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PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

THE twentieth century has been fortunate in having two distinguished minds intent upon applying first principles to human affairs, and encountering difficulties which called for, and received from them, heroic response. We are thinking of Hannah Arendt, born in Konigsberg in 1906, and Simone Weil, born in Paris in 1909. Both came to maturity during the period between the two world wars, both were equipped with a thorough European education to bring to bear on their times the best of the knowledge and philosophy of the Western world, both were essentially concerned with the pursuit of truth, and equally concerned with its application for the good of others, especially in behalf of the defenseless victims of man's inhumanity to man. Both possessed exceptional powers of mind, both sought the undermeanings of ideas and events, and both gave dramatic illustration of the kind of thinking and behavior that grows out of the union of intellect with spontaneous and irrepressible compassion.

Both Simone Weil and Hannah Arendt had teachers whom they revered and loved; for Simone it was the French philosopher Alain, for Hannah, Karl Jaspers. At seventeen Simone Weil wrote for Alain's class an essay on "The Beautiful and the Good," focusing on a story told of Alexander the Great. With his army, he was crossing a desert, all suffering from thirst. When he was brought a cask of water, Alexander poured it out on the ground, refusing to be more favored than the soldiers. She wrote:

> His well-being, if he had drunk, would have separated him from his soldiers. . . . Everything takes place in Alexander's soul, and for him it is simply a matter of taking the stance of a man. . . . So it suffices to be just and pure to save the world, which is an idea expressed by the myth of the Man-God who redeemed the sins of men by justice alone, without any political action. It is necessary therefore to save the Spirit in oneself, of which external humanity is the myth. Sacrifice is the acceptance of pain, the refusal to obey the animal in oneself, and the will to redeem suffering men through voluntary suffering.

No wonder Alain called her "the Martian"! This attitude was hers for the rest of her short life—she died in England, at thirty-four, in 1943. Her perceptive biographer, Simone Petrement (in *Simone Weil—a Life,* Pantheon, 1976), a schoolmate and lifelong friend, said, "Simone felt that there should not be the slightest discrepancy between one's beliefs and one's way of life." This rule she followed without deviation, sometimes to the anxiety of her friends, and bringing ridicule from her critics, when she attempted what was for her quite impossible. They saw in her effort to share the burdens of the lowliest, the boredom and strain of a factory assembly line, the nerve-wracking exhaustion of operating a jack-hammer in a mine, little more than neurotic compulsion, neglecting to recognize that this frail young woman's commitment to moral consistency gave a power in thought that has had few equals, in her time or any other.

Her dissertation diploma, earned before she was twenty (in the school year of 1929-30), titled "Science and Perception in Descartes," amounted to a basic revision, according to her own thinking, of the Cartesian view. In the summary provided by Simone Petrement:

> For example, there is a *cogito,* but in the form "I can therefore I am." "To exist, to think, to know are only aspects of a single reality: to be able to act. . . . From the moment that I act, I make myself exist. . . . What I am is defined by what I can do." . . .
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> My life and my thoughts are first given without my willing them, given by an emotion "of pleasure and pain combined," which is the sign of an existence I do not govern. . . .
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> "The idea of God alone has been able to bear witness to existence. Also the idea of God alone was

the idea of a veritable and consequently real power, a veritable power could not be imaginary. If the all-powerful could be a fiction of my mind, I could myself be a fiction, for I do not exist except insofar as I participate in the all-powerful."

Therefore God exists for her. But one is astonished that this God is defined by his all-powerfulness rather than by benevolence, goodness, and perfection. For later on she defined God as being essentially the Good. . . . The belief in God is expressed by the right thought on the subject of the world. . . .

Correct knowledge will therefore be the progressive knowledge of the world that is constructed when one adheres to order, without ever deviating from it, proceeding from the simple to the complex by only accepting clear ideas.

Nonetheless, "I am always double: on one hand, the passive being who is subjected to the world, and, on the other, the active being who has a grip on it. . . It is through work that reason seizes hold of the world." Work teaches us to use the world insofar as it is an external obstacle in order to resist the world insofar as it is an internal enemy. "I must be tricky, cunning, I must hamper myself with obstacles that lead me to where I want to go."

Simone Pétrement found in rough drafts for this paper some ideas concerning God.

At first only two things are evident: on one hand, that she does not like priests, theologians, and respectable people; on the other, that she wants to understand the belief in God and does not reject it, at least in one sense. . . .

The true God, she says, is what is infallible in myself. Actually, thought is infallible in its essence and it is that which proves that the perfect thought exists. . . . we can see more clearly now that the power she refers to was not at all a material, external power, a power analogous to that of the world, but only the power of the mind, thought insofar as it is action, will, and freedom. It is as absolute freedom that God exists, as absolute action bereft of all passion.

