had so far-reaching an effect on Gandhi. Ruskin declared: "Possession is in use only, which for each man is sternly limited; so that such things and so much of them as he can use, are, indeed, well for him, or Wealth; and more of them, or any other things, are ill for him, or Illth."

Then, in the 1930s, an American lawyer, Richard Gregg, an advisor in industrial relations, learning of Gandhi's efforts to replace violence with other means of resolving conflicts, went to India and spent four years at Gandhi's ashram, in close contact with the Indian leader. His classical study, *The Power of Nonviolence*, appeared in 1935, and a year later he contributed to an Indian journal his discussion of "Voluntary Simplicity," which had an obvious Gandhian inspiration. (This article was reprinted in two parts in MANAS for September 4 and 11, 1974.) In it Gregg wrote:

Observance of simplicity is a recognition of the fact that everyone is greatly influenced by his surroundings and all their subtle implications. The power of the environment modifies all living organisms. Therefore each person will be wise to select and create deliberately such an immediate environment of human things as will influence his character in the direction which he deems most

important and such as will make it easier for him to live in the way that he believes wisest. Simplicity gives him a certain kind of freedom and clearness of vision.

But simplicity that has meaning, Gregg pointed out, is impossible unless self-chosen and self-regulated. It cannot be imposed or enforced. As he says in the last paragraph of his article:

If simplicity of living is a valid principle there is one important precaution and condition of its application. I can explain it best by something which Mahatma Gandhi said to me. We were talking about simple living and I said that it was easy for me to give up most things but that I had a greedy mind and wanted to keep my many books. He said "Then don't give them up. As long as you derive inner help and comfort from anything, you should keep it. If you were to give it up in a mood of self-sacrifice or out of a stern sense of duty, you could continue to want it back, and that unsatisfied want would make trouble for you. Only give up a thing when you want some other condition so much that the thing no longer has any attraction for you, or when it seems to interfere with that which is more greatly desired."

While on this subject Richard Gregg's article is still the best thing to read, there is now a book titled *Voluntary Simplicity*, a Bantam paperback (\$3.95). The author, Duane Elgin, begins by saying:

The world is profoundly changing, that much seems clear. We have entered a time of great uncertainty that extends from local to global scale. We are forced by pressing circumstances to ask difficult questions about the way we live our lives: Will my present way of life still be workable when my children grow up? How might their lives, and my own, be different? Am I satisfied with my work? Does my work contribute to the well-being of others—or is it just a source of income? How much income do I really require? Require for what? How much of my consumption adds to the clutter and complexity of my life rather than to my satisfaction? How does my level and pattern of consumption affect other people and the environment? Is there an alternative way of living that is more sustainable in an era of scarcity? Do I have the flexibility to adapt to a period of prolonged energy shortage and economic depression? In the face of scarcity, is there an alternative way of living that fosters cooperation

and community rather than cutthroat competition and social fragmentation? Are there small changes that I could make in my own life that, with many others making similar changes, would result in a large difference in the well-being of others? What are my responsibilities to the other members of the human family who are living in grinding poverty? Am I missing much of the richness of life by being preoccupied with the search for social status and consumer goods? What is my purpose in life? How can I take charge of my life?

These are questions that ordinary people can ask themselves. They are partly grounded in enlightened self-interest and are being asked by more and more. That they are now raised in a Bantam paperback suggests that there may even be a "mass market" for their consideration. Duane Elgin's book is a good one to stir this interest further, and to show the relation of simple ways of living with other spontaneous and reasoned tendencies of the time, such as the movement to live in ecological harmony with nature.

These ideas and their numerous corollaries are receiving worldwide attention. Taking issue with Herman Kahn's *Views on Global Economic Development* (more of everything), a writer in last July's *Gandhi Marg*, O. R. Rao, discusses "basic needs," showing that the mechanistic approach based on quantitative measures ignores essential human values. He says:

Questions such as the effect which the application of high technology has on man's health and psyche, on his social relationships, on man's relationship with nature as a whole, and indeed with himself, are not considered relevant when decisions are taken about the application of technological solutions to problems. The only criteria considered relevant are those of costs and the quantum of growth expected—in short criteria bound by the quantitative principle. . . .

The combination of "alienation" and a rampant technology with no values to define its application is undoubtedly responsible for the sense of destruction which overhangs everything which modern technology touches—for the sense of desecration of the human psyche and of the environment which is forcing itself into the world's consciousness today. The ecological and environmentalist movement, of

course, is the result of a reaction against the rampant use of technology, and its success will be in its ability to replace the quantitative criterion by values and meanings which will integrate man with his environment in a symbiotic relationship. . . .

By insisting that man does not live by bread alone, the opponents of technicism are not crying hoarse that the production of bread should stop, but urging us to think about how we should produce the bread (or meat). Should the soil be considered nothing more than a factor in the production of cereals, or as a part of Nature and hence to be treated with consideration? If it is the latter, then perhaps the bread will taste all the sweeter for it. Is a cow nothing more than a milk-producing machine, and a cattle farm nothing but a meat factory? The kind of answer that is given to such questions will determine our attitude toward Nature and ultimately toward ourselves, as we are part of nature.

These considerations have the same roots as the conception of voluntary simplicity.