The biographer concludes:

To tell the truth, these fragments are only attempts, rough drafts, and perhaps successive, disconnected attempts. It would be imprudent to draw a doctrine from them, as if they were parts that were intended to form a whole. They merely show in what particular direction Simone was searching. All that one can conclude is that she seems to identify religion with morality. At this period, to believe in God is for her simply to act correctly. "God is pre-supposed and posited by the right action, and in no other way." Belief is more the effect than the condition of courage and virtue. Morality is primary and unconditioned.

These were the thoughts of a young woman who was led by her convictions and her identification with the working classes to spend a year of her life working in a Renault factory, and who went to the front of the Spanish Civil War as a volunteer (a photo in the biography shows her return from Spain in 1936, a rifle hanging from her shoulder). The experience in Spain led to long thoughts. Two years later, in a letter to George Bernanos, she said: "One sets out as a volunteer, with the idea of sacrifice, and finds oneself in a war which resembles a war of mercenaries, only with much more cruelty and with less human respect for the enemy." She gave examples:

I was very nearly present at the execution of a priest. In the minutes of suspense I was asking myself whether I should simply look on or whether I should try to intervene and get myself shot as well. I still don't know which I would have done if a lucky chance had not prevented the execution.

So many incidents come crowding . . . in a light engagement a small international party of militiamen from various countries captured a boy of fifteen who was a member of the Falange. As soon as he was captured, and still trembling from the sight of his comrades being killed alongside him, he said he had been enrolled compulsorily. He was searched and a medal of the Virgin and a Falange card were found on him. Then he was sent to Durruti, the leader of the column, who lectured him for an hour on the beauties of the anarchist ideal and gave him the choice between death and enrolling immediately in the ranks of his captors against his comrades of yesterday. Durruti gave this child twenty-four hours to think it over, and when the time was up he said no and was shot. Yet Durruti was in some ways an admirable man. Although I only heard of it afterwards, the death of this little hero has never ceased to weigh on my conscience.

Simone Weil knew from the bottom up the condition and hopelessness of the poor and the

unemployed. For a time she worked with Communist groups but later wrote brilliantly in criticism of both Marx and Lenin, pointing to the futility of violent means of revolution. Her essays on this and other questions, written in the 1930s, are available in the collection, *Oppression and Liberty* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1973). This book, and her classic *The Need for Roots* (Putnam, 1952)—her Platonic Republic in the form of a utopian conception for the revival of France after the liberation—her remarkable essay, *The Iliad, or The Poem of Force* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet No. 91), and Simone Petrement's biography will together show the reason for regarding Simone Weil as a leading thinker of our time. Out of a period still unsurpassed for ugliness in the twentieth century, she forged a vision equally unsurpassed. She wrote to a former student who had asked her advice about a lifework:

> Briefly, I foresee a future like this: we are entering upon a period of more centralized and more oppressive dictatorship than any known to us in history. But the very excess of centralization weakens the central power. One fine day (perhaps we shall live to see it, perhaps not), everything will collapse in anarchy and there will be a return to almost primitive forms of the struggle for existence.
>
> At that moment, amidst the disorder, men who love liberty will be able to work for the foundation of a new and more humane order than our present one. We cannot foresee what it would be like (except that it must necessarily be decentralized, because centralization kills liberty), but we can do what lies in us towards preparing for that new civilization. . . . The most important [thing] from this point of view, in my opinion, is the *popularization of knowledge,* and especially of scientific knowledge. Culture is a privilege that, in these days, gives power to the class that possesses it. Let us try to undermine this privilege by relating complicated knowledge to the commonest knowledge. . . .

Until her famous book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* appeared in 1951, Hannah Arendt was virtually unknown to American readers. She was then forty-five, at the height of her powers, which did not diminish thereafter. The book was essentially an invitation to thinking, not an "explanation" of totalitarianism, but a description of its psychotic drives, and, as Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, her biographer, puts it, "an historical account of the elements which crystallized into totalitarianism." The book begins with an analysis and history of anti-semitism, of which the author, growing up in Konigsberg, in a family of more or less assimilated Jews, had had little personal experience. Her education was classical, including Greek and Latin and as a postgraduate student in Marburg she came under the influence of Martin Heidegger. Then, at Heidelberg, she studied with Karl Jaspers, who became her lifelong friend. Thus philosophy was her first love, and remained so until the last, although it was eclipsed by what seemed to her the need for political action. Action, however, was for her the application of philosophy, the end of thought being an act. She was led to the significance of being Jewish by writing a biography of Rahel Varnhagen, a woman of a century earlier who lost her lover because she was a Jew, and by friendship with Kurt Blumenfeld, whose ideals and method of working involved her in Zionism, although she did not become a Zionist. Meanwhile Hitler had come to power and Hannah Arendt offered her Berlin apartment as a way-station for German Jews and Communists fleeing the Nazi regime.

After herself being arrested and held for eight days, Hannah and her mother (her father had died when she was a girl) escaped to Prague, then went to Geneva, and finally to Paris where she worked for organizations that helped Jewish refugees to emigrate to Palestine. She was most at home, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl says, with a group "that included artists and workers, Jews and non-Jews, activists and pariahs; German was their language, but they were cosmopolitan in vision." She and her husband, Heinrich Blucher, arrived in New York in May of 1941, and ten years later she received her citizenship papers. By the end of the war she had begun writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* which catapulted her to fame.

Thereafter she had no difficulty obtaining teaching assignments. She was awarded a Guggenheim grant and invited to give a series of lectures at Princeton.

When Adolf Eichmann was brought to Israel by Israeli agents for trial, Hannah Arendt went to William Shawn, editor of the *New Yorker,* and offered to report the trial for the sophisticated weekly. Shawn was pleased. She wrote a five-part report which later became *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* a book which brought down on her head the wrath of very nearly every articulate writer in the American Jewish community. There were two reasons for this sense of outrage: first, she characterized Eichmann, not as an incarnation of Evil, but as an ordinary man who *could not think* (she subtitled the book "The Banality of Evil"), making careless readers think she minimized his guilt; and second, she devoted ten of its nearly three hundred pages to the European Jewish Councils which had in some measure "cooperated" with the Nazis in the collection of Jews for the concentration and death camps. Not remarkably, she was charged with writing without feeling, without sympathy, without understanding. But what these readers had encountered was a resurgence of Hannah Arendt's devotion to philosophy—to the need never to lie to oneself. This part of her book was indeed dispassionate—and doubtless tactless—yet it stood for an intellectual and moral integrity that had almost died out in the world.

It is this quality which gave Hannah Arendt's writing its extraordinary penetration, evident in all her books. Besides the two already mentioned, she wrote *The Human Condition, Between Past and Future, On Revolution, On Violence,* and the posthumous *The Life of the Mind.* From these works and her numerous articles, it became clear that she could not be "classified." She was a philosopher who examined the political scene in *philosophical* terms. She knew the limits of politics, yet held that goings-on in the political realm are judged, as two of her students put it, "by inappropriate standards," and that politics "is the arena of excellence and responsibility where, by acting together, men can become truly free." (Peter Stern and Jean Yarbrough in *Masters—Portraits of Great Teachers,* Joseph Epstein, editor.) There is a section in her posthumous book which first appeared as an article in *Social Research* (Autumn, 1971) issued by the New School for Social Research, where she taught, in which the underlying themes of all her work become manifest. The article is "Thinking and Moral Considerations," and it begins with Eichmann, who could not think, and ends with Socrates, who was an ideal teacher of thinking. Taking from Kant the distinction between thinking and knowing, she shows that "knowing" is knowing how to do things, to make things, to reach desired ends, while *thinking* alone prepares one for judging what is to be done, what *ought* to be done.

Using Socrates as her example, she shows that real thinking is always an interruption of thinking-as-usual. For the practical man, the conventional person, thinking is dangerous. It discloses what may be right, but does not count the cost. And real thinking, once begun, can never be stopped. It has no final destination. There is no thinking which "would make further thinking unnecessary." Thinking, the Athenians maintained, corrupts familiar ways, and they disposed of Socrates for his offense. But thinking, he replied, is the only means we have of overcoming corruption.

> If "an unexamined life is not worth living," then thinking accompanies living when it concerns itself with such concepts as justice, happiness, temperance, pleasure, with words for invisible things. . . . Socrates calls this quest for meaning *eros,* a kind of love which is primarily a need—it desires what it has not—and which is the only matter in which he pretends to be expert in. . . . Since the quest is a kind of love and desire, the object of thought can only be lovable things—beauty, wisdom, justice, etc. . . . We are left with the conclusion that only people filled with this *eros,* this desiring love of wisdom, beauty, and justice, are capable of thought—that is, we are left with Plato's "noble nature" as a prerequisite for

> thinking. And this was precisely what we were not looking for when we raised the question whether the thinking activity, the very performance itself—as distinguished from and regardless of whatever qualities a man's nature, his soul, may possess—conditions him in such a way that he is incapable of evil.

Socrates, Hannah Arendt shows, had two propositions for which he never tired of arguing. It *is* better, he said, to suffer wrong than to do wrong. And he maintained that in judging ourselves we are answerable to ourselves—to our conscience—before anyone else. Humans, in short, are two, not one. There is an eternal dialogue which goes on within ourselves—which *should,* that is, go on within ourselves.

> For Socrates this two-in-one meant simply that if you want - to think you must see to it that the two who carry on the thinking dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be friends. It is better for you to suffer than to do wrong because you can remain the friend of the sufferer; who would want to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer? Not even a murderer. What kind of dialogue could you lead with him?

In her conclusion, Hannah Arendt shows the effect of thinking in political matters—this being thinking about the good of the community, not politics as the struggle for power. She says:

> The purging element in thinking, Socrates' midwifery, that brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them—values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions—is political by implication. For this destruction has a liberating effect on another human faculty, the faculty of judgment, which one may call, with some justification, the most political of man's mental abilities.

Judgment is the application of the disclosures of thinking, and judgment, therefore, is the making of a life, and in our judgments together we make the common life.

REVIEW

MACDONALD ON GANDHI

A CALIFORNIA reader—to whom we are grateful—has sent us four copies of *Politics,* the magazine Dwight Macdonald published and edited during the years of the second world war, and for a while thereafter. Since Macdonald died earlier this year, this gift makes occasion for noting his unique place in American letters. He was brilliant, critical, as fair as he knew how to be, and intellectually honest. It may be long before we again have in this country a magazine like *Politics.* Why did he stop publishing it? Because, he explained, he no longer felt he had anything vital to say. He began the paper because he thought taking part in the war was politically stupid and morally wrong. He and his contributors said this again and again, with facts and figures, but mostly with insight and argument, and with humor.

The founding editors of MANAS were among Macdonald's readers—as our early issues make plain—and as a result we have the bound volumes of *Politics* in the MANAS library. But apparently we don't go back to them often enough, since we had wholly forgotten that in the Winter 1948 issue (it had been a monthly during the war) Macdonald put together a section on Gandhi that should now be remembered, when the Gandhi film is still deservedly current. The material on Gandhi was in that issue of *Politics* because Gandhi had just been assassinated—on Jan. 30, 1948. Macdonald wrote about the event, and he obtained contributions from Mary McCarthy, Nicola Chiaromonte, James Agee, Paul Goodman, Niccolo Tucci—something of a galaxy, you could say.

Gandhi was *understood* by these writers. Chiaromonte wrote:

> He banked his life on one single idea: to *test* the force of Truth on man. An "experiment," as he said to himself. To carry out the experiment, he exacted from himself and from others the most rigorous conditions he could conceive of. From chastity and vegetarianism to being beaten and jailed without resisting—that meant asceticism. And it is very apparent, when you read Gandhi, that to him asceticism was equivalent to an effort of the whole being to "simplify" further and further, in order to isolate with more and more rigor the core of the matter, the ultimate source of human energy, Truth, and unleash as much as possible of it in acts. Is it too much to say that it is difficult to think of another man in all known history, for whom Thought and Deed were so utterly inseparable as for Gandhi? Gandhi's God fed absolutely not on mystical ecstasies, but exclusively on deeds, on what the Mahatma called "readiness to reduce principles to practice." And between his God and his mission to make true men of four hundred million individuals, he drew absolutely no distinction.

Chiaromonte headed his brief essay with a question from Gandhi: "You can wake a man who is really asleep; if he is merely pretending your effort will have no effect on him." We in the West, Chiaromonte concludes, find Gandhi very hard to understand "because he was such an utterly consistent, such an absurdly logical man."

> In spite of so many words of his, which were only simplified reiterations of ideas familiar to the West, Gandhi has no real message for us. Possibly only a single question.
>
> "Are you really asleep?"

Agee begins by saying that he is one of those who revere Gandhi without actually knowing much about him, and offers, in four paragraphs, "the tribute" of humility.

> I now begin to realize, with some acuteness, who this man was, what he proved and achieved, what is lost in his death, and what he has given us that we may hope through sufficient study, and alteration of ourselves, to find, and to put to good use. Even in my present ignorance I can foresee that there is much in what I am going to try to learn that I may be unable to accept, or rise to or abide by, or even to understand; and am aware, too, that much that Gandhi achieved in India may prove hopeless of application in such a country as this and, accordingly, of no likely hope or use in any other of the most suicidal parts of the world. But even in this ignorance I know also that he proved, beyond our avoidance, that kinds of action are possible, and effective which most even of the best of men have consistently discarded, and still discard, as

impossible; and that he has given us our best and perhaps our only reasons still to have any hope in any supportable future, for ourselves or for any other men. I suspect that only those who have come fully to despair of any form of political action to which we are accustomed, are ready to profit much by a study of Gandhi's life, and personality, and ideas, and methods, and discoveries, and accomplishments; but I cannot conceive of any other study, or any other kind of action, which promises as much. . . .

May the world, if it survives, forever remember in gratitude and in honor this man who shall, I am sure, have done most among all men to make survival and virtue possible, and inseparable.

May his work advance, transfigure and endure, even among the barbarians.

Niccolo Tucci said at the end of his comment:

One glance at the *New York Times* may suffice to prove how little they all care. Had the news of the tragedy been followed in the headlines by exhortations not to take the passing of a fool too seriously, the scandal could hardly have been greater. Yet no one seemed incensed by the appearance, on the same front page, of the following news: "ARMS GET ATOMIC ENERGY PRIORITY IN POLICY SET BY CONGRESS GROUP. The Joint Committee on Atomic Energy laid down today a firm policy that the production of atomic weapons, rather than work on peacetime applications of atomic energy, must be 'vital business' (quotes theirs, and why 'vital' and not 'lethal' is not explained) of the United States for the foreseeable future." . . .

This is true news, and this is what the Atomic Energy Commission is going to do, Continuity of work to insure the continuity of war. Also Gandhi's assassination is true news even down in the hearts of the gangsters who insure the continuity of war. One wonders what right these papers have to print the truth, OUR TRUTH, that Gandhi's death is a real tragedy. They would be truer to themselves if they called Gandhi a fool, in small type, on page 38.

Macdonald's piece—which has the flavor of an editor—comes close to being the best, perhaps according to the "bias" of another editor.

Gandhi was the last political leader in the world who was a person, not a mask or a radio voice or an institution. The last on a human scale. The last for whom I felt neither fear nor contempt nor indifference but interest and affection. He was dear to me—I realize it now better than I did when he was alive—for all kinds of reasons. He believed in love, gentleness, persuasion, simplicity of manners, and he came closer to "living up to" these beliefs than most people I know—let alone most Big Shots, on whom the pressures for the reverse must be very powerful. (To me, the wonder is not that Gandhi often resorted to sophistry or flatly went back on some of his ideas, but that he was able to put into practice as many of them as he did. I speak from personal experience.) He was dear to me because he had no respect for railroads, assembly-belt production and other knickknacks of liberalistic Progress, and insisted on examining their human (as against their metaphysical) value. Also because he was clever, humorous, lively, hard-headed, and never made speeches about Fascism, Democracy, the Common Man, or World Government. And because he had a keen nose for the concrete, homely "details" of living which make the real difference to people but which are usually ignored by everybody except poets. And finally because he was a good man, by which I mean not only "good" but also "man."

This leads into the next point. Many pacifists and others who have an ethical—and really admirable—attitude toward life are somewhat boring. Their point of view, their writing and conversations are wholly sympathetic but also a little on the dull side.

Intellectually, their ideas lack subtlety and logical structure. Ethically, they are *too* consistent; they don't sense the tragedy of life; the incredible difficulty of actually putting into practice an ethical concept. They have not succumbed to temptation because they have never been tempted; they are good simply because it has never occurred to them to be bad. They are, in a word, unworldly. Gandhi was not at all unworldly, the Sunday Supplement idea of him to the contrary notwithstanding. He was full of humor, slyness, perversity, and—above all—practicality. Indeed, the very thing which leads people to think of him as unworldly—his ascetic ideas about diet, household economy, and sexual intercourse—seems to me to show his worldliness, or at least his imaginative grasp of The World: how could anyone be so concerned about such matters, even though in a negative sense, without a real feeling for their importance in human life, which in turn must come from a deep drive on his part *toward* gluttony, luxury, and sexual indulgence? That he conquered this drive may be to his credit (though he overdid it, in my opinion) but I think it is clear that he knew what it was all about. . . .

> It is true that Gandhi "compromised" with the rich, those untouchables of the class struggle, living at their villas (though carrying on there his own ascetic regimen). But he also "compromised" with the poor, spending at least as much time in the "untouchable's" quarters (he constantly complains of the smell and lack of sanitation) as in the Birla Palace. In short, he practiced tolerance and love to such an extent that he seems to have regarded the capitalist as well as the garbage-man as his social equal.

Next Macdonald prints four pages of brief extracts from Gandhi's weekly, *Harijan*—the name Gandhi had given to the "Untouchables," meaning Children of God. Macdonald spoke of *Harijan* as "odd" but rarely dull. "What other political weekly in the world would run a front-page headline: WHO AND WHERE IS GOD? Continuing, he said:

> Some of the oddity to the Western reader, however, comes from the fact that Gandhi was educating a backward people. His genius appears in the way he constantly harps on such details as keeping order in public meetings—he often suspended his own prayer meetings to reprove the chattering audience—or prompt removal of garbage. This world figure devotes more space in his magazine to the dangers of "promiscuous spitting" than to the United Nations and in this precisely appears his greatness. . . .
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> In each issue there is a "Question Box" in which he answers the most amazing variety of questions, mostly of the kind that in this country are commonly coped with by either Dorothy Dix or Bernarr MacFadden. His answers are never perfunctory, always interesting, and often arrive at important generalizations. His method of education, in general, is admirably Socratic: he prefers to start off from a question or objection and to use the critic's own logic to lead him to a better understanding.

Gandhi material can be purchased at reasonable prices from Greenleaf Books, Weare, New Hampshire 03281.

COMMENTARY
"FOR LOVE OF THE WORLD"

ON page 2, Hannah Arendt's biographer, Elisabeth YoungBruehl, is named, to which should be added the title of her book—*Hannah Arendt—For Love of the World,* issued by Yale University Press in 1982. The writer, who was a student of Prof. Arendt at the New School for Social Research, has both affection for her subject and the objectivity required for criticism. Among Hannah Arendt's books we strongly recommend a reading of *On Revolution,* which makes clear the devotion of this European and German thinker to her adopted country—a country which eventually recognized her genius and through publication gave her to the world. Her best writing is concerned with thinking, of which her work is among the best examples. Continuous thinking, temperate but uncompromising, was her contribution to the world. What better form of "Love of the World" could there be?

Another example of rare and effective thinking in this issue is Dwight Macdonald's brief essay on Gandhi. Macdonald hated cliches; his own prose is devoid of them; what he says about Gandhi shows how well he understood their source in conventional human nature. Who, of all the writers about Gandhi, has done as well in getting at the core of the man and celebrating the qualities that made him great?

Some more of Dwight Macdonald should be appropriate here. We quote from his book, *The Root Is Man* (The Cunningham Press, Alhambra, Calif., 1953), his meaning for "radical":

> "Radical" would apply to the as yet few individuals—mostly anarchists, conscientious objectors, and renegade Marxists like myself—who reject the concept of Progress, who judge things by their present meaning and effect, who think the ability of science to guide us in human affairs has been overrated and who therefore redress the balance by emphasizing the ethical aspect of politics. . . .
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> The Progressive makes History the center of his ideology. The Radical puts Man there. . . . The Progressive thinks in collective terms (the interests of Society or the Working-class); the Radical stresses the individual conscience and sensibility. The Progressive starts off from what actually is happening; the Radical starts off from what he wants to happen. The former must have the feeling that "History is on his side." The latter goes along the road pointed out by his own individual conscience; if History is going his way, too, he is pleased but he is quite stubborn about following "what ought to be" rather than "what is."

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE CRAFT OF TEACHING

LAST spring we found reason to say that "the world has always been hard on genuine teachers, who sometimes don't bother to be sufficiently circumspect." We now have a book which, among other things, gives attention to the right sort of circumspection. The book is *On Teaching,* by Herbert Kohl, issued by Schocken in 1976. Kohl enjoys teaching and has other qualities which make him worth reading—as those who back in the 60s read his *36 Children* do not need to be told. That book was an account of his experience teaching the sixth grade in a public school in Harlem. By use of his imagination, Kohl turned about the worst imaginable circumstances for education into rich experience for his pupils and himself. (For quotations see MANAS for Nov. 27, 1968.)

On Teaching, as the author says at the beginning, "is for people thinking about becoming a teacher as well as for people in teacher training and for people who are in the classroom and think of themselves as still learning how to teach." Since Kohl loves to teach, he is an amateur, and since he was resolved to be good at it, he becomes a professional in the best sense. The book is restorative of the dignity of the teaching profession. After the introduction—in which he says, "Learning to teach well has been one of the themes of my life. Another has been learning to survive while doing it"—there are three sections: one on "Why Teach?", one on "The Craft of Teaching," and one on "The Politics of Teaching." This third section has to do with the circumspection we referred to above. For example:

> New teachers must focus on their teaching and on figuring out the strengths and weaknesses of the social structure of their school, as well as identify their friends and enemies before they can take on the system. It is no value to anyone to get wiped out too soon.
>
> This does not mean it isn't possible to change things. In some cases there are administrators waiting for teachers to help them change their schools, to cross class lines, or eliminate them, in the service of the students and the community. In other instances, there are combinations of teachers, parents, and students that can be effective. There is no single way to go about changing a school. One must analyze every individual situation, assess strengths and weaknesses, keep documents, and date incidents that might be of use. One can move effectively in a situation only after one understands it.

To illustrate, he tells about what it may take to overcome resistance to change, recalling what happened in a Berkeley (Calif.) junior high school a few years ago. Two teachers wanted to introduce "open classroom" methods of teaching. Specifically, they "wanted to have 100 students, three classrooms, and their own books and supplies within the context of the junior high." They wanted "a semi-autonomous public junior high that would be open and would involve student and parent governance, and yet would share the facilities and resources of existing junior high." At the outset, this sounded like a "revolution":

> The first time the teachers approached the principal with this idea, he looked at them as if they were mad. The idea was unheard of, what would the parents say, and how would the rest of the staff respond? He gave the teachers a thousand reasons why they couldn't have their minischool, though none of the reasons questioned the educational soundness of the ideas. The teachers were discouraged, but decided that they probably could get the school eventually if they started more modestly. They proposed to the principal the next day that they not have the school, but be allowed to develop an elective class for the next semester. The class was entitled Contemporary Education Theory. The teachers proposed a mini junior high based on open principles. The plan was broached to parents, many of whom were definitely interested. They kept on meeting, and by the end of the school year a plan was developed, a proposal written, and community support mobilized. In June, the teachers approached the principal with their plans for a new school again. However, this time they went to him with parents and students. He still opposed their plan, but this time he was more cautious since he was dealing with parents as well as

> teachers. He didn't exactly turn them down. He claimed that he didn't have the power to grant their request and sent them to the assistant superintendent, who also claimed he had no power to act, and sent them to the superintendent, who told them he would study the matter. The issue was almost filed away for several years in a slick, professional way. No one had been turned down, no one had been accepted, no battles and no public bitterness. However, the parents were not willing to quit. Moreover, they were angered at how powerless they were to effect even slow and responsible change. The step-by-step battle up the hierarchy was a form of political education for the parents and made them more committed to the minischool than before. At this point, the school was given a name, and the teachers and parents and students talked about it as if it already existed.
>
> The parents went to the school board and requested action. They did not ask for any extra money and did not want to be put off by a feasibility study that would last a year. They wanted the school next September.
>
> After the whole history of the planning and development of the school was presented, as well as the fact that the principal had allowed the elective course to happen, the board voted that the superintendent should find a way to make the school exist. By the next September, the school came into existence, and it still continues.

In short, the two teachers—with the help of the parents—won. Kohl comments:

> I think their ingenuity and persistence and the energy they put into educating the parents paid off in a way that a direct personal confrontation with the principal would not have. Of course, if the school board had said no, it would have been a different matter. Then the teachers would have had several options—try to close down the junior high and gain strength through confrontation in the streets; run a candidate in the next school board election or work on the school board members in private; have their own school without public money and continue to confront the school system with its own failure to respond to the needs and the demands of the community; go back into the school and subvert it; or, finally, to quit and go back to life as usual.

The path of circumspection involves moral decision. Kohl recalls:

> I was transferred out of two schools—once for defending a student against another teacher in public, and once for criticizing a racist teacher openly at a staff meeting. The principal of each of these schools saw me as disruptive, as did most of the other teachers, and for the tranquility of the community I had to go. In the first instance, defending the student, I would do it again and any time. If being a teacher means refusing to prevent young people from being brutalized, then it's not worth it. However, in criticizing the racist teacher, I think my words were ineffective. Perhaps if I'd been cooler, kept a record of his actions, established myself with the students and parents, belonged to a small cell of teachers ready to act, then the public confrontation might have had a different outcome. But I was too new at the school, struggling on too many fronts at once. My classroom was not together—I was just learning how to teach. The parents barely knew me; all the teachers were still looking me over, as was the principal.

There is a sense in which *On Teaching* is entirely anecdotal, yet a unity of theory pervades Kohl's work. But virtually every point is illustrated with actual classroom experience. The pervasive point is that in order to teach, one must be able to enter the minds of the young, and then to work with what is found there.

> Young people are no different from adults. When faced with new possibilities they want something old and predictable to hold onto while risking new freedom. Inexperienced teachers often make the mistake of tearing down the traditional attitudes their students have been conditioned to depend upon before the students have time to develop alternate ways of learning and dealing with school. In their impatience they become cruel to students who do not change fast enough or who resist change altogether. One just cannot legislate compassion or freedom. Teaching as a craft involves understanding how people learn; as an art it involves a sensitive balance between presenting and advocating things you believe and stepping away and encouraging your students to make their own sense of your passion and commitment.

A book like this earns respect for teachers. Its purpose, you could say, is to help teachers to deserve it.

FRONTIERS

"We Should Do Nothing about it"

THE persistence of integrity in odd places continues to be one of the wonders of the world. In the *Progressive* for last May, Ben Bagdakian, a professor of journalism at the University of California in Berkeley, told a story—two stories, really, of Jonathan Schell, now known as author of *The Fate of the Earth,* and of William Shawn, editor of *The New Yorker*—which should help us to resist classifying people by their associations. It begins with the decision by Schell, a recent Harvard graduate, while in Taiwan visiting with his brother Orville, to have a look at the Vietnam war, said (in 1967) to be going quite well, in American press reports. Since he was a youth from an elite school, and of a family with prestige, Schell was given the red carpet treatment by the military. They liked him, showed him all around, assuming that he would approve of what they were doing. He didn't. As Bagdakian says, "Americans shot, bombed, and uprooted civilians in massive campaigns that resulted in the disintegration of social structures," and, contrary to report, the Americans were not winning.

Schell set down one of his experiences at some length—the erasure from the earth of a Vietnam town of some 3,500 people—with "clear, quiet detail." He wrote the story (later a book) of the village of Ben Suc at the request of William Shawn, a family friend, and it ran in *The New Yorker* in the July 15, 1967, issue. Bagdakian relates:

> Shawn said he had serious doubts about the war before Schell appeared, "but certainly I saw it differently talking to him and reading what he wrote. That was when I became convinced that we shouldn't be there and the war was a mistake."
>
> Thereafter, *The New Yorker* in issue after issue spoke simply and clearly against the war. It was not the first publication to do so, but at the time the most important media followed the general line that the war was needed to stop international communism and save the Vietnamese, and that the United States was on the verge of victory. . . . There were growing popular protests, but the mass marches were yet to come. Neither the My Lai massacre nor the Tet offensive had occurred, and the exposure of the Pentagon Papers detailing a long history of government lying about Indochina was still four years away.

Shawn, the editor, did the right thing, you could say. He put what he believed in his magazine. But Bagdikian's point is not yet made. His interest is in the practice of journalism and his story is about what happened to *The New Yorker,* for a time. After Schell's article appeared, the magazine began going downhill, money-making-wise. Its half million circulation didn't diminish, but the ads began dropping out—half of them within a few years. Profits dropped by two thirds. What happened? *Young people* were reading the magazine—"out loud in the dormitories." These young had affluent parents, of course, but not the same buying power as older folk. The median age of the magazine's readers went from forty-eight in 1966 to thirty-four in 1974. And the advertisers went elsewhere with their wares. The youngsters, who would doubtless be prosperous in the future, were not then buying $10,500 wristwatches or $14,000 brooches. "They were buying the magazine because of its clear moral stand against the war and its quiet, detailed reporting from the scene." *The New Yorker,* in short, had acquired "the wrong kind of reader."

What should have been done to mend *The New Yorker's* income? The typical board of directors of an American publication knows exactly what to do. You change the editorial content to attract the readers you—and the advertisers—want. If the editor resists the change, you fire him.

But Shawn made no change. He was not fired, because the owners of the magazine are a family, heirs of its founders, who believe in "total freedom for the editors." Asked if advertising and business people told him the paper's content was attracting "the wrong kind of reader," Shawn implied that they knew better than to say things like that to him.

"It gradually sank in on me that *The New Yorker* was being read by young people. I didn't know it in any formal way. Who the readers are I really don't want to know because we edit the magazine for ourselves and hope there will be people like ourselves and people like our writers who will find it interesting and worthwhile. . . .

'We never talk about 'the readers'," Shawn said. "I won't permit that—if I may put it so arrogantly. I don't want to speak about our readers as a 'market.' I don't want them to feel that they are just consumers to us. I find that obnoxious."

But the paper's income was down, dividends paid to investors a third of what they received in the banner year of 1966, and critics gently hinted that the content was "too serious," too much "into politics," the articles too long. Shawn said:

"My reaction was that we should do nothing about it. Whatever change took place did so gradually and spontaneously as we saw the world. . . . To be silent when something is going on that shouldn't be going on would be cowardly. . . . We published information we believed the public should have and we said what we believed. If the magazine was serious, it was no more serious than we were. If there was too much politics, it was because politics became more important and it was on our minds."

If, he said, you edit to create a market for advertisers, "to give back to the readers only what they think they want, you'll never give them something new they didn't know about."

"You stagnate. It's just this back-and-forth and you end up with the networks, TV, and the movies. The whole thing begins to be circular. The new tendency is to discourage the creative process and kill originality.

"We sometimes publish a piece that I'm afraid not more than one hundred readers will want. Perhaps it's too difficult, too obscure. But it's important to have. That's how people learn and grow. This other way is bad for our society and we're suffering from it in almost all forms of communication.

It doesn't add much of a moral to note that *The New Yorker* is now making big money again. The figures are impressive, and the *New Yorker* advertising department is not in the least shy about pointing out that the paper's "market" is now just the right median age for *real* buying power. So we conclude with Ben Bagdakian's flattering words—which are almost deserved—about the paper:

While other magazines assume that modern Americans don't read, *New Yorker* articles are incredibly long and weighted with detail. . . . Editorial doctrine on other leading magazines calls for short punchy sentences, but *The New Yorker* is almost the last repository of the style and tone of Henry David Thoreau and Matthew Arnold, its chaste, old-fashioned columns breathing the quietude of Nineteenth Century essays.

Yes, the professor got carried way. But considering the present fare on the newsstands, the temptation was great